New Times for New Times:

navigating whenua slowly with Aotearoa moving image

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Capitalist time is propulsive time. It's time resolutely in one direction only: towards profit. Capitalist time tells us that this forward momentum shuttles us from barbarism to civilisation (capitalist time is colonial time), from stone tools to artificial intelligence, from poverty to wealth. Capitalist time may accelerate as in the eternal alienating flow of social media, or it may take its time, silently undermining whenua with the slow violence of environmental and economic degradation (Nixon, 2011), but it always, inexorably, moves forward, no matter the consequences.

But what if we attempt to complicate this rigid sense of time? What happens if we accept a multiplicity of viewpoints that bring with them multiplicities of time? Whose world's might we be inhabiting then?

The moving image works in *Navigating Slowly* were gathered to suggest alternatives to forward momentum. Via complex relationships with whenua, they navigate times that are circuitous, cyclical, circular. By undermining extractive relations with whenua, new times begin to emerge, ones that that seek reversals, retreats, returns, and hauntings. Time becomes less certain, less inexorable, more enfolded and enveloping. Rambling tracks in the bush, not a new Road of National Significance. These works complicate time through their entanglements with the world.

The collected imaginative times in *Navigating Slowly* chart a speculative journey through whenua, beginning and ending in Te Moana nui a Kiwa. We alight via the digitised and sonified kupesi of Sione Faletau's *Navigation* (2021).

Faletau's videos translate audio waves into visual works "much like how tufunga manipulate material to create their art." (Faletau, 2021) He explores Tongan kupesi patterns, traditionally printed on textiles, through video, orienting himself using the concept of ongo fakafa'ahikehe, or minor sound: "Literally meaning sound of the other side . . . sound linked to the spiritual world." (ibid.) *Navigation*'s title implies a journey, but it is not a direct one. It is an iterative one that unfolds slowly, transforming from singular to multitudinous, giving no certainty of destination as it opens out further and further, perhaps hinting at how the Pacific was explored: outwards in many directions, from island to island to island.

Faletau's translation of kupesi pilots us from static to temporal, from an ancient form to a contemporary one, but also from the mundane to the spiritual, from one world to another. In the context of this programme, it also navigates us from our nation's Pasifika beginnings towards Aotearoa's contemporary, ever unfolding collaboration of cultures.

Making landfall with Jeremy Leatinu'u's *Mai i te kei o te waka ki te ihu o te waka* (2018) finds us unfolding and refolding this cultural collaboration. The film tells us two stories of migration and settlement of the Tāmaki-Makaurau isthmus narrated in both Te Reo Māori and English. This is coupled with a series of still shots of urban landscapes, resolutely empty of humans, that are presented in an order that is reversed halfway through the film.

This palindromic structure plays with reflection and translation, leaving the viewer uncertain about the reliability of its narrative, highlighting

the ambiguities of storytelling as part of culture-making. As I write this on Waitangi Day 2026, the film calls into question our reliance on texts, documents, records, and languages to chart a clear path through history. It undermines a forward-facing narrative of nation building, instead offering unreliable loops and repetitions that offer differing perspectives, denying our ability to easily define truths. Perhaps the meditative shots of Tāmaki Makaurau's whenua suggest a different, more reliable truth present in the more-than-human narratives that always accompany our human history?

Three films in *Navigating Slowly* directly address this idea. Janine Randerson's *Waiho, Retreat* (2017), my own collaboration with Jake Kīanō Skinner, *Rua Kōhatu | Two Stones* (2024), and Nat Tozer's *Footpath fossil (breath)* (2020) all work with more-than-human perspectives and timescales, specifically those of our geological whanaunga (Yates, 2021).

Tozer's digitally rendered fossil is a document of urban stratigraphy. The data that composes her work was drawn from broken footpaths in Tāmaki Makaurau, particularly ones that were left in unrepaired limbo during the COVID-19 rahui of 2020. Tozer describes these periods as "lulls in productivity and progress . . . small poetic moments of urban decay." The work imparts a sense of stasis, of pause, of contemplation of anthropogenic geology. There is something of the child's joy in minute detail in the work, and indeed Tozer's nine-year-old daughter helped as "pathfinder" for the work. *Footpath fossil (breath)* asks us to commune with an otherwise unnoticed actant in our urban environment. Tozer is explicit in her project:

> This approach is about revealing the alternative strategies against capitalist modes of production, where we focus on tending and caring for what we have, instead of perpetuating in an ever-expanding frenzy. (Tozer, 2020)

This sense of care pervades *Waiho, Retreat*, Randerson's quiet performance video set in and around Kā Roimata o Hine Hukatere glacier in Westland. The always partially obscured body of performer Tru Paraha guides us in a contemplative journey from the head of the glacier to its rapidly retreating terminus. The glacier's name translates as "the tears of Hine Hukatere." Hine Hukatere was an expert mountaineer and tipuna wahine of Ngāi Tahu. Her tears were shed for the love she lost in a mountain fall at the site (Tumahai, 2022). Paraha's performance enacts something of the grief of Hine Hukatere, but set against a liquescent glacier, and rock denuded of its ice, it translates as the grief of slow violence, of the relentless impact of climate change on the glacier. It also seems, to me, that Randerson and Paraha's collaboration is attempting to feel the grief of the glacier itself. The sense of care for this frozen whanaunga is palpable through camera and body.

