"This thing is intricate and it's everywhere"

The art of Michael Stevenson as a model of historical time

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April 2018

Abstract

This thesis is the first detailed, scholarly analysis of the practice of the Berlin-based New Zealand artist Michael Stevenson (b. 1964). It examines the substantial body of work extending from Stevenson's paintings of the late 1980s to the research-based installation projects he produced in 2012. The research has been motivated by two questions: What is it that ties this artist's practice together? And what is its particular contemporary relevance? An eschatological model of historical time built from the unlikely combination of fundamentalist Christianity and postmodern theory underpins all of Stevenson's work. This model constitutes an important contribution to current thinking about time and history. Stevenson's works are at odds with both the linear time of modernity, and also the pluralist and horizonless "presentism" of contemporaneity.

This thesis stems from a recognition of the central importance of Stevenson's early religious experiences to his later art practice. The significance of his religious paintings of the late 1980s has never previously been acknowledged. The cataclysmic collision of postmodernity and Pentecostalism in Stevenson's life and thinking during the 1980s, however, was formative. Following his departure from religious faith, Stevenson's art practice has been a multi-decade project to reconstruct a shattered world-view, and also a deep engagement with the historical conditions of our time. Repeatedly circling the intellectual problems he encountered in and around the late 1980s—problems thrown into relief by the coincidence of postmodernism, the end of the Cold War, and his departure from the Church—Stevenson has developed a model of historical time that draws from both postmodern scepticism and religious faith.

Declaration

This is to certify that

1. The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD.

2. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.

3. The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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Anna Parlane

April 2018

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Introduction

> "The historian is, in every sense of the word, only the *fictor*, which is to say the modeler, the artisan, the author, the inventor of whatever past he offers us. And when it is in the element of *art* that he thus develops his search for lost time, the historian no longer even finds himself facing a circumscribed object, but rather something like a liquid or gas expansion—a cloud that changes shape constantly as it passes overhead. What can we know about a cloud, save by *guessing*, and without ever grasping it completely?"[1]

In 2011, a survey exhibition of the work of the mid-career Berlin-based New Zealand artist Michael Stevenson, simply titled *Michael Stevenson*, was held at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA). The first, spartan, room of this exhibition contained only two works. One was Stevenson's *The Gift*, 2004–2006, a full scale copy of the raft that painter Ian Fairweather cobbled together from found materials for his infamous, near-suicidal solo sea journey from Darwin to Indonesia in 1952 (fig. 2). On loan from Queensland Art Gallery, *The Gift* is relatively well-known in Australia and featured in the publicity images for Stevenson's exhibition. Sharing the room with this "star" work was a single painting which would have been unfamiliar to almost every viewer, *Stacked Hymnals and Collection Plates*, 1987 (fig. 3). The connection between these two, apparently completely dissimilar, works was further reiterated by an addition that Stevenson made to *Stacked Hymnals* in the final stages of the exhibition's installation.[2] By tightly binding around the edges of the unframed painting with red string, he formally echoed the construction of the raft, which is bound together with a quantity of elaborately knotted hessian rope. The juxtaposition was, therefore, both baldly stated and insistent (fig. 4). However, as the opening salvo of an exhibition purportedly offering a clarifying synthesis and overview of an artist's practice, it seemed to raise more questions than answers.

Michael Stevenson at the MCA was the first time that works from the entirety of Stevenson's career had been exhibited together, and for the artist it occasioned a rigorous effort to consider a body of work spanning more than two decades as a single

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[1] Didi-Huberman, 2005, p. 2, emphasis in original.
[2] Glenn Barkley, interview with the author, Sydney, 8 July 2012. During our conversation, Barkley stressed that while he was nominally the curator of the exhibition, it was primarily conceived by Stevenson as a new work.

project. The juxtaposition of *Stacked Hymnals* and *The Gift* in the exhibition's first room was one outcome of this effort, but it was also a sardonic response to a short and mildly provocative blog post the occasional arts commentator Courtney Johnston had written in 2008.[3] In contrast to the thematically tight and formally consistent retrospective *Rita Angus: Life and Vision* that was then showing at Wellington's Te Papa, Johnston had used Stevenson's work as an example of a practice resistant to retrospective summary, and rendered inaccessible by its formal diversity. She provided an image of Stevenson's *The Gift* alongside one of his early paintings to illustrate the difficulties a curator would encounter in attempting to construct a coherent account of this practice. Stevenson's later juxtaposition of *Stacked Hymnals* and *The Gift* insisted on the thematic unity that Johnston was unable to perceive. It asserted that there is an answer to at least the first of the two questions that have motivated my research: What is it that ties Stevenson's practice together? And what is the particular contemporary relevance of his work?

Stacked Hymnals depicts Christian paraphernalia piled neatly on a tabletop. The painting is a schematic still life of objects constitutive of a religious community: the hymn books with which the congregation comes together in song, and the collection plates for the tithes that fund the church's activities as a corporate body and social entity. It calmly evokes the closed economy and shared goals of this self-funding community, in which tithes collected from church members directly support the maintenance of the group and the realisation of its collective aspirations. The congregation's financial and spiritual togetherness provides practical, and also epistemological reassurance: a member of a church congregation can rely on the support of their fellow congregants, and the existence of the group continually reaffirms the shared world view. No such reassurance exists in Fairweather's raft.

Fairweather's inexplicable journey, in which the aging artist perched on his dangerously ramshackle vessel offered himself to the mercy of wind and waves, was a leap into the unknown vastly more personally consequential than Yves Klein's later, stagier, and more famous jump. Fairweather's was a hermit's life of utter precarity, and his survival was almost entirely dependent on his own ability to scavenge and

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[3] Courtney Johnston, "Curatorial Challenge," *Best of 3* (blog), 6 August 2008, http://best-of-3.blogspot.com.au/2008/08/curatorial-challenge.html

trade. The cosmic reassurance of the unified religious community is entirely absent from Fairweather's solitary vulnerability to unknowable risks. A prominent feature of *The Gift* is a a flag showing a white 'X' on a blue background, which hangs from the rigging. It could be the national flag of Scotland, which was Fairweather's country of birth. According to international maritime code this flag also indicates the letter M (or "Mike" in the NATO phonetic alphabet, which was Stevenson's chosen sobriquet in earlier years), or the signal "My vessel is stopped and making no way through the water."[4] While *The Gift* may be drifting, at the mercy of ocean currents, Stevenson made it clear in the installation *Argonauts of the Timor Sea*, 2004–2006, within which the sculpture was originally exhibited, that Fairweather's journey ultimately proceeded according to some logic of economic equivalence. This was a calculus that Fairweather benefited from, and also revealed in the process. As Stevenson demonstrated in *Argonauts*, Fairweather's vehicle was also a form of currency. Washed up on tiny Roti Island after sixteen days at sea, the artist was taken in by the local people and nursed back to health. This hospitality was provided in exchange, apparently, for the raw materials of his raft which they repurposed and put to use.

The juxtaposition of *Stacked Hymnals* and *The Gift* offered some fascinating propositions. Firstly, if we consider the two works as in some measure autobiographical, it contrasted Stevenson's early life as a member of an exclusive religious community with his own later life as an artist. The closed economy and known cosmos of the church was contrasted with the terrifying volatility of an open economy and an unknown cosmos. In bringing these two works together so insistently, Stevenson asserted that his later work stands in dialogue with a body of early religious paintings that are now rarely, if ever, discussed. In this sense, the two works can be interpreted as bookends of both a period of biographical time and a body of work, describing the *before* and *after* of a series of events.

Secondly, Stevenson's addition of the red string to his painting proposed a connection between the works that was temporally bidirectional: the 2004 sculpture also influenced the 1987 painting. In the process of assembling his survey exhibition, Stevenson re-engaged with his own early work through the framework of his later

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[4] United States Government, 2003, p. 22.

practice. The simple sequence of before and after was complicated by this act, and by the symmetries that the artist thereby created (or discovered) in the two works. Both point to an economic system of exchange and mutual benefit: one that is contained within a known community, and one that is less visible but nevertheless operates in an informal and unpredictable manner in the wider world. Both of these systems function through gift-giving, but in neither case are the gifts freely given. They are the compulsory price of survival. The two economic systems in *Stacked Hymnals* and *The Gift*, the one echoed in the other, only become recognisable as such with this juxtaposition and repetition. The church's tithing practices are a pragmatic reiteration of Christianity's broader salvational economy, where the investment of self-sacrifice pays off "in the coin of eternal life and divine satisfaction."[5] Stevenson's knowledge of this economy enabled him to recognise that Fairweather's survival was similarly precipitated by certain sacrifices, transactions and equivalences—or perhaps the Fairweather story helped him to recognise the transactional nature of the religious system.

The juxtaposition of the two works revealed that the worldview of Stevenson's early Pentecostal faith can be used as a key to understanding his later works, and particularly his interest in discovering a certain kind of cosmic regularity within historic events. The narrative I relate in this thesis is in one sense very simple. It addresses the work of an artist who was raised in an environment endowed with form and coherence by religious faith, and who—following his departure from this faith—has been trying to make sense of a world stripped of such cosmic order. Stevenson's personal experience of religious apostasy coincided with postmodernism's break from modernism, a rupture that Hans Belting described as a "loss of faith in a great and compelling narrative, in the way things *must* be seen."[6] The contemporary relevance of Stevenson's practice stems from this fact.

Stevenson's work, as I demonstrate, can be brought to bear on some of the central problems we face in attempting to conceive of history after the collapse of the modern order. For example: is it possible to perceive the action of general historical forces by examining particular, local histories? Or, is any such perception of the inherence of

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[5] Morgan, 2009b, p. 5.
[6] Belting, 1987, p. 3, emphasis in original.

the cosmic in the mundane simply wishful thinking or the product of an interpretive lens distorted by ideological preconceptions? Secondly, what historical agency, if any, can we exercise? In the universe of Stevenson's work, human historical and political agency is regarded rather dimly. Revolutionary actions always trigger outcomes that are dramatically different to the revolutionaries' intentions. In Stevenson's works, human actions seem embedded in a vast network of forces, both known and unknown, which interact in unpredictable ways to influence the turn of events: we are floating, like Fairweather, at the mercy of the fates. However, I regard Stevenson's own artistic strategies—the mode of representation he employs—as a means to reclaim some of the historical agency which the characters in his works lack. Thirdly, and most fundamentally, in the absence of the linear structure of modern progress, what temporal model can we use to make sense of history? I was completely taken aback by the discovery that Christianity could provide me with a central organising principle for interpreting Stevenson's practice. However, the radical eschatology of his early faith knits together past, present and future in a way that endows our occupation of historical time with profound significance.

A tangible gap: the existing literature on Stevenson's work

Christian temporality provided a central theme that I have found to be capacious and elastic enough to form a narrative encompassing several decades of Stevenson's practice. Clearly, this is not the last word on the complex, multi-layered and ongoing work of this artist. It is one possible approach, and there are many avenues that I have left unexplored, or insufficiently explored. Nevertheless, my approach to Stevenson's practice is notable for its novelty, as well as for its unprecedented depth of analysis. There have been no book-length studies of Stevenson's work, and few attempts to consider his practice as a whole: even the MCA survey exhibition did not result in a substantial catalogue.[7]

Despite including short pieces by a number of notable scholars and critics, the existing literature on Stevenson's work is wholly inadequate to the task of analysing this artist's practice. At no point has it been suggested that Stevenson's dialogue with

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[7] What was produced, on Stevenson's request, was a slim pamphlet containing a short, lyrical essay by Michael Taussig which was as evocative and enigmatic as the exhibition itself. See Taussig, 2011.

a Christian conception of time and history is at the core of his practice, or even that his religious background might have some relevance to his later work. During the 1980s, the religiosity of his explicitly religious paintings was downplayed in favour of an interpretation tied to the nationalist narratives about emplacement and local identity that dominate New Zealand art history. Similarly, the work he produced in Melbourne during the 1990s was primarily understood in geographic terms, as an antipodean commentary on centre-periphery politics in the art world. This narrative emphasising geographic marginalisation was tenacious, and lingered through the early 2000s, largely due to persuasive interpretations of large-scale projects like Stevenson's Venice Biennale commission *This is the Trekka*, 2003, and *Argonauts of the Timor Sea*, 2004–2006, by his long-time supporters sociologist David Craig and curator Robert Leonard.[8] From the 2000s, Stevenson's adoption of a more explicitly research-based installation practice made several of his interests more apparent. His interest, for example, in the histories of geographically diverse places like Iran, Guatemala and Panama complicated the association of his work with an antipodean context. His interest in economics also signalled the broad scope of his material. Commentators increasingly recognised the epic nature of Stevenson's works, which address political and social histories at least as much as cultural and artistic ones.

A handful of writers have noticed the unusual temporality at play in Stevenson's practice, which Michael Taussig described in 2011 as a process of "backwards-becoming."[9] Chris McAuliffe's 1996 interpretation was prescient, as were texts by Giovanni Intra and Mark von Schlegell in 2000 and 2001 respectively. McAuliffe rightly suggested that the "conspiracy theorist" persona Stevenson developed in the 1990s allowed him to explore a notion of causation that is premodern, although he erroneously regarded this model as linear in structure.[10] Intra and von Schlegell wrote ficto-critical narratives, each in their own inimitable style, and each of which foregrounded an unusual temporal-historical perspective. Intra's characteristically irreverent narrative focused on the uncanny vengeance of art history, figured as a golem formed by the hubris of the artist, which—in the end—engulfed the artist in a

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[8] See for example Craig, 2003; Leonard, 2003a and Leonard, 2003b.
[9] Taussig, 2011.
[10] McAuliffe, 1996, p. 24.

nightmarish return of the repressed.[11] Von Schlegell's text addressed the work of the Slave Pianos art/music collective, of which Stevenson was a member from the late 1990s.[12] Adopting a position in an imagined long-distant future, he imagined the work of Slave Pianos as an ancient predecessor to an as-yet unfulfilled history. These texts responded to the unusual temporality of the artworks they addressed, but their ficto-critical format meant that the authors' insights remained on the evocative level of implication or allusion.