Rua Kōhatu | Two Stones attempts to bring this same sense of care to the more-than-human, this time examining the landscape of Ngā Kohatu Whakarakaraka o Tamatea Pōkai Whenua. The gesture is simple; to give voice to stone through music. We complicated this process by allowing space in the work's stratum for a section of Hone Tuwhare's poem, *Thoughts on a Sufi Proverb*. As Bronwyn Holloway-Smith has said, through this "we are given visions of the dark side of the moon, and the erosion of rock, crumbling to sand and eventually ancestral dust: a deep time that eclipses the span of human existence." (Holloway-Smith, 2024)

This video was shot weeks after the 2023 General Election and reflects our thinking on Te Tiriti relations and how they might emerge in artistic practice. It suggests that by bringing geological kin into the conversation, we may be able to slow the conversation down, soften it, see it from different angles. Stones seldom speak in anger; they take their time, consider, and speak quietly.

Sriwhana Spong's *Badlands* (2023) shares the more-than-human performativity of *Waiho, Retreat* and *Rua Kōhatu*, but rather

than expressing a geological deep time, its temporality is terpsichorean. Comprised of footage collected in Tuscany, Spong describes it as her "most dance-like film" (BLOT, 2024), drawing on her own background as a dancer and on the rhythms of the tarantella, an Italian folk dance with possible ancient roots in Bacchanalian ritual.

Badlands draws us into a hypnogogic relationship with the desiccated central Italian landscape. Its performers are cats, trees, hillsides, buildings, frescoes, plastics, moulds, and fleetingly the artist herself, all contending with heat, saturated light, and the ever-present, moisture-sapping sun. We are presented with a slow-moving multibeing ensemble that quietly performs Spong's choreography, while posing interesting questions about the relations between these dance-partners. The tarantella is at once a brief flirtatious dance between partners and also a durational healing ritual lasting hours; which dance do we see in *Badlands*, with its abstractions, juxtapositions, and scenes of decay?

A sense of uncertainty is also central to James Tapsell-Kururangi's *A portrait with my Father* (2022). He reminds us that any portrait must reflect the impermanence of being: "You're never going to be the same person, the same being, you're always shapeshifting." In this "living portrait" identities are tied to the land and to the ocean, which are also always changing their form (McIntosh, 2023).

A portrait explicitly desires to slow the viewer down to allow time for contemplation. In particular, the central section of still photographs, as Tapsell-Kururangi says: "reflect that slowing down of time and worries and conversation, enjoying that peace at ocean with my dad." (ibid.) It also shares some of the same methods of Leatinu'u's work. A whakatauki, composed with the help of Ngaere Roberts, is presented in English and in Te Reo Māori, playing with reversals and repetitions, asking us to: "cast again. / cast home. / cast aside. / cast true! / but cast again."

We have now begun our departure from the shore. *A portrait* leaves us drifting off imposing coastal cliffs and we leave whenua completely via Ana Iti's *All the way to Te Rerenga Wairua* (2017). Built again around a palindromic structure, Iti's work, like Faletau's at the beginning, develops from abstraction and leaves us in the world of the spirit. The viewer has already lifted from the land, departed from Te Rerenga Wairua at the tip of Te Ika a Māui, and inhabits an uncertain realm drained of colour and sound.

The first thing we see are questions: after death, does the spirit know where to go, and what is the process of travel when identity is shapeshifting and uncertain? We traverse in this short space of time from blackness to blinding white and back to the dark. Is there a revelation at the centre of the work? Certainly, we find ourselves at the close with an arachnid imagery of interconnectedness that heals the beginning's fragmented identity (and harkens back to the arachnid origins of Spong's tarantella). Might one see us working our way inwards on the patterns of pūngāwerewere's web in the opposite direction of Faletau's kupesi, finding an exit from the world at the centre of the web of whakapapa?

And as I write on this hot summer's day, enveloped in the endlessly iterating vibrations of the cicada, I hear in Iti's work, as with many of these works, that insistent, quiet voice that asks if we might not learn something from taking notice of the temporalties of the more-than-human. If not this, then these works do ask us to slow our pace, to be more considered of the time we have, to think more deeply. Whether we are listening to glaciers or considering our complicated colonial history, there is no single clear path to follow, only patterns, rhythms, and our imagination as guides.

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