During recent years, increasing numbers of commentators have recognised that Stevenson's focus on highly specific histories is a means to obliquely address general questions which themselves remain unstated. In 2006, Robert Leonard wrote that Stevenson's projects should be seen as "unlikely keys to the big picture."[13] For Kate Sutton and Nav Haq, this "big picture" was economic. Sutton claimed that "Stevenson has spent more than two decades investigating the coincidences and interconnected histories underpinning the global economy."[14] For Haq, the artefacts that Stevenson exhibits are connected by their embodiment of "the concerns of the broader political economy—the flow of money, people, and ideas."[15] In a review of Stevenson's MCA exhibition, Jon Bywater concluded that the objects and images on display functioned as "clues," not to a vaguely conceived catch-all like "the broader political economy," but "to occasionally overlapping, unstated narratives that resist easy summary."[16] As Bywater recognised, Stevenson's works point towards a referent that is present only in its overwhelming absence. He suggested:

> The abstract question of how we can speak about the universal when all we experience is specific could . . . serve as a figure for a central concern of an artist whose work consistently negotiates interchanges between periphery and center, marginal historical detail and global issues.[17]

[11] Intra, 1997.
[12] Von Schlegell, 2001.
[13] Leonard, 2006, p. 222.
[14] Kate Sutton, "Michael Stevenson: The Deck is Always Stacked," *Bidoun*, no. 28, Spring 2013, https://bidoun.org/articles/interviews-michael-stevenson
[15] Nav Haq, "Interview: Michael Stevenson," *Bidoun*, no. 18, Summer 2009, https://bidoun.org/issues/18-interviews#michael-stevenson
[16] Bywater, 2011, p. 366.
[17] Bywater, 2011, p. 366.

Jan Verwoert, similarly, described Stevenson's works as "material indices" which examine the effects of an unknown cause. "Stevenson's policy of handling information is first of all designed to render a *gap* tangible: the gap that exists between what is given to be seen and read, and the act and modalities of looking and reading."[18] Verwoert went on to suggest that the viewer of these works is the means of plugging this gap, and of speculatively connecting the specific material the artist provides to what it may ultimately index. Bywater also noted Stevenson's implicit demand that the viewer "decipher meanings planted by the artist-as-savant."[19] Robert Leonard even went so far as to suggest that the interpretive labour that Stevenson's projects seem to necessitate is so great that they should be considered a form of relational aesthetics.[20] Stevenson himself has rejected the claim that appreciating his works is contingent either on knowledge of their back stories or any particularly heroic interpretive efforts: "a visitor walks into a space, and sees something, and goes: 'what the fuck is that?' And that's enough for me."[21] For Stevenson, creating this feeling of epistemological dislocation, or as he described it elsewhere, the sense that "*something happened here,*" is his primary goal.[22]

Methodology

My thesis that the core concerns and contemporary relevance of Stevenson's work stem from his ongoing dialogue with a radical Christian conception of historical time is not intended to resolve this feeling of epistemological dislocation, or definitively plug the gap that his work opens. It is intended to demonstrate that the contours of this gap closely approximate those of some central mysteries of Western thinking about history. These conundrums are both philosophical and theological, and have acquired renewed relevance since the advent of postmodernism.

I formulated my analysis while conducting extensive interviews with the artist and others he has worked with, viewing his works in person where possible, trawling through his studio archive of preparatory and research material, and undertaking my

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[18] Verwoert, 2013, p. 58 and p. 59, emphasis in original.
[19] Bywater, 2011, p. 366.
[20] Leonard, 2006, p. 225.
[21] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Mexico City, 20 August 2012.
[22] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Hill, 2009, p. 471.

own immersive research into the back stories of his work. Performing exactly the kind of heroic interpretive labour that Stevenson declared unnecessary, I found myself compulsively connecting a dizzying array of clues: an art historical method, frankly, not unlike that of a conspiracist, a biblical exegete, an end-times theorist or, I suspect, Stevenson himself.[23] Certain fragments or phrases became recurrent motifs (the exit signs in Stevenson's 1980s paintings, his habitual use of the oblique phrase "this *other thing*" in conversation, the doors, and the vehicles, an odd attentiveness to facial hair) which eventually coalesced into a point of view.

My thesis is organised chronologically, and it takes the biographical circumstances of Stevenson's upbringing and his departure from faith as key to his subsequent art practice. This structure seems set up to establish "the conflation of before and after with cause and effect, as the presumption that the prior event produces the later one"—or in other words, precisely the unidirectional and sequential temporality that I aim to complicate.[24] I hope that my establishment of a recurrent theme through repetitions and echoes is enough to at least partially dislodge this impression. Rather than a sequence of cause and effect, it seems to me that the relation between Stevenson's early life experiences and his later work could be better diagrammed by a kind of endless circling (perhaps not unlike Robert Smithson's spiral formulation) where the intellectual problem of the initial circumstance operates as a constant irritant, magnetically attracting the artist to continually re-examine it from different angles and in the process retroactively restate and reshape the problem. As in Hal Foster's description of Freudian deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*):

> One event is only registered through another that recodes it . . . [in] a continual process of protension and retension, a complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts—in short, in a deferred action that throws over any simple scheme of before and after, cause and effect, origin and repetition.[25]

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[23] See Ginzburg, 1980, for a discussion of how clues function in the construction of knowledge in art history, detective work and psychoanalysis.
[24] Foster, 1996, p. 10.
[25] Foster, 1996, p. 29, emphasis in original.

A collective historical apostasy: Review of theoretical and art historical literature

Religious apostasy is an experience of epistemological turmoil, as an orderly cosmos collapses into a seemingly empty chaos of meaningless events. For Stevenson, this personal experience chronologically coincided with its equivalent on a broadly cultural scale. Postmodern scepticism concerning modern historical structures and processes gained widespread traction in Western culture during the 1980s and 1990s. Stevenson was building his artistic practice, therefore, in the context of a mass effort to work through the ramifications of this collective historical apostasy. As art historian Jennifer Roberts has observed: "It is one thing to pull out the conceptual infrastructures that support traditional ideas of time, but quite another to confront the heap of deboned historical matter left behind."[26] The coincidence of the personal and the cultural provided Stevenson with a unique perspective on the effort to re-think history after postmodernism.

Art historians have, in recent years, become increasingly interested in non-linear temporal structures which articulate ways in which the past, present and future mingle and clash. My interest in the impact of radical and pre-modern Christian temporality on Stevenson's practice can be situated within this broad disciplinary tendency. Attention to Stevenson's strategies has enabled me to think through a model of historical time that is not based on unidirectional causation.

Within contemporary art history, "the contemporary" is widely regarded as the periodising umbrella under which such discourse is clustered. Strongly associated with temporal multiplicity and also with the processes and effects of the art world's globalisation, the phrase "the contemporary" is used in the work of writers like Terry Smith as a periodising catch-all for global contemporary art practice in all its wild heterogeneity. Smith writes: "If used at all, the term 'postmodern' recalls the moment of transition between [the eras of modern and contemporary art], an anachronism from the 1970s and 1980s."[27] "The contemporary" seems to have emerged, in art history at least, as the winner of what Brian McHale described as the "*name-that-period* sweepstakes" that sprang up following the declaration of postmodernism's

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[26] Roberts, 2004, p. 5.
[27] Smith, 2009, p. 242. On "the contemporary," see also Foster, 2009; Meyer, 2013 and Osborne, 2013.

demise: "Ironically, perhaps the only consensus that has ever been reached about postmodernism has to do with its *end*: postmodernism, it is generally agreed, is now 'over.'"[28] The palpable relief of that consensus can certainly be attributed in part to lingering embarrassment over the excesses of Western culture during the early excitement of postmodernity (who, now, wants to dwell on Julian Schnabel's rise to prominence?), and also perhaps (for leftists) a profound desire to forget the political events that facilitated the global hegemony of multinational capital. The rush to adopt a new periodising term, which has seemed premature to several scholars, also ironically ignores the postmodern critique of modernism's periodising breaks with tradition. McHale, sensitive to this problem, follows Jeffrey Nealon in arguing that what he calls "post-postmodernism" is a:

> change of degree rather than kind, but of course at a certain point change in degree becomes change in kind, and so the first post of post-postmodernism serves to indicate 'postmodernism's having mutated, passed beyond a certain tipping point to become something recognizably different in its contours and workings,' yet without becoming 'absolutely foreign to whatever it was before.'[29]

Art historian Pamela Lee, like Nealon and McHale, does not "endorse a revival of the term 'postmodernism'," while similarly arguing that the declaration that we have entered a wholly new period of history is overly hasty.[30] For Lee, "we have yet to wrestle fully with postmodernism as an ersatz or partial theory of time."[31] Postmodernism marked a break with the modern effort to continually supercede the past, thereby initiating—in the West at least—a different relationship to historical time. Stevenson's art grapples with precisely this, as-yet unresolved, legacy.

The model of historical time that has emerged out of my analysis of Stevenson's practice is based in the Judeo-Christian religious and intellectual tradition. This has two major implications for my effort to position Stevenson's work within art history. Firstly, (and this is despite Stevenson's inclusion in omnibus exhibitions like *The*

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[28] McHale, 2015, p. 176 and p. 5.
[29] McHale, 2015, p. 177.
[30] Lee, 2013, p. 41.
[31] Lee, 2013, p. 40.

Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989, held in 2011 at Zentrum für Kunst und Medien) this model is entirely Western—not "globalist."[32] Stevenson's work is rooted in historical particularities in a way that a catch-all like "the contemporary," with its blanket coverage and evocation of a liberatory, free-floating and internally disjunctive "now," can not be. The history of European colonialism is core to the historical particularity of the temporal model that Stevenson's work negotiates. As a Pākehā New Zealander, Stevenson is sensitive to the exercise of imperial power and his work bears the imprint of his geographic origin in this way, rather than in any particular interest in articulating an independent national identity or overcoming the tyranny of distance from the colonial parent. The model of historical time I have perceived in Stevenson's work is therefore Western, but in an internally conflicted postcolonial sense that is acutely attentive to the violence of globalist ideologies, such as the universal claims of monotheistic religion and its related histories of imperial conquest.

Secondly, the model of historical time at play in Stevenson's practice is characterised by a non-linearity that is as much pre-modern as it is postmodern. Stevenson's early religious community was broadly fundamentalist (or "primitivist") in orientation, and explicitly sought to reinstate the raw spirituality and eschatological excitement of first-century Christianity. Citing Pamela Lee's *Chronophobia*, James Meyer has rightly pointed out that the temporal "multeity" and the "purported breakdown of linear time that is declared to be definitive of the contemporary, is an artifact of the 1960s, of postmodernity, the very period the contemporary has allegedly left behind."[33] I would add that temporal multeity was also a feature of pre-modern Christianity, and that this feature of the religious tradition is very much alive in many of its more radical contemporary manifestations.

A long list of art historians, including Georges Didi-Huberman, Amy Knight-Powell, Amelia Barikin, Pamela Lee, Sven Lütticken, Christine Ross, Mieke Bal, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, have in recent years addressed ways in which artworks, both historical and contemporary, can be seen to manifest the interpenetration of

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[32] The exhibition was one outcome of a research project titled Global Art and the Museum, initiated by Hans Belting and Peter Weibel. See also the related publication, Belting, Buddensieg and Weibel, 2013.
[33] Meyer, 2009, p. 75.

multiple different times.[34] As Amelia Groom notes, these efforts have paralleled "a rising concern with *re-present-ing* the past" by contemporary artists:

> Rather than a winking postmodern pastiche of appropriated styles, or an earnest nostalgic immersion in a fixed, absent past, these new engagements with the remnants of previous times mark a thickening of the present to acknowledge its multiple, interwoven temporalities.[35]

This effort to formulate an approach to non-linear temporality has also resulted in the renewed prominence of several modern opponents of linear chronology. The discontinuities, breaks, reversals, anachronistic reappearances, palimpsestic layering and parallel realities explored by writers like Walter Benjamin, Aby Warburg, Marcel Proust, George Kubler, Henri Bergson and Jorge Luis Borges have been re-engaged in the efforts of current thinkers.

In his influential 1984 article "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Fredric Jameson called for new maps.[36] He described the loss of historicity under postmodernism as a form of disorientation, exemplified by the sensation of occupying the vast and discombobulating lobby of John C. Portman Jr.'s Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles. Submerged within an overwhelming totality (which, for Jameson, is the omnipresent but unrepresentable totality of multinational capitalism), we experience the "hysterical sublime": "the world . . . momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density."[37] Jameson stressed that the danger of this disorientation, in which the world seems flattened into structureless heterogeneity, mesmerising and depthless, is that it prevents the critical distance that is an essential precondition for political action. Immersed, we are unable to formulate critique or even description.

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[34] Bal, 1999; Lee, 2004; Didi-Huberman, 2005; Nagel and Wood, 2010; Barikin, 2012; Knight Powell, 2012; Ross, 2012; Lütticken, 2013b.
[35] Groom, 2013, p. 16, emphasis in original.
[36] Jameson, 1984.
[37] Jameson, 1984, p. 76–77.

Historian François Hartog and media theorist Douglas Rushkoff are among growing numbers who use the term "presentism" to name the sensation of disorientation that Jameson described. Both, like Jameson, regard this situation as dystopic. We are living, Hartog claimed, in a world enslaved to a "monstrous" distended present, which has incorporated both past and future into itself.[38] There is "the sense that only the present exists, a present characterized at once by the tyranny of the instant and by the treadmill of an unending now."[39] Confronting such phenomena as real-time technologies like smartphones and Twitter which enable instantaneous global news reporting, reality TV, speculative finance's new precedence over long-term investment, a consumer economy oriented towards the disposable, and the continual necessity for members of the labouring "precariat" to multitask and network, Rushkoff concluded: "you can't help but become temporally disoriented."[40] In contrast to the dystopian tone of these writers, there are also those who celebrate the apparent dissolution of past and future into a present characterised—as Jameson recognised—by "sheer heterogeneity," and the concomitant modification of the past into "a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum."[41] Laura Hoptman, curator of *The Forever Now*, 2014, an exhibition of post-Internet painting at New York's Museum of Modern Art, described "a new and strange state of the world in which, courtesy of the Internet, all eras seem to exist at once."[42] Hoptman's catalogue essay displays a truly surprising level of techno-optimism. The paintings in her exhibition were offered as the products of artists wallowing blissfully in a frictionless digital utopia of total information accessibility and flattened hierarchies: "we can picture," she claimed, "the eternal present as an endlessly flat surface with vistas in every direction."[43] Hoptman's celebration of the artistic "connoisseurship of boundless information" was untroubled, apparently, by questions regarding the propriety or justice of the indiscriminate appropriation and usage of data. Nor was it concerned to acknowledge the corporate interests that shape the world of online images, determine access to them, and harvest users' metadata in the service of their own commercial aspirations.[44]

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[38] Hartog, 2015, p. 203.
[39] Hartog, 2015, p. xv.
[40] Rushkoff, 2013, see also Standing, 2011.
[41] Jameson, 1984, p. 57 and p. 66.
[42] Hoptman, 2014, p. 13.
[43] Hoptman, 2014, p. 16.
[44] Hoptman, 2014, p. 14, emphasis in original.

What Groom described as the "thickening" of the present is an outcome of the effort to recognise the pasts and futures that course through but are not contained within it. It is in relation to these that the present we occupy can take on depth and significance, escaping presentism's superficial shallowness. However, as Jameson noted, we need new maps in order to describe the nature of these relationships. Art historians addressing non-linear temporality are working on models of historical time that aim to do just that. Alert to the possibilities of retroactivity and anachronism, they are attempting to think a history that isn't anchored in strict chronology and which acknowledges temporal heterogeneity and non-linear causation. Usually, their insights are derived from the artworks they are studying, and often—as Hal Foster recognised—these insights lead them to "question the verities of the discipline."[45]

Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood argue, for example, that the "nonevolutionary metaphorics of time" they have perceived in both medieval and Renaissance artworks is "a temporality in structural misalignment with, and therefore systematically misrecognized by, art historical scholarship."[46] For Georges Didi-Huberman, being open to a recognition of the temporal heterogeneity of artworks entails relinquishing the "tone of certainty" with which art history positions them as explanatory keys to their historical period.[47] Didi-Huberman's project follows Aby Warburg's effort to map the "afterlife of antiquity" in his famous *Mnemosyne Atlas*. As Warburg did when he tracked the recurrence of antique gestures through history, Didi-Huberman regards artworks as a potential rend or perforation in chronology, an opening for the irruption of history's unconscious. In his 2005 book *Confronting Images* Didi-Huberman called for an art history that can not only recognise its objects of study as the anachronistic aberrations they are, but can also acknowledge the rends in its own ability to comprehend them: "This would be a history of the limits of representation, and perhaps at the same time of the representation of these limits by artists themselves."[48]

[45] Foster, 2012, p. 12.
[46] Nagel and Wood, 2010, p. 34.
[47] Didi-Huberman, 2005, p. 2.
[48] Didi-Huberman, 2005, p. 194.

Mieke Bal has offered the retroactive agency of artistic representations as a model for "doing history." As she observed: "Quoting Caravaggio changes his work forever."[49] Studying contemporary artistic re-presentations of Caravaggio's work, she noted that the newer works retroactively influenced her understanding of the original. The contemporary artworks, however:

> neither collapse past and present, as in an ill-conceived presentism, nor objectify the past and bring it within our grasp, as in a problematic positivist historicism. They do, however, demonstrate a possible way of dealing with 'the past today.' This reversal, which puts what came chronologically first ('pre-') as an aftereffect behind ('post') its later recycling, is what I would like to call a *preposterous history*. In other words, it is a way of 'doing history' that carries productive uncertainties and illuminating highlights—a vision of how to re-vision the Baroque.[50]

Nagel and Wood's *Anachronic Renaissance* demonstrates how the retroactivity that Bal recognised in the relation between contemporary and Baroque art was also crucial to pre-modern Christianity's model of art-making. They relate that devotional images in this tradition were conceived as effective stand-ins for an absent original, rather than the novel production of an individual author. Nagel and Wood's pre-modern "substitutional" model also offers "a possible way of dealing with the past today." It describes a relation between present and past that is not simply one of unidirectional succession or causation: the new work substitutes for an earlier original, but it also "selects" its predecessor "out of the debris of the past."[51] This kind of retroactive agency, like that described by Bal, complicates simple relations of cause and effect. In these art historians' work, the present is "thick" with the ongoing effects of a past not fully contained within it, and the past also bears the imprint of the present.

Nagel and Wood, Bal and Didi-Huberman have leveraged their acknowledgement of art's anachronistic and retroactive capacities into methodologies for "dealing with the past today" that is replete with "productive uncertainties." Their work challenges art

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[49] Bal, 1999, p. 1.
[50] Bal, 1999, p. 6–7, emphasis in original.
[51] Nagel and Wood, 2010, p. 11.

history's foundation in a linear chronology of period styles. Artworks are not regarded as privileged indexes of a particular period which, taken collectively, throw history into linear perspective. They are offered as privileged indexes of temporal heterogeneity that allow us to map the ways in which the past and future relate to the present.

I have perceived a model of historical time in Stevenson's practice that is similarly alive to non-linear causation and to the retroactive power of the copy. It is also a model that has a lot in common with the figural methods of biblical exegesis. It is telling that many of the recent body-blows to the linear chronology of conventional art history have come from scholars like Nagel and Wood, Didi-Huberman and Amy Knight Powell, who are specialists in pre-modern Christian art. In the substitutional model, as Nagel and Wood write,

> Artifacts and monuments . . . stitched through time, pulling two points on the chronological timeline together until they met. . . . Such temporalities had something in common, as we have noted, with the typological thinking of biblical exegetes, according to which sacred events, though embedded in history, also contained what theologians called a mystery, figure or sacrament— a spiritual meaning that lifted the event out of the flow of history. The 'omnitemporal' scheme of history presupposed by figural thinking was an effort to adopt God's point of view, which grasps history all at once, topologically, rather than in a linear sequence.[52]

Such attention to the parallels between artistic and religious perspectives is both predictable and necessary for scholars writing about the intrinsically religious art of pre- and early modern Europe. The recognition of similar parallels in contemporary art is apparently more problematic. During a recent visit to Melbourne, the artist collective Slavs and Tatars observed that in the art world, if you want people to head for the exit as quickly as possible, you should start talking about religion.[53] When art historian Thomas Crow was invited to contribute a provocation to the Power

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[52] Nagel and Wood, 2010, p. 32.
[53] Slavs and Tatars, "Al-Isnad or Chains We Can Believe In," a Boiler Room lecture presented by Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne and Institute of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, at the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, 22 October 2015. See also *Mirrors for Princes*, 2015, p. 21.

Institute's "Power Polemics" series, he offered the most provocative proposal he could imagine: an argument for the theological significance of canonical Western artists of the twentieth century such as Mark Rothko and Robert Smithson. In 2004, James Elkins claimed that taking religion seriously may be enough to cast an art historian into the "dubious category of fallen and marginal historians who somehow don't get modernism or postmodernism."[54] For these thinkers, the very mention of religion in association with modern or contemporary Western art seems to be controversial.

Concurrently, however, our entrance into a so-called "post-secular" age has been widely remarked and debated. Scholars like Jürgen Habermas, but also myriad commentators in the popular press, have observed that the spectacular narrative of clashing Christian and Islamist fundamentalisms that has been playing out in the media in recent years constitutes a reappearance of religion as a powerful political force.[55] This apparent "return" of religion is more precisely characterised as a return of religion to the headlines: religion itself, as over 5.7 billion believers worldwide would attest, never went away. According to figures assembled by the Pew Research Center, the religiously unaffiliated comprised only 16.4% of the global population in 2010.[56] As Peter Berger has pointed out, in a world "as furiously religious as it ever was," it is the secular Western-educated cultural elite who are the anomaly.[57]

A project organised by Sven Lütticken at BAK (basis voor actuele kunst) in Utrecht during 2008–2009 tackled the subject of religion's rise to renewed prominence in politics and the media.[58] BAK director Maria Hlavajova characterised the project as an "attempt to think religion with and through art."[59] She argued that artists' and art scholars' professional sensitivity to the complexity of images and image-making has

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[54] Elkins, 2004, p. xi.
[55] See for example Habermas, 2008.
[56] Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050," *Religion and Public Life*, 2 April 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/
[57] Berger, 1999, p. 2 and pp. 9–10.
[58] The project included an exhibition curated by Lütticken, *The Art of Iconoclasm*, 2008, a related public symposium "On Post-Secularism," 2009, organised by Hlavajova, Lütticken and the Centre for the Humanities, Utrecht University, and the book *The Return of Religion and Other Myths: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, 2009. See Hlavajova, Lütticken, and Winder, 2009, and also Lütticken, 2009.
[59] Hlavajova, Lütticken, and Winder, 2009, p. 10.

new relevance in a mediascape characterised by oversimplification and iconoclastic violence. The specialist knowledge of contemporary art practitioners could be used, for example, to complicate the "singular and uncontested meaning" of repressive sexism often attributed to Islamic veils and headscarves in the West.[60] Hlavajova's effort to articulate the value of artistic knowledge in this particular political arena, however, is based on a connection that still needs to be more fully articulated. This is the connection between contemporary Western art and the devotional images and religious iconoclasm of premodern Europe. In short, and as they were well aware, Lütticken and Hlavajova's project depended on a recognition of contemporary art's participation in "a western visual culture made possible by the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation."[61]

Art historian Aaron Rosen has pointed out that while the "secularization thesis" typecasts modern and contemporary art as religion's mortal enemy, artists have nevertheless continued to create works that draw on religious traditions, evoke concepts like eternity or infinity and engage seriously with religious themes and institutions.[62] Despite this, religion remains a blind spot for most art historians of modern and contemporary Western art. This is because of the discipline's origin in Enlightenment humanism, and the priority it afforded to secular reason over religious traditions that have been viewed as remnants of a stagnant and moribund past. As David Morgan has narrated: "Avant-gardism inherited from Henri de Saint-Simon and the Enlightenment harbors a suspicion of religion, a belief that it is vestigial, and a corresponding conviction that modernity is secular at heart."[63] Thomas Crow has recognised that acknowledging the presence of religion in contemporary art entails certain risks for the discipline of art history, including the risk of undermining the critical distance that allowed art historians to perceive images of gods as artefacts of human creativity in the first place. Art history's break from "the predominantly Christianised culture of Europe and North America" enabled:

> the art of that tradition [to] be viewed apart from any devotional reverence. Without such separation, no dispassionate examination of the historical

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[60] See for example Von Braun, 2009.
[61] Hlavajova, Lütticken, and Winder, 2009, p. 9.
[62] Rosen, 2015, p. 18.
[63] Morgan, 2009a, p. 39.

record—which is to say, no art history worth the name—would have been genuinely conceivable.[64]

Crow's *No Idols: The Missing Theology of Art*, and Jennifer Roberts's research into the work of Robert Smithson from which Crow draws, both demonstrate what can be gained by overcoming contemporary art history's religious blind spot. Crow proposed that the overlooked theological contributions of Mark Rothko, New Zealander Colin McCahon, Robert Smithson, James Turrell and Sister Corita Kent are of central importance to understanding their work, with flow-on effects for our understanding of Western modernism. These were artists, he claimed, who "proceeded in overt acknowledgement of the inseparability of the Western art tradition from its founding in Christian observance."[65] Crow's interpretation of Smithson follows Jennifer Roberts's pioneering analysis, in which she challenged established readings of Smithson as a skeptical and irreverent proto-postmodernist by placing his later work in relation to an early and little-known body of explicitly Catholic paintings and collages. As I have also found with Stevenson's work, Roberts discovered significant continuities between the "attitudes towards temporality" in Smithson's early religious work and his later, celebrated and ostensibly secular practice:

> Although the specific Catholic motifs would disappear from Smithson's work, many of the structures of their articulation would not. . . . Smithson's religious work . . . must not be seen as simply postponing the development of his mature work but rather enabling it. . . . Indeed, much of what we have come to understand as Smithson's 'postmodernism,' . . . derives ultimately from his engagement with the lugubrious premonitions of Christian mystics bemoaning a fallen world.[66]

As Roberts did when she recognised Smithson's interest in entropy as a reformulation of Christian eschatology, acknowledging the theological dimension of such artist's works allows us to put it in conversation with the tradition—both religious and philosophical—that it clearly engages. As is apparent in both Smithson and

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[64] Crow, 2017, p. 5.
[65] Crow, 2017, p. 14.
[66] Roberts, 2004, pp. 14–15.

Stevenson's works, this tradition offers a model of historical time that is quite different to that of secular modernity. The figural scheme employed by biblical exegetes, which "stitched through time" to connect chronologically distant figures, regards history as a complex matrix of echoes and foreshadowings, and non-linear causes and effects. As I will argue, Stevenson's practice draws from a model of historical time that is similarly non-linear. This is certainly not to suggest that a religious model of historical time is unproblematic, or that it should be uncritically adopted. As Roberts also recognised, the apocalyptic finitude and divine governance of the Christian cosmos places serious limits on—for example—human historical (and political) agency.[67] However, I suggest that there are benefits in reassessing what such a model can offer to us now.

Chapter summary

I begin, in chapter one, with an exploration of the moment that I consider foundational to Stevenson's practice. This was the period of the late 1980s in New Zealand, when the artist was living in what he has described as the "parallel universe" of his religious community and faith, while also learning how to be a postmodern figurative painter at art school. Stevenson's paintings from this period describe a reality that I call "parochial-supernatural." They are oriented towards a God that is both otherworldly and unpredictable, and they adhere to the artist's religious convictions regarding the imminence of Christ's apocalyptic return. However, as I demonstrate, these paintings also contain the seeds of the religious critique that has been the engine of Stevenson's practice. They depict the banal and parochial face of an otherworldly religion. In their insistent focus on the physical objects and architectural spaces associated with Pentecostal worship, I argue, Stevenson's paintings stage an implicit critique of the denomination's transcendentalism. They raise the question, which is both artistic and theological, of the possibility of adequate representation, and they do so using a postmodern painting style that foregrounds representation's duplicity and irresolution.

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[67] Roberts, 2004, pp. 9–10.

In chapters one and two, I challenge the existing interpretation of Stevenson's early works. I show that the religious aspects of these works place them at odds with the narratives of nationalist emplacement and geographic determinism which dominate antipodean art history, and within which they have been understood. Chapter two moves into a discussion of the "conspiracy theorist" works that Stevenson produced during the 1990s. Rather than regarding these works as an illustration of what Terry Smith called the "provincialism problem," I demonstrate that they are an effort to work through the immediate aftermath of Stevenson's departure from faith. Stevenson's "conspiracy" works confront the possibility entertained by postmodernism at its most nihilistic and sceptical: that there is no underlying truth anchoring our representations of the world, that even knowledge gained through direct experience is socially constructed, and that therefore what counts as truth is endlessly relative.

In chapter three, I describe a significant turning point in Stevenson's practice. From around 2000, he began producing research-based installations that re-present historical narratives using a constellation of archival documents and historical artefacts, both found and recreated. These installations invited their viewers to "join the dots" in the artefactual record of the recent past in order to perceive an epic historical terrain, and the suggestion that some larger force or order was at play in history. These installations can be clearly distinguished from the savagely comic nihilism that characterised Stevenson's works of the 1990s. As I demonstrate, a different approach to the question of representation was key to this transition. Slipping between the registers of fact and fiction, Stevenson's installations of the early 2000s opened the possibility of discovering, or inventing, some truth in fabrications.

Chapters four and five examine a selection of projects of the mid- and late 2000s, concluding with works made in 2012. Chapter four performs a detailed analysis of Stevenson's approach to representation, and the logic of doubling or repetition that is central to his practice. Through a discussion of several sculptural replicas of historical artefacts that he made during this period, I demonstrate that the mode of representation operating in these works is one that "zooms in" on the telling detail rather than attempting to achieve an overview, and it is a mode that stages revelation

through affective embodiment rather than didactic address. In chapter five, I fold this insight back into my analysis of the model of historical time that underpins Stevenson's practice. I demonstrate that the replicas and doubles that populate his works operate as proxies or stand-ins for something that is categorically unknowable. Stevenson's approach to representation can be considered, I suggest, in terms of the sublime: it approaches the limits of the calculable, the knowable, and the representable.

I regard the contemporary relevance of Stevenson's practice as based in its orientation towards absolute otherness, absolute difference, and the fact that this is a departure from the model of historical time inaugurated by postmodernism. Contemporaneity, when understood as a bloated present into which multiple pasts and futures are incorporated in a continual play of relative difference, is a product of the postmodern rupture. In contrast, the model of historical time at work in Stevenson's art is eschatological. As we will see, it reinstates absolute otherness into a worldview grown suffocating in its immersive horizonless heterogeneity. It opens, in effect, a profoundly unknowable future: an apocalyptic horizon just as unpredictable as that of Pentecostalism, but lacking the benevolent promise of redemption.

Chapter one: The end

"I think time is such a fundamental thing . . . [it's] a kind of medium that we live in, and we all have a kind of foundational relationship [with it] somehow in our childhood. . . . I think you can't get rid of that. It stays with you in lots of ways."[68]

Michael Stevenson's first solo exhibition, *Paintings*, was held at Wellington's Southern Cross gallery in February 1988. Stevenson had graduated from Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts in 1986, and his distinctive faux-naive paintings had attracted the attention of Southern Cross proprietor Gregory Flint. An artist who was then establishing himself as one of New Zealand's pioneering art dealers, Flint went on to also exhibit the work of other emergent luminaries of the 1980s and 1990s like Bill Hammond, Judy Darragh, Ronnie van Hout and l budd. Stevenson's inaugural exhibition, however, came hard on the heels of one of the most extreme market crashes in New Zealand history. It was, to say the least, a commercially inauspicious moment to launch an art career. In the stockmarket crash known as Black Tuesday, October 20, 1987, share values dropped by NZ$5.7 billion in four hours and many shareholders lost everything.[69] The shock waves were felt across the country: not only millionaire CEOs but also Mum and Dad investors and blue-collar workers were rendered bankrupt overnight. Stevenson recently recalled: "it was a crisis. That . . . was the moment when I became an artist . . . I entered into this whole market at that moment. And it was only going down."[70]

The crash of 1987 was formative for Stevenson. Up until that moment, he had remained curiously insulated from the broader political, economic and cultural forces that dramatically reshaped New Zealand society during the 1980s. However, he didn't directly address the crash and its effects until much later. It was only in 2000, when he moved to the other side of the world and produced the installation *Call Me Immendorff*, 2000–2002, that Stevenson began to retrospectively examine the New Zealand he had inhabited in the 1980s. In this chapter, I will examine the period

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[68] Michael Stevenson, Skype interview with the author, Berlin/Melbourne, 25 March 2016.
[69] Grant, 1997, p. 307. Known elsewhere as Black Monday, the crash occurred on Tuesday October 20, 1987 according to New Zealand time.
[70] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.

immediately surrounding the market crash, when a number of factors intersected in unexpected ways to shape Stevenson's nascent practice and influence its reception. Primary among these were the religious beliefs of the extreme and exclusive Pentecostal community of his youth, and also the emergent and still-forming postmodern theory to which he had been exposed at art school.[71] The reverberations of the events of the 1980s and the complicated interactions of these two ideologies echo through Stevenson's subsequent career.

Stevenson's paintings of the 1980s—entirely unpeopled depictions of church halls, and still lifes of the paraphernalia of religious worship—were understood at the time as a kind of resuscitation of the New Zealand regionalist-nationalist painting tradition, exemplified by such canonical mid-twentieth-century figures as Colin McCahon, Rita Angus and Bill Sutton. As Stevenson wryly recalled in 1994: "Francis Pound's wonderful line was: a neoregionalist footnote to McCahon that bears too much reference to Philip Guston and Morandi."[72] The consensus view was that Stevenson's paintings were an investigation of the culturally overlooked, and a nostalgic (if ambivalent) articulation of faded provincial pride. Like his regionalist predecessors, Stevenson's forays into the New Zealand heartland were understood as a redemptive effort to elevate the local and banal into the iconic. Miro Bilbrough wrote in 1989 that Stevenson's paintings articulated "the vocabulary of not just one but of an archetypal small New Zealand town—it doesn't really matter which." Long-serving critic T. J. McNamara felt that "his images bear witness to a way of life." Mark Amery observed that Stevenson "treats his unscenic sights with love rather than mockery, often detailing the cultural curiosities unaffected by fashion, and the views to be found behind the postcard imagery."[73]

Rather than an updated, 1980s version of the tradition of regionalist and nationalist emplacement that dominates twentieth-century New Zealand art history, I argue that Stevenson's paintings are an expression of the eschatological expectations of his religious faith. Their articulation of an essentially Pentecostal worldview

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[71] While I use the term Pentecostal to describe the religious community that Stevenson was a member of, the group resisted denominational categorisation. Stevenson has characterised it as loosely Pentecostal, Evangelical and fundamentalist. Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin/Melbourne, 25 March 2016.

[72] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Leonard, 1994, p. 33.

[73] Bilbrough 1989, McNamara 1994, Amery 1998. See also Standring, 1992, pp. 95–102.

distinguishes these works completely from the regionalist tendencies and nationalist preoccupations of earlier New Zealand painting. Far from neoregionalism, they articulate a postnationalism which could be described as "parochial-supernatural," and which can be situated in complicated dialogue with the historical and temporal shifts of postmodernism. The core problematic of Stevenson's practice was established in the intersection between his Pentecostal beliefs and his engagement with postmodernism. This problematic—as is evident in his paintings of the late 1980s—also planted the seeds of his later, powerful religious critique.

Stevenson was born and raised in Inglewood, Taranaki, population 3000, as a member of a tight, religious community. He has described it as a "serious" community, "the kind . . . where if you're moving house, you don't even need to phone, and ten mates come around in the morning to help you shift."[74] Following in his parents' footsteps, Stevenson studied at Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts. After graduating in 1986, he moved from Auckland to Palmerston North, back into a provincial environment.[75] Travelling against the flow of city-bound traffic and leaving New Zealand's largest urban centre is an unusual move for an ambitious twenty-two-year-old art school graduate. Stevenson's retreat from the city is also unusual given the urban culture that had been developing in New Zealand's larger cities during the preceding years. The experiences of photographer Fiona Clark offer a salient contrast. Also from Inglewood, Clark studied at Elam between 1972 and 1975, during which time she became involved in Auckland's nascent queer and transgender scene. She produced some of her best-known (and most controversial) work photographing the city's underground night life around the time of her graduation.[76] Clark's photographs pointed out that a livelier, more permissive and more liberal culture than New Zealand had seen before was out and active in Auckland.

Politically and culturally, "the eighties were New Zealand's adolescence."[77] During this decade, there were dramatic upheavals in New Zealand's culture, politics and economy. Feminists and Māori became increasingly authoritative in their challenge to

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[74] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Laird, 2000, p. 15.
[75] Palmerston North had a population of 66,951 in 1986, compared to Auckland's 816,927. David Thorns and Ben Schrader, "City History and People: New Cities," *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, modified July 10, 2013, http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/interactive/23532/new-zealand-cities
[76] See *Go Girl*, 2002 for a retrospective analysis.
[77] Stratford, 2002, p. 7.

mainstream cultural values, and homosexuality was decriminalised. The Springbok rugby tour of 1981 became a national flashpoint for the confrontation between the emergent youthful, politically progressive urban-centred culture and a conservative "rugby, racing and beer" old guard. Protests over New Zealand's friendly sporting contact with apartheid South Africa erupted into violence on streets and sports fields, dramatising a deep generational and cultural rift in New Zealand society.

The 1984 Labour government led by David Lange built on this groundswell to introduce a raft of socially progressive legislation, including the landmark nuclear-free policy that effectively banned US warships from New Zealand waters.[78] They also, however, introduced radical right-wing economic policies that turned New Zealand's economy into an experiment in applied neoliberalism. In Auckland, shop trading hours and liquor licensing laws were relaxed, and developers constructed high-rise apartments and office blocks. An optimistic, brashly hedonistic, newly wealthy urban culture developed and the stockmarket boomed. In the art scene, money and culture met. Alan Gibbs, hardline proponent of the market economy and "scourge of the political left" emerged with his wife Jenny Gibbs as an extremely generous philanthropist of contemporary art: "He was a horseman of the Apocalypse, but a cultured one. Minimalism appealed to him, both in art and when it came to the role of the state."[79] Auckland's Artspace opened, and with exhibitions like Wystan Curnow's *Sex and Sign*, 1987, confidently applied cutting-edge feminist and Continental theory to contemporary New Zealand art. A new crop of commercial galleries such as Gregory Flint, Sue Crockford Gallery and Gow Langsford Gallery joined established stalwarts such as the New Vision Gallery, Wellington's legendary Peter McLeavey Gallery, and Christchurch's Brooke Gifford Gallery.[80]

Stevenson acknowledges "The '80s were very exuberant . . . but I wasn't part of that, I locked myself up in Palmerston North for six years. And lived an extremely frugal, monastical kind of a life."[81] While Stevenson's isolation wasn't complete—he recalls

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[78] For an overview of this period in New Zealand's political history, see John Carlaw and Marcia Russell, *Revolution*, Television New Zealand, 1996, four-part YouTube video, 55:17, 55:35, 55:40 and 56:18, accessed 16 July 2017, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZXpeUQ0tD8.
[79] Goldsmith, 2012, p. 179.
[80] See Trevelyan, 2013.
[81] Stevenson recalled that the building in which he lived and worked was "a kind of a shack, if you like. It had electricity, it didn't have running hot water, it didn't have a shower, it didn't have a telephone."

visits from artist Julian Dashper, for example, and he continued to borrow books and articles from Elam's library via the public inter-library loan system—it was resolute and purposeful. In addition to the lure of the preposterously cheap rent in Palmerston North, Stevenson has emphasised that he was drawn to small communities. In his words: "I was . . . interested in retro culture, and retro culture is laid on thicker in the provinces. Palmerston North is like the Bible Belt."[82] During the late 1980s he travelled extensively around New Zealand's small towns, the sort described by architect David Mitchell as "the least picturesque," mining them for material for his paintings.[83] In Mitchell's words:

> The recurring form is of the main-street town, signaled by a scatter of light industrial sheds on the highway. Houses start near the 50kph speed zone, and move out to flank the strip of shops that runs through the town centre, gap-toothed with parking lots and petrol stations.[84]

Quoting this passage from Mitchell and Gillian Chaplin's *The Elegant Shed: New Zealand Architecture since 1945*, Stevenson commented: "This is the town I was brought up in. In its unremarkable streets I find a sense of belonging. However mundane they may appear, these are the places I know and love best."[85] It is easy to see why Stevenson's paintings were interpreted primarily as nostalgic depictions of a "way of life" peculiar to New Zealand's small towns. However, during the 1980s, Stevenson was involved in another, religious way of life, centred in the small towns and suburban backwaters characterised by "retro culture," which was much more extreme than the cultural shifts happening in New Zealand's cities. He has described it as a parallel universe. His paintings need to be read in light of this fact, but also within the context of the arrival of postmodernism in New Zealand art.

When it rained, "a river ran through it." The rent, however, was very cheap. Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.

[82] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Leonard, 1994, p. 34.

[83] Mitchell and Chaplin, 1984, p. 10. EMRL, Michael Stevenson Artist's File, Michael Stevenson, "Biographical Notes," *c*.1988. Stevenson noted that he did several trips, including a "grand tour" with his then-girlfriend filmmaker Kathryn McCool in November 1987 when he travelled as far south as Bluff. Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.

[84] Mitchell and Chaplin, 1984, p. 10.

[85] EMRL, Michael Stevenson Artist's File, Michael Stevenson, "My Hometown New Zealand," *c*.1987–89.

Stevenson's *Christmas Lights and Toilet Block*, 1988, is an odd picture (fig. 5). A night scene, it shows a trinity of subjects lined up under a glowering, ominous sky. Occupying the painting's strangely shallow, stage-like space is an enormous, and slightly wonky, timber cross supporting glowing lights strung up in the shape of a stylised Christmas tree. This construction is flanked by a pohutukawa tree in particularly ecstatic bloom, and a concrete-block public toilet building painted antiseptic green.[86] The Christmas lights, glowing ethereal white against a dark background of shrubbery, seem like a series of overlapping cartoon arrows pointing joyfully upwards as if to say "This way to God!" The other sign in the picture, the one that reads "MEN" and marks the toilet block's entrance, has different, taboo, connotations. In this small public park, the sacred and the profane, cheerfully oblivious to their drastic incompatibility, co-habit.[87]

Typically of Stevenson's work from this time, *Christmas Lights* is executed crudely. Objects are reduced to blunt, schematic shapes: the grass has the featurelessness of Astroturf and the concrete pathways are as flat as those printed on a child's road-map play mat. The painting's awkward composition—the clunky line-up of the three subjects, with the Christmas lights slightly off-centre—and the inept handling of spatial perspective faithfully reproduce the naivety of a child's drawing. Even the jaunty Christmas red and green of pohutukawa flowers and toilet block are childlike; however, this naivety does little to dispel the pressing gloom of the sky, which bears down turgidly on the little scene.

The glowing Christmas tree that dominates Stevenson's composition seems at first to proffer an easy symbolic opposition between its own pure light, which provides the scene's only illumination, and the dark, greenish bruise of the sky. However, the surreal presence of the toilet block, in its un-ignorable shade of green, confounds any clichéd reflections on the Christian message and its use of illumination as metaphor.

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[86] The pohutukawa tree, native to the north of New Zealand, is colloquially known as "New Zealand's Christmas tree" because of the intense red flowers it produces over the summer Christmas period.
[87] Stevenson's juxtaposition irresistably recalls a notorious comment by poet Rex Fairburn in an early review of the work of Colin McCahon, which disdainfully compared his religious paintings to the flamboyant and controversial Los Angeles Pentecostal evangelist Aimee McPherson. Fairburn thought that McCahon's existential-religious experiments with the painted word "might pass as graffiti on the walls of some celestial lavatory—say in an Aimee MacPherson [*sic*] temple—but that is about all." Fairburn, 1948, p. 50.

A great deal of the pleasure—and humour—in *Christmas Lights and Toilet Block* is due to its obdurate refusal to be comprehensible, and the steadfastness of its pose as a naive rendering of plain fact. Combining sweetness and uneasiness, overt religious sentiment and caustic humour to disorienting effect, the painting is strangely compelling. Like many of Stevenson's paintings, it initially seems approachable but, in the artist's words, "rapidly after that first impression, the 'Welcome' mat is snatched away."[88]

Christmas Lights and Toilet Block is typical of Stevenson's purposefully faux-naive style, which lends his paintings their self-contradictory tone containing both irony and earnestness, rustic charm and dark humour. As an oil painting on canvas board, it is also typical of his use of traditional media: Stevenson's output in the 1980s consisted largely of easel paintings and acrylic wash line drawings on paper. The ironic distance that brackets Stevenson's paintings as "faux-naive" rather than simply naive, their purposefully clunky execution and highly conventional media, their vernacular subject matter and their attention to written signage: all of these elements add up to a particular kind of ironic, self-conscious datedness that aligns them with the "bad painting" trajectory of postmodern figurative painting. However, the unironic presentation of religious subject matter in Stevenson's works also endows them with a sincerity at odds with flippant postmodern quotation. As curator Robert Leonard observed in 1994, Stevenson's subjects were "unfashionable, and not yet in a fashionable way."[89]

Postmodernism and history

In Western art of the 1980s, figurative painting became a signifier of an emergent postmodern culture. The apparent revival of studio-based painting practice was signalled in New York during the late 1970s by *A Painting Show*, 1977, at PS1, Marcia Tucker's *Bad Painting*, 1978, at the New Museum and Richard Marshall's *New Image Painting*, 1978, at the Whitney Museum. Across the Atlantic, *A New Spirit in Painting* at London's Royal Academy in 1981 was followed by *Zeitgeist* at Berlin's Martin-Gropius-Bau in 1982. These exhibitions sought to establish the

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[88] Michael Stevenson, quoted in O'Brien, 1996, p. 135.
[89] Leonard, 1994, p. 33.

international character of the "new painting," and generated a sense of the discipline's international resurgence after years dominated by "post-studio" conceptual and performance work. The new painting's opposition to the conceptual practices of the 1960s and 1970s was particularly emphasised in the US, where *October*-affiliated critics like Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens and Benjamin Buchloh didn't pull their punches in linking painting with neoconservative politics. In his 1982 article "Back to the Studio," for example, Owens claimed that painting, as the studio-based and market-friendly production of alienable artworks, was a betrayal of the ideals of the leftist counterculture that had found expression in conceptual art.[90]

The vitriol with which it was attacked in the pages of *October*, however, belies the difficulty—both then and now—of defining the character of postmodern painting. Reacting to different conditions in different contexts, postmodernism retained and antagonised different aspects of the various modernisms to which it responded— thereby, of course, demonstrating the cultural plurality that became one of its core propositions. However, Fredric Jameson's 1984 "periodizing hypothesis," in which he described widespread bewilderment and disorientation in the face of "the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" has become close to definitional.[91] Similarly, Jean-François Lyotard's early characterisation of postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" described how the grand historical narratives that had given form to Western thought suddenly seemed untenable.[92] Jameson linked the stylistic changes apparent in artistic practice to the newly postindustrial and transnational character of late capitalism in Western societies. Following Jameson, Steven Connor recently offered a summary of these broad systemic changes:

> Centrist or absolutist notions of the state, nourished by the idea of the uniform movement of history towards a single outcome, were beginning to weaken. It was no longer clear who had the authority to speak on behalf of history. This rise of an economy driven from its peripheries by patterns of consumption

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[90] Owens, 1982, Crimp, 1981, Buchloh, 1981. See also Graw, 2006, for an attempt at dismantling this binary.
[91] Jameson, 1984, p. 55 and p. 80.
[92] Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv.

rather than from its center by the needs of production generated much more volatile and unstable economic conditions.[93]

Jameson claimed that a "weakening of historicity"—a shift in the relation between present and past, and a shift in the way that history was thought and represented—was crucial to the cultural expression of this broad systemic postmodernism. In painting practice as in architecture, literature and other disciplines, he argued that this change was apparent in a style of historical reference characterised by pastiche and parody. The new style substituted insubstantial references—history as a surface effect—for the sense of historical emplacement and temporal anchoredness that had been granted by modernism's progressive drive to continually supercede tradition. A number of recent commentators have described our current historical condition as "presentism," in which all historical times are absorbed into a bloated, static and overdetermined present.[94] For Connor, this is a defining feature of postmodernism, which:

> is concerned almost exclusively with the nature of its own presentness. Indeed, one definition of postmodernism might be: that condition in which for the first time, and as a result of technologies that allow large-scale storage, access, and reproduction of records of the past, the past appears to be included in the present, or at the present's disposal, and in which the ratio between present and past has therefore changed.[95]

The substitution of historical pastiche for modernist progress, it seems, is a symptom of a dramatic rupture in the Western conception of our relation to historical time. As Jameson observed, the loss of the modernist sense of historicity has also been marked by a tendency towards apocalyptic thinking. The endless present is haunted by a future that is imagined as terrifying and catastrophic. The loss of historicity, Jameson wrote:

> effectively abolishes any practical sense of the future and of the collective project, thereby abandoning the thinking of future change to fantasies of sheer

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[93] Connor, 2004, p. 3.
[94] See for example Hartog, 2015.
[95] Connor, 2004, p. 10.

catastrophe and inexplicable cataclysm—from visions of 'terrorism' on the social level to those of cancer on the personal.[96]

The postmodern subject occupies a historical position that is mobile and free-floating rather than anchored by its opposition to a fixed set of traditions. Those occupying this position are threatened by a spectral future that they passively await, rather than a future that they actively seek to create. With this shift in the perceived relation between past, present and future, the modern logic of a progressive break with tradition became confused, and the distinction between orthodoxy and radicalism was no longer so clear or useful. However, as the *October* critics' response to the revival of figurative painting attests, early commentators on postmodern culture remained reliant on a framework built around the opposition between progress and conservatism.

Postmodernism in New Zealand

At art school, Stevenson found that his education in art history—centred, as it was, on the apocalyptic narrative of modernism's ending—corresponded fairly well to the eschatological emphasis of his religious beliefs:

> It was really taught that this formal progression of modernism, particularly post-War modernism, through all its different phases, had come to an end. Or was coming to an end. And I knew everything about *ending*, how things end. I saw this progression as eschatological. That was my frame of reference.[97]

The advent of postmodernism made sense to Stevenson in the framework of his religious expectation of total apocalypse. In New Zealand as elsewhere, initially at least, it meant different things to different people. During Stevenson's time at art school in Auckland, the conversations taking place about the status of figurative painting corresponded in part to those occurring in New York, in that the revival of painting was regarded as antithetical to the post-object practices that had dominated

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[96] Jameson, 1984, p. 85.
[97] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.

the school under the leadership of artist Jim Allen in the 1970s.[98] However, this opposition was not as central to the New Zealand discourse as it was in the US. In New Zealand, postmodernism came to define itself against the essentialising, romantic and nationalist tendencies of the art that constituted New Zealand modernism.

Stevenson has described his time at Elam, between 1983–86, as "an interesting time, a time of transition."[99] He explained: "It was the eighties but our formal art education still included forced trips into the crater of Mt Eden on the winter solstice to beat bits of metal with Phil Dadson."[100] A key member of New Zealand's post-object scene, Dadson's experimental sound, performance and video work infused this legacy with a shamanistic back-to-nature sensibility. Reading Dadson's 1988 description of *Solar Plexus*, the collaborative drumming event he held annually in the crater of Auckland's Maungawhau (Mt Eden), it is easy to see why it seemed like a seventies throwback to Stevenson:

> Each year around June 21/22 an open invitation stands for any number of drummers and other participants to celebrate the pulse of the earth and the waves of the air in the way they see fit. One thing only remains constant from year to year, the passage of time from day break to sundown marked by a continuously fluctuating pulse, stated, varied and freely decorated by all manner of drums and other instruments, found and invented. Other activities visual and physical occur spontaneously or planned through the day to create an occasion as unpredictable from one year to another as the weather on the day.[101]

Linking the "pulse" of the drums to both the radiating nervous network of the abdominal solar plexus and the earth's annual seasonal changes, Dadson's *Solar Plexus* was a performance ritual that created parallels between bodily and solar rhythms. While this celebration of rhythmic harmony between the work's participants

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[98] Post-object art is known outside New Zealand and Australia as conceptual art. See *Action Replay*, 2002 for a retrospective analysis of New Zealand post-object art of the 1970s.

[99] Michael Stevenson, quoted in O'Brien, 1996, p. 135.

[100] Michael Stevenson, quoted in O'Brien, 1996, p. 135.

[101] Phil Dadson, *c*.1988, quoted in Victoria Passau, "Solar Plexus" (blog), National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries, University of Auckland, 13 June 2012, http://blogs.library.auckland.ac.nz/nicai/archive/2012/06/13/Solar-Plexus.aspx (site discontinued).

and their natural environment may have seemed closer to a dated form of hippie spirituality than cutting-edge art practice by the mid-1980s, Stevenson remembers being intrigued by the traces of the radical pedagogical environment that Jim Allen had introduced to Elam, which was "just exiting the building" when he arrived at the school. "There was a sense, and you could smell it, there was still a sense of this other much more radicalised art practice. Which was interesting."[102]

However, the university department which, according to Stevenson, most closely approximated radical thinking during the time of his education was the English department. Wystan Curnow and Roger Horrocks both taught classes that engaged with international critical theory. Stevenson studied film with Horrocks, and remembers that it was through the analysis of filmic images that, "you would then go on and read something like Barthes. This was the entry point, through film."[103] However, these academics' theoretical interests did not cross over into the fine arts department: "there was no *theory* at Elam. There was no film at Elam. There was nothing. There was Phil Dadson running around with a sixteen-millimetre film camera."[104] Intrigued by what he had encountered in Horrocks's class, Stevenson was initially interested in studying with Dadson and producing film works himself, but it seems that he couldn't face the implications of Dadson's holistic approach to teaching:

> I didn't study with him because he basically told me that if I signed up I couldn't just shoot film, I'd have to do other things as well, like performance, which at that time meant being *naked*. And I didn't particularly want to do that. But that was Phil's thing . . . his Cornelius Cardew thing, and his jazz piano thing, you had to do it all. If you were in his class you had to do it all.[105]

Given the two, apparently mutually exclusive, options that he was faced with, Stevenson opted to preserve his personal dignity and become a painter. Instead of making films, he worked with Dick Frizzell, an artist who was vocal—and characteristically irreverent—in his opposition to the post-object tradition:

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[102] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.
[103] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.
[104] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.
[105] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.

In 1978 art practice was completely dominated by Performance, Video, Installation. Artists were nailing themselves to Volkswagens, rolling in poo like demented holymen, starving themselves underneath the floorboards of empty art galleries. We had Gender politics, antiwar politics, Political politics . . . everything got a look in . . . everything but painting . . . And then—if my experience is anything to go by—a sort of underground alternative movement began . . . where 'picture' driven artists started 'doing it' despite the governing orthodoxy.[106]

For Frizzell, painting was a radical activity in a situation where the counterculture had ossified into a "governing orthodoxy." His views echoed those of the curators of London's *A New Spirit in Painting*, who characterised painting as a practice of resistance, "an underground battle against the official norm."[107] Painting is, as Stevenson acknowledges, an "inherently conservative" medium.[108] However, the supporters of the "new painting" continually emphasised its newness: the fact, as they saw it, that this return to tradition was actually an unprecedented and novel manoeuvre. The revival of painting practice seems to have epitomised, in New Zealand as well as internationally, the temporal and historical changes wrought by postmodernism, and the confusion between orthodoxy and radical practice that it inaugurated. In 1983, Francis Pound's *New Image* exhibition at Auckland City Art Gallery came down strongly on the side of the newness of the new figurative painting. Pound bundled Dick Frizzell together with Paul Hartigan, Denys Watkins, Richard Killeen and others to form a local vanguard of postmodern figurative painters: "all these painters paint images, new images for New Zealand, and paint them in a new kind of way."[109] Billed as "new image" artists in an explicit reference to the New York painting scene, these artists were united by their use of appropriated imagery and the insertion of an ironic distance between themselves and their subject matter.

Pound's appropriation of the term "new image" was "happily" accepted by Frizzell, who was keen to be associated with the New York artists to whom it was first

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[106] Frizzell, 2012, p. 42.
[107] Joachimides, 1981, p. 15.
[108] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.
[109] Pound, 1983, p. 8.

applied.[110] He had travelled to the United States in 1978, the same year that the exhibitions *Bad Painting* and *New Image Painting* were staged, and on this trip he met with Neil Jenney in New York.[111] Frizzell's work from the late 1970s and early 1980s bears the mark of this encounter: his *Everybody's Business* series from 1981–82 is the bastard offspring of pop, vernacular regionalism, and late modern formalist abstraction. Echoing Jenney's signature paintings from 1969–70, with their deadpan puns and their banal objects stranded in a field of streaky brushstrokes, Frizzell lifted his imagery from snapshots of everyday street scenes. In *Hammer Hardware*, 1982, for example, the hammer-shaped sign of a hardware shop floats, in slapstick menace, over the head of an oblivious shopper (fig. 6). In these paintings the artless signage of local businesses ("Look!" "Crazy Prices!" "Quality Meats"), fragments of landscape and unpretentious people going about their business, float together in fields of modulated colour (fig. 7). Stevenson remembers Frizzell's emphasis, as a teacher, on the quotation of found material:

> He gave me an insight into how to go about the act of painting. Dick was very big on *source material*—you had to have a big stack of photographs in your studio, lots of books out of the library, bric-á-brac, postcards.[112]

Frizzell's insistence on the importance of research, his particular interest in vernacular subject matter and his strategy of quotation—coolly ironic, warmly comical—were diligently absorbed by his student. For art historian Christina Barton, postmodernism in New Zealand's visual art was inaugurated by the painters of *New Image*. With Pound, she characterised the shift as a challenge to the romantic foundations of New Zealand modernism, as embodied by regionalist painting:

> These artists' rejection of landscape as their core motif, together with their skeptical disregard of art's expressive potential, signified for Pound a structural shift away from an implicitly ideological investment in landscape and, therefore, an explicit refusal of New Zealand's romantic-expressive tradition.[113]

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[110] Pound, 1983, p. 8.
[111] Frizzell, 2012, p. 75.
[112] Michael Stevenson, quoted in O'Brien, 1996, p. 135.
[113] Barton, 1992, p. 176.

As Barton, Pound and Robert Leonard have all argued, modernism in New Zealand was more or less synonymous with nationalism.[114] In Leonard's words, nationalism "provided the teleology, the master narrative, for local art history, just as modernism had (and does) in the Museum of Modern Art."[115] What Barton called an "identificatory investment in the land," which achieved its climax in Colin McCahon's spiritual colonisation of the landscape, and which was also apparent in Dadson's *Solar Plexus*, was fatally contradicted by the freshly authoritative Māori and feminist voices and histories that nationalism had attempted to efface.[116] Recognising this shift, the new image painters of the late 1970s and 1980s handled nationalist tropes differently. As Pound recounted, when landscape appears in the work of artists like Richard Killeen and Ian Scott, it is as "the depiction of a *kind of art* that depicts place . . . [landscape] is usable only in the form of a readymade—one would not paint it oneself."[117] Unlike the new image painters in the United States, whose figurative works reacted against the "classicizing"[118] abstractions of Greenbergian modernism, in New Zealand the real edifice to be smashed was that of nationalism.[119]

While Stevenson's work did draw from the conversations about postmodernism's opposition to New Zealand's nationalist art tradition, the more interesting aspect of his paintings relates to postmodernism's accompanying historical disorientation, its slippage between radicalism and conservatism:

> I was never trying to create 'New Zealand Art,' although I was interested in the construct of New Zealand-ness. In fact my early work isn't representative of New Zealand at all, it's more wacky Southern Baptist Hillbilly.[120]

By the late 1980s New Zealand postmodernism's solidified position was centred on its ironic commentary on the nationalist metanarrative. To position Stevenson's work within this discourse would be misleading, although it provided his first big break. He

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[114] Barton, 1992; Pound, 2009; Leonard, 1992.
[115] Leonard, 1992, p. 167.
[116] Barton, 1992, p. 183.
[117] Pound, 2009, p. 363, emphasis in original.
[118] Tucker, 1978, unpaginated.
[119] Leonard, 1992, p. 167.
[120] Michael Stevenson, quoted in O'Brien, 1996, p. 135.

was the youngest artist included in Christina Barton's 1989 exhibition *after McCahon* at Auckland City Art Gallery. Held up as the exemplar of New Zealand nationalism, McCahon functioned in the exhibition as modernist foil to the work of a younger generation.[121] In *after McCahon*, artists like Merylyn Tweedie and Julian Dashper offered works which retroactively dismantled the nationalist canon. In *scrubbers or I will need a word processor or thank you marie*, 1989 (from her *under McCahon* series), Tweedie collaged a jumble of photocopied illustrations and instructions from *Home and Building* magazine and dated self-help manuals onto wallpaper, sealing the whole in her trademark epoxy resin (fig. 8). Scrambling communicative efficacy, *scrubbers'* feminist subversion of authority and authorship mocked McCahon's famous declaration "I will need words" with the reply "I will need a word processor."[122] Dashper's *Cass*, 1986, explicitly cited a canonical example of regionalist painting while similarly sabotaging the original's representational integrity (fig. 9). A work produced in ten editions, *Cass* paired a photograph of the rural railway station immortalised in Rita Angus's *Cass*, 1936, with one of Dashper's own abstract drawings. For each edition, Dashper copied his own drawing freehand. His inadvertent divergences from the "master" copy ironically reintroduced unique artistic mark-making into this parody of authentic expression and emplacement.[123]

For New Zealand postmoderns, as Barton wrote in 1992, "the image is now recognised as a surrogate, a stand-in for an inevitably absent reality."[124] This statement holds true for Stevenson's paintings, but in a religious sense centred on the opposition between mundane and divine realities that is utterly different to Tweedie and Dashper's works. In the four paintings of Stevenson's included in *after McCahon*, depictions of the venues and paraphernalia of small town religious worship act as

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[121] Laurence Simmons and Rex Butler have subsequently undertaken a retrospective reassessment of McCahon's work that aims to complicate both its modernism and its nationalism. Simmons argued in 2002 that the reception of McCahon's work was "still too bound to structures of idolatry and intentionality, too bound to the assurance of authority, authorship and authenticity of the painter, and to a certain vision of New Zealand and intrinsic New Zealandness," and proposed to "grapple with the texts of paintings . . . read them against the grain," in the same way that McCahon wrestled with the biblical texts that he quoted. As Barton's exhibition pointed out, however, for artists like Stevenson, Merelyn Tweedie and Julian Dashper in 1989, McCahon was close to definitionally modern. Simmons, 2002, p. 51, see also Butler and Simmons, 2008 and 2010.

[122] Colin McCahon, quoted in *I Will Need Words*, 1984, p. 1.

[123] The best introduction to Dashper's work and humour might be the following quip: "someone asked me once at a party, 'What sort of artist are you?' and I said, 'I'm a super-realist painter,' and they said, 'Well that sounds good, what do you paint?' I said, 'Abstract art.'" Dashper, 2010, p. 63.

[124] Barton, 1992, p. 179.

surrogates and stand-ins for an inaccessible divine reality. It seems, in fact, that Stevenson's religious perspective should have disqualified him at the outset from a postmodernism predicated at root on the denial of metaphysics. However, by showing works like Stevenson's *Jesus Loves Us All: In Clinton*, 1988, Barton sought to offer a pluralism-friendly Christianity as a contrast to the epic proportions and solitary heroism of McCahon's struggle with faith. "That prophetic voice no longer resounds over the land," she wrote, "leaving room for a groundswell of 'other' voices," such as Emare Karaka's Māori feminist rewriting of creation stories, and Stevenson's depictions of small town religion:

> In Michael Stevenson's paintings of small, undemonstrative brethren churches in the nowhere places of suburban and provincial New Zealand, the omnipresent but disembodied word of God is replaced by simple statements of belief spoken not by angels and saints, but in the words of ordinary people. Not *I Paul to you at Ngatimote* but *Jesus loves us all: in Clinton*.[125]

Barton rightly perceived the strange dislocation of Stevenson's paintings—their focus on the "nowhere places" of suburbs and provincial towns—as a key difference to regionalism's sense of emplacement. However, she also effectively downplayed the works' religious content to read them as egalitarian celebrations of small town community: a reading which overlooked Stevenson's deadpan sarcasm. In *Jesus Loves Us All: In Clinton*, Stevenson depicted the banal interior of a church hall in Clinton, South Otago (fig. 10). The bare, Guston-esque, light fixture and basic furniture identify it as the sort of unadorned church hall used by Pentecostal congregations. A disorderly scatter of tables and chairs indicates that a gathering has recently ended. A large banner—JESUS LOVES US ALL—is strung up above the hall's window, which opens sightlessly onto a viewless space: perhaps sky, perhaps the blank wall of a neighbouring building. It is telling that this banner, with its affirmative message of Christ's universal love, is directed smugly *inwards*, at the congregation who assembles inside the hall rather than at the outside world—which isn't visible anyway. Far from a populist and inclusive postmodern reply to New Zealand regionalism, this is a painting about religious exclusivity: Jesus loves *us* all

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[125] Barton, 1989, p. 12. *I Paul to you at Ngatimote* is the title of a 1946 painting by Colin McCahon.

(in Clinton). It describes a community that, like Stevenson's own religious community in his home town of Inglewood, was operating at a remove from broader society. Occupying what was in effect a parallel universe, they were divided from their neighbours by their eschatological expectation of their own imminent salvation, and, more pointedly, by their concomitant expectation of everyone else's imminent damnation.

Pentecostal time

Running alongside Stevenson's education in Auckland and his post-graduation art practice in Palmerston North was his life as a church member. He has described this double existence as a "crazy dichotomy . . . with two worlds on top of each other."[126] For him, painting was not simply a matter of a reactionary response to post-object practice as it had been for Frizzell:

> It wasn't just a form of painting for me, a reactionary form of painting or some conservative thing . . . I was going to prayer meetings at six o'clock in the morning, and then going to the painting studio and painting.[127]

After moving to Palmerston North, he remembers being "very intensely involved" with the local church community:

> but also at the same time intensively at the public library making interloans of all this stuff that I guess someone like Wystan [Curnow] was teaching. I was interloaning this stuff and reading it. . . . Not at all, I would say, reflected in my work particularly, but I was interested and wanted to know what was going on.[128]

Pentecostalism's eschatological emphasis is completely at odds with regionalist or nationalist values. This is not only because extreme religious groups tend to occupy a marginal social status, being more closely associated with a global network of like-

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[126] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.
[127] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.
[128] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.

minded churches than their local, secular, neighbours.[129] It is also because they are primarily oriented towards a deity and a temporal-historical system that is not local, or even global, but extra-terrestrial. The cultural dislocation of Pentecostal communities like the one Stevenson was a member of, and the temporal-historical perspective of Pentecostal beliefs therefore find surprising parallels with postmodernism. The postmodern sense of dislocation garnered by often incompatible global and local identifications, and also the historical disorientation produced by Western culture's sudden departure from the linear time of modernity are both strangely echoed in a Pentecostal worldview. Stevenson's paintings of the late 1980s, which were produced while he was immersed—simultaneously—in the two worlds of his artistic and religious pursuits, occupy this place of overlap between them. Despite his assertion that his theoretical reading did not particularly register in his work, I suggest that Stevenson's interest in postmodern ideas—an interest also fed by his friendship with artists like Dashper—was due to the compelling way in which these ideas were refracted through his religious beliefs.

Pentecostalism is distinguished from other Christian denominations by two major, and related, factors: its famously ecstatic style of worship, and its particular approach to eschatological temporality. Anthropologist Joel Robbins has described how a Christian understanding of time is different to what he terms "evolutionist" time.[130] Evolutionist time is experienced as a perpetual process, "*in* which things happen but not *to* which things happen. It is steady and regular and supports a model of the world in which continuity is the default assumption."[131] In contrast, Christianity's discontinuous time is predicated on the possibility—and "indeed the salvational necessity"—of violent rupture.[132] In this model, such ruptures do not occur *in* time, but are the result of a divine intervention that originates *outside* of time and linear causation and institutes an entirely new temporal state: "One temporal progression is

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[129] "Pentecostal-charismatic Christians are a far-flung network of people held together by their publications and other media productions, conferences, revival meetings, and constant travel. Gerlach and Hine (1970), the first to give this point due emphasis, describe the organization of global Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity as decentralized, segmentary and reticulate. It is characterized both by a lack of centralized authority able to question the propriety of local evangelical efforts and by a web-like structure of personal connections." Robbins, 2004, p. 125.
[130] Robbins, 2007, p. 12.
[131] Robbins, 2007, p. 12, emphasis in original.
[132] Robbins, 2007, p. 10.

halted or shattered and another is joined."[133] For most Christians, history is bracketed by two major examples of divine temporal disruption: Christ's earthly incarnation, and his anticipated return. This second coming is expected to inaugurate an apocalyptic "end-times" period which will conclude with the cessation of human history and time as we know it.

While mainstream Christian denominations tend to downplay this radical temporality in favour of an emphasis on the sedimented stability of tradition and institution, Pentecostalism insists on it. From its origins in the early twentieth century, the movement has emphasised its own anti-institutional, irruptive nature, and the absolute imminence of the apocalyptic return of Christ. For Pentecostal believers, who maintain a continual expectation of radical rupture, the steady normality of "evolutionist" time seems an easily punctured illusion. Temporal continuity is constantly interrupted by divine interventions, which foreshadow on a micro scale the coming cataclysm of Christ's return. The signature example of such a micro-intervention, for Pentecostals, is the experience of "spirit baptism." This ecstatic religious experience is regarded as a contemporary, and personalised, re-enactment of the first-century event from which the denomination takes its name. This is the moment described in the New Testament when, following Christ's death and miraculous ascension, his followers had gathered to celebrate the Jewish festival of Shavuot or Pentecost. The biblical narrative relates how Christ's friends and disciples were surprised by a sudden sound "like a rushing mighty wind", and tongues of fire miraculously appeared resting on each of them: "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."[134] God had reached in and disrupted normal life, entering the disciples in the form of the Holy Spirit and granting them an ecstatic experience of bodily oneness with divinity. The empowering and euphoric sensation of contemporary spirit baptism recreates this foundational experience of unpredictable immersion in the divine.

Pentecostalism's emphasis on the radical and unexpected rupture of normal experience is intertwined with the denomination's particular, "crisis-oriented," take

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[133] Robbins, 2007, p. 12.
[134] Acts 2:2 and 2:4 (King James Version).

on Christian eschatology.[135] Spirit baptisms, particularly when they occur *en masse*, are celebrated as a sign of the end times. Such latter-day outpourings of the Spirit are known as the "latter rain," in symmetrical relation to the foundational "former rain" experienced by the apostles during the first-century Pentecost. The end is identifiable by its connection to the beginning. The "latter rain" of the Spirit therefore signals the imminence of Christ's apocalyptic return, while simultaneously empowering the faithful for a final push to convert those who are as yet unsaved.

The worldview of Pentecostal believers is shaped by their orientation towards an unpredictable deity, and towards a divine reality ("God's Kingdom") that is, largely, currently inaccessible but is expected to supercede the existing world in the very near future. It seems that this orientation towards a divine intervention that is perpetually teetering on the brink of its full realisation leads to profound dislocation, and often also a strange passivity towards worldly events. Many Christians believe that the faithful will be "raptured" off the face of the planet prior to the tribulations of the apocalypse, and as Pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia observes, until that moment they "can do little more than try through evangelism to save as many from the flames of wrath as possible."[136] Human history is regarded as being, as Macchia puts it, "on a downward slope," and salvation is only possible through intervention from above.[137] In this worldview, the yet-to-be-fulfilled reality of God's Kingdom is the true reality, and the world we currently occupy takes on the status of a mirage, mask or simulacrum, a screen through which reality can sometimes be glimpsed.

Pentecostalism, then, departs in several different ways from "evolutionist" time. Pentecostals' ecstatic connection to the divine in the experience of spirit baptism is both a foretaste of God's Kingdom and a recreation of the events of the first-century Pentecost. The present is continually punctuated and "shot through," to borrow Walter Benjamin's phrase, with other times, both past and future.[138] Anthropologist Charles Piot has described how the prominence of the Christian end-times narrative in Pentecostalism "serves to condition congregants into an openness to a radical/millennialist orientation toward time" which suffuses everyday life:

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[135] Macchia, 2008, p. 283.
[136] Macchia, 2008, p. 284.
[137] Macchia, 2008, p. 287.
[138] Benjamin, 1999, p. 255.

those micro-encounters of the everyday—a chance meeting with a stranger, an unexpected phone call, a sudden flash of insight—are potentially pregnant with meaning and might lead to a radical shift in the life of the believer, even changing everything that went before.[139]

The corollory of this permeation of millennial excitement through daily life is, of course, the sheer inertia of waiting for a future that is perpetually about to arrive. Stevenson has described this infinite deferral as exhausting: "people are held in this constant and very weird state, *ad infinitum* . . . [it] is just *without end*." The result, according to Stevenson, is "boredom and madness."[140]

Believers, as anthropologist Jane Guyer notes, must exist "in an enduring attitude of expectant waiting" and Stevenson's paintings convey this strange sense of stasis.[141] Given the particular preoccupations of New Zealand art history, it is easy to read works like Stevenson's *After Christmas*, 1990, as memorials to a mothballed provincial culture, as writers like Douglas Standring have (fig. 11).[142] However, the airless inertia of this painting also conveys an "attitude of expectant waiting" that has grown grim with fatigue and interminability. Depicting a spare, prosaic church hall interior furnished with plain wooden benches and trestle-tables, the only relief from the otherwise relentless functionality of the space is provided by a number of bedraggled and partially unravelled party streamers that hang listlessly from the ceiling. Upon noticing that *After Christmas* is dated 12 June, it is difficult not to wonder if the hall has been used at all *since* Christmas. Stevenson told Robert Leonard:

I found this mouldering network of places up and down the country that weren't used much anymore . . . Once, the church hall was the focal point for small towns—every social event would happen there. Now they're highly

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[139] Piot, 2010, p. 66.

[140] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.

[141] Guyer, 2007, p. 414.

[142] Standring, 1992.

marginalised. They're sealed up and only used, say, once a week. There's a weird sense of loss and decline.[143]

This narrative of cultural loss seems to position works like *After Christmas* as a response to demographic changes in New Zealand during the late twentieth century, when urbanisation and secularisation led to the increasing marginalisation of provincial and religious communities. Running parallel to this narrative of loss, however, is a second narrative about the psychological burden of staying *in* the church, and of continuing to endure a waiting game that has been going on now for over 2000 years. The period "after Christmas," after all, stretches to accommodate the entire length of time until Christmas rolls around again. Viewed in terms of the open-ended endurance required by eschatological expectation, Stevenson's painting could equally be titled "after Christ." The stasis of works like *After Christmas*, which convey a sense of being locked in both a perpetual present and a stalled and unchanging provincial culture, is underlined by Stevenson's practice of dating his works with the full day's date. The dates carefully inscribed onto the surface of each painting mark the passage of time, like a child counting down to the school holidays or a prisoner inscribing a tally of days on the wall of the cell.

However, a series of clearly marked exits punctuate the inertia that pervades many of Stevenson's paintings. *The Church of Christ, Dominion Road*, 1987, *One Baptism*, 1988, *Harvest Home*, 1988, *Inside the Church Hall*, 1988, and many of Stevenson's acrylic wash drawings feature open doorways crowned by conspicuous exit signs. The doorway in *Inside the Church Hall*, for example, is positioned in the exact centre of the composition and exerts a magnetic pull: the banal interior seems to thrill with the possibility offered by this opening (fig. 12). *One Baptism*, which depicts a stage in a church hall interior, includes a proliferation of possible exits (fig. 13). The stage backdrop that fills most of Stevenson's composition features a pastoral landscape— the promised land itself—with the River Jordan winding invitingly back into the middle distance. Below this illusory egress, a baptism pool built into the centre of the stage leads, like a comedy trapdoor, straight down. Finally, to stage right, a dark

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[143] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Leonard, 1994, p. 33.

doorway marked with a glowing exit sign interrupts the otherwise symmetrical composition, throwing it off balance.

None of Stevenson's paintings show what is on the other side of these marked exits. In all cases, the open doorway is dark or blank. They remain unfulfilled promises. Like the constant possibility that the rapture will whisk believers away, that a supernatural force from outside the system will intervene and alter the flow of causation or the trajectory of a life, these exits hover in Stevenson's paintings as a reminder of the potential for rupture in the fabric of everyday life and also of the complete epistemological mystery of the new temporal order that will succeed our current one. Both Pentecostalism and postmodernism occupy an extended present populated with the signs of other times. Steven Connor's description of postmodernism's temporal order as "dense with retrospection and forecast . . . a stalled present, an agitated but idle meanwhile" could equally be applied to Pentecostalism.[144] A narrative of dramatic temporal-historical rupture is also a defining characteristic of both. While Pentecostalism's apocalypse is perpetually imminent—always just around the corner—postmodernism's epochal break with modernity has just happened. However, like Pentecostalism, postmodernism also seems to be haunted by a future that is imagined as cataclysmic and unstoppable. As Jameson noted in 1984, postmodernism's break with modernism's progressive drive "abolishes any practical sense of the future . . . abandoning the thinking of future change to fantasies of sheer catastrophe."[145] No longer the authors of history, we have become its victims. Whether this imagined future cataclysm takes the form of the Cold War's nuclear threat, terrorism or climate change, we seem to be locked in a perpetual present, waiting with a strange passivity for the anticipated apocalyptic intervention from beyond.

Radical orthodoxy

The mingling of old and new that seems characteristic of postmodernism, its historical break with progressive, future-building action, confused the modernist distinction between radicalism and orthodoxy. As the *October* critics were quick to notice, within

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[144] Connor, 2004, p. 11.
[145] Jameson, 1984, p. 85.

the visual arts the revival of easel painting was a major manifestation of this change. In Pentecostalism, too, extreme conservatism is a form of extreme radicalism. The denomination's focus on the first-century Pentecost connects, as I outlined above, first things to last things, imagining human history as bracketed by the symmetry of God's two major appearances on earth. However, Pentecostalism's focus on the foundational moment of the Christian church—bypassing the intervening 2000 years—is also a form of fundamentalism. Like all fundamentalisms, Pentecostalism's effort to return to first principles is a critique of the *status quo*, and its otherworldly focus expresses a belief in the need for renovation so drastic that it can only be effected by a supernatural power. Pentecostalism has, as Frank Macchia notes, "a rather dismal view of the religious establishment."[146] A sense of isolated embattlement and radical anti-institutionalism is essential to the world view of this religious denomination, which regards itself as a "faithful 'little flock'" at odds with a corrupt "formal church."[147] Michael McClymond explains:

> Unlike their evangelical and modernist contemporaries, early Pentecostals did not propose plans for the church's gradual amelioration. God would accomplish what no human beings could ever do. The Pentecostals wanted to replace Christendom, not reform it. This impetuous, impatient insistence on total change has never wholly left the global Pentecostal movement.[148]

From a Pentecostal perspective, the world, and the institutionalised church that has grown comfortable in its worldliness, are both now so degraded and corrupted that they can only be corrected by a total overhaul, a return to point zero. Pentecostalism's unadorned church halls, and also its mobile ministries in the form of tent-churches and caravans, are an expression of the denomination's purposeful rootlessness and its opposition to the grand edifices of institutionalised Christianity. The end is nigh: this is temporary accommodation only. Many of Stevenson's paintings were produced as an outcome of his travels around rural New Zealand in 1987–88, when he visited, photographed and painted church halls in small towns all over the country. The works' recurring compositional format of the halls' street frontage, which is usually

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[146] Macchia, 2008, p. 284.
[147] Macchia, 2008, p. 284.
[148] McClymond, 2014, p. 31.

shown square on, retains a sense that these buildings are stops on an itinerary. Unlike New Zealand regionalist painting however, there is very little surrounding landscape included in Stevenson's paintings. In works like *The Where Does Jesus Come in Your Life Christian Fellowship*, 1987, and *The Gospel Hall*, 1988, the viewer is not provided with any overview of the terrain in which the halls are situated, or any identifying characteristics of place apart from the written signage on the halls themselves (fig. 14). The network of church halls in Stevenson's paintings are rendered interchangeable by their aesthetic banality and purely functional architectural forms: they are radical minimalism, but of a very different sort.

A quotation that Stevenson wrote out and displayed in his Palmerston North studio conveys this sense of communal dislocation from, and antipathy towards, the surrounding environment:

> Ca-ra-van: A company of travellers or pilgrims organized and equipped for a long journey, or march, or travelling together, especially through hostile countries.

Works like *Gospel Caravan*, 1987, *One Holy Caravan*, 1988, and *Christmas Lights and Caravan*, 1988, literalise this image of the caravan as an expression of dissenting difference, but also of evangelical outreach (figs. 15–16). The large loudspeakers mounted on the roof of Stevenson's *Gospel Caravan*, which are designed to spread the word of Christ's imminent return, recall the tent-church "crusades" that made Pentecostalism a global phenomenon. Originally brought to New Zealand by the charismatic English evangelist Smith Wigglesworth in the 1920s, the numbers of the "little flock" were boosted dramatically during crusades conducted by US evangelists like Billy Graham and Tommy Hicks in the late 1950s.[149] Brett Knowles, historian of Pentecostalism in New Zealand, described how the methods of these visitors were then replicated by locals like Rob Wheeler, who in 1957:

> bought a thirty-six-foot by eighteen-foot ex-army tent, and resigned his
> pastorate to begin evangelistic campaigns using the tent as a 'transportable

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[149] Knowles, 1999, pp. 28–30. For histories of New Zealand Pentecostalism see Knowles, 1992, 1999 and 2014; Lineham, 1989 and Clark, 2007.

church.' Wheeler . . . consciously modelled his method of Pentecostal evangelism on [Oral] Roberts's tent crusades in the United States.[150]

The Stevenson family were affected by what religious historian Amos Muzondiwa described as "the confusion brought about by the Pentecostal influence that hit Inglewood in the 1970s especially."[151] The visits from international evangelists that New Zealand received in the 1950s and 1960s coincided with a global charismatic movement in Christianity. This movement resulted in the widespread influence of Pentecostalism's ecstatic forms of worship in mainstream churches, and the beginnings of the dramatic growth in Pentecostal congregations, particularly in the global South.[152] Pentecostalism's mobility, and its highly purposeful self-characterisation as a voice of radical, fundamentalist dissent, are given form in Stevenson's paintings by the denomination's spartan church halls and evangelistic caravans. These temporary accommodations express the "outsider" status which is essential to Pentecostalism's radical stance. They are a manifestation of the rootlessness, otherworldly orientation and evangelical-missionary impulse that accompany its end-times convictions.

The distinctive faux-naive style of Stevenson's paintings echoes another kind of outsider orientation, which also effects a strange, primitivist, combination of

[150] Knowles, 1999, p. 30.

[151] Muzondiwa, 2012, p. 51. Muzondiwa relates that the Stevensons were one of twelve families who left the mainstream United Church (a union of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches) for the new Inglewood Christian Fellowship around 1980. Alan Stevenson, Michael's father, explained to Muzondiwa: "We left dissatisfied with the lack of spirituality, the dryness of traditionalism and the frustrations of a church so rigid and change proof one wonders if Christ equals rigidity." (p. 49) The IFC was one of three Pentecostal churches formed in Inglewood around this time, the other two being the short-lived Inglewood Christian Life Centre and the Life Gate Apostolic Church, both of which were very extreme and marked by controversy. By far the most extreme and tragic example of this was the 1994 death of twelve-year-old Dane Gibson at the hands of his mother, a member of the Life Gate Apostolic Church, who was attempting to conduct an exorcism.

[152] Joel Robbins noted in 2004 that "even conservative estimates see the [Pentecostal-charismatic] movement as having at least 250 million adherents worldwide, and all agree that its most explosive growth has occurred in the southern hemisphere." Robbins, 2004, p. 118. Interestingly, Christianity's charismatic renewal coincided with the countercultural revolution that produced both the 1968 uprisings in Paris and the flower children of the 1970s. The Jesus People movement, which was heavily influenced by both Pentecostalism and hippie culture, could be seen as the product of this coincidence, and a movement which in turn helped to popularise Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity. See Eskridge, 2013, particularly p. 77; Thompson, 1974; and Knowles, 1992, p. 128. Stevenson's paintings *Jesus Christ Superstar in Levin*, 1987 (fig. 17), and *Jesus Rock, Rotorua*, 1987 (fig. 18), dryly acknowledge the emergence of Christian youth culture and Christian rock in New Zealand, both of which have become an integral part of the culture of contemporary Pentecostal mega-churches like Destiny Church in New Zealand or Australia's Hillsong. See Eskridge, 2013, p. 268 for a discussion of the growth of the Christian music industry and its relationship to the counterculture of the 1970s.

conservatism and renewal. In 1988, he told Anna Petersen that he enjoyed the work of mid-twentieth-century English artists like "Christopher Wood, Cedric Morris, Lowry and naive art in general."[153] Paintings by the Depression-era African-American artist Horace Pippin, who was admired by both Stevenson and his teacher Dick Frizzell, could also be added to this list. Stevenson's interest in a naive, "outsider" aesthetic style came in the form of an attraction to (in the case of Lowry at least) some of the least fashionable art possible in 1988. Like Jeff Koons's embrace of kitsch, Stevenson's orientation towards such conservative models could be regarded as characteristically postmodern in that its very unfashionability seems fashionable—or at least knowingly perverse, and thus undecidable.

Like Frizzell's paintings from this period, Stevenson's "Sunday painter" pose was a postmodern pastiche of charming "folksy" conservatism, and down-home values. Targeted precisely against a heroic avant-gardist stance that seemed unredeemably dated, both artists borrowed naivety as an effect. Stevenson's purposefully clunky compositions, inept handling of paint, and both his and Frizzell's practice of inscribing their works with the full day's date (Stevenson's sometimes in characters large enough to constitute a compositional element in their own right) were self-conscious signifiers of naivety designed to distinguish their works from the indefensible self-importance and high seriousness of the avant-garde.

However, unlike Frizzell, Stevenson's attraction to an "outsider" aesthetic—and particularly that of the work of Horace Pippin—also forms an interesting parallel with his religious life. Stevenson's attraction to Pippin's work was at least partially due to the Christian subject matter of many of the earlier artist's paintings, which integrate personal experience and biblical narrative. Pippin's *The Holy Mountain* series, 1944–46, for example, combines the artist's memories of war with his religious expectation of the restoration of Edenic peace on earth (fig. 19).[154] Barely visible amongst the shadows of the trees in these paintings, soldiers, aeroplanes, bombs, grave markers and a noosed figure hanging from a branch unsettle the prophetic vision of a utopian future that the works ostensibly depict. In addition to the complex temporal layering

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[153] Michael Stevenson, quoted in TMM: *Two Stacks of Bibles*, 1987, object file, Anna Petersen, "Interview with Michael Stevenson at the Manawatu Art Gallery, 21 January 1988."
[154] See Powell, 1993, pp. 132–4 for a discussion of these works.

evident in Pippin's paintings, the reception of his work was also marked by a form of temporal-historical confusion not dissimilar to that of Pentecostalism's primitivist tendencies.

An artist from the small town of West Chester, Pennsylvania, Pippin's work became widely known in mainstream art circles when it was included in the 1938 exhibition *Masters of Popular Painting: Modern Primitives of Europe and America* at New York's Museum of Modern Art. This wider reception of his paintings was marked, as writers like Cornel West and Celeste-Marie Bernier have noted, by "racist myths of the black artist as untutored naif."[155] In the Jim Crow-era US, it seems that Pippin's paintings could only be included in the canon through a manouvre of temporal dislocation. It was possible, at that time, to celebrate Pippin as an untrained visionary or "innocent autodidact," but not, apparently, as a self-conscious and sophisticated contributor to contemporary culture.[156] Judith Stein notes that *Masters of Popular Painting* drew on a local primitivist impulse that was both practical and patriotic during the war years when transatlantic travel was limited:

> Whether it was described as naive or folk or primitive, the instinctive work of untrained painters and sculptors was understood as honest, pure and direct, and hence valued as authentically American.[157]

Pippin's use of media like burnt-wood panels and the poignant simplicity of his depictions of domestic life, religious imagery and historical scenes were taken as just such authentic expressions of a local folk tradition. The primitivising designations that burdened Pippin's mainstream reception effected a temporal displacement, whereby the contemporary interest of his work was derived precisely, and paradoxically, from an insistence on his conservatism, and his supposedly "instinctive" adherence to the fundamentals of US identity. This authentic traditionalism was celebrated, again paradoxically, and at least in *Masters of Popular Painting,* for its ability to rejuvenate contemporary culture by returning to core principles. As the exhibition's co-curator Holger Cahill put it:

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[155] Bernier, 2009, p. 89; see also West, 1993.
[156] West, 1993, p. 48.
[157] Stein, 1993, p. 34.

Folk and popular art is significant for us because, in our fear that contemporary civilization has almost abandoned its form-creating function in favor of the sterile mathematics of machine-form, we are startled and reassured to find this rich creativeness still alive in the unpretentious activities and avocations of the common man.[158]

Pippin's categorisation as a "modern primitive" described the distance between his work and that which was considered a properly modern artistic expression, but it also became the means by which his work was understood as a vital part of its broader cultural moment. As does Pentecostalism, *Masters of Popular Painting* offered a kind of radical orthodoxy, suggesting that a cultural renovation (on, admittedly, a much less dramatic scale than Pentecostalism's) could be effected by a return to first principles.

Stevenson's interest in Pippin's aesthetic style is evident in, for example, his *The Gospel Hall*, 1988, where the carefully delineated brickwork of the hall and the compositional prominence of the adjacent lamppost recall Pippin's *Harmonizing*, 1944, with its detailed attention to the patterned surfaces of woodgrain fence, brick church steeple and weatherboard houses (figs. 14 and 20). Paintings like Stevenson's *Inside the Church Hall*, 1988, with its flattened perspective and paint-box colours, echo Pippin's domestic interiors, such as the beautiful *Giving Thanks*, 1942 (figs. 12 and 21). Such quotation could be regarded as the ultimate irony: a flippant postmodern pastiche of a style that has seemed to many to exemplify instinctive authenticity and the absolute antithesis of irony. It could also, however, form the basis of a claim that Stevenson's paintings are closer to neoprimitivism than neoregionalism, and that their interest in the "retro culture" of small town New Zealand (perversely rendered using a style borrowed in part from an "authentically American" artist) was derived primarily from the fundamentalist tendencies of the artist's religious community.

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[158] Cahill, 1938, p. 104.

Parochial-supernatural signification

I have described Stevenson's works of the late 1980s as "parochial-supernatural." The paintings articulate Pentecostalism's temporal and geographic dislocation and its primary orientation towards a reality that is extra-terrestrial, but they exclusively depict small town subject matter, focusing on the aesthetically impoverished "retro culture" of isolated religious communities like that of Stevenson's own background. In these paintings, the architecture and paraphernalia of worship are depicted, with self-conscious and intentional clumsiness, as temporary stand-ins for the world to come. Currently accessible only as a promise, or inasmuch as it can be glimpsed during ecstatic worship, the post-apocalyptic divine reality of God's Kingdom is present, in a highly provisional way, in these banal and obviously inadequate surrogates. The designation "parochial-supernatural" reflects a clash of drastically different realities, but also their interpenetration, as the most commonplace and inelegant forms become unlikely local proxies for an otherworldly deity. As Stevenson wrote at the time, "Heaven smells like flower water, leached pine resins and old upholstery."[159]

Pentecostal Christianity's sense of the provisionality of the terrestrial world echoes, in a strange way, the shallowness of postmodern signification. In both, but for different reasons, the world that we see and experience is regarded as an overabundance of signs, where depth is either strangely lacking or constantly deferred. The French poststructuralists, whose work provided a core theoretical framework for cultural postmodernism generally, destabilised the ability of words (and also, by extension, visual signs) to signify. The effect of severing the connection between signifier and signified was to substitute an endless discursive web for the inherent "pure experience or sheer being" of the modernist work.[160] Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance*, for example, took "the calm, present, and self-referential unity of concept and phonic material" of the meaningful word and exploded it into an endless chain of differences without positive terms:

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[159] TMM, Michael Stevenson Artist's File, Michael Stevenson, "Back Home," *c*.1987–89.
[160] Melville, 2004, p. 86.

the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences.[161]

Within a system of signification where there is only the difference between terms and the endless deferral of positive meaning, a distinction between reality and representation vanishes. In his analysis of the work of artists of the "Pictures" group, Craig Owens offered allegory as a similarly diffuse and open-ended system of signification characteristic of postmodernism in the visual arts. Owens argued that the alienation of form from content in allegory, and its central requirement that the viewer engage in activities of deciphering and decoding, stood in opposition to the modernist symbol: "the supposedly indissoluble unity of form and substance which characterizes the work of art as pure presence."[162] As Stephen Melville notes, the final resolution of meaning that is the goal of traditional allegory is absent from postmodern allegory that Owens described:

> We seem to have the interval between surface and depth that is constitutive of allegory without actually having the depth that anchors or justifies—underlies and supports—that surface.[163]

Jean Baudrillard took such deconstructive analyses of the process of meaning-making to their logical conclusion when he announced, rather dramatically, that in the dawning era of simulacra and simulation: "Something has disappeared . . . It is all of metaphysics that is lost."[164] Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, in which he declared that the world had recently become a simulation of itself, and that the simulation had displaced—had taken the place of—the reality, reads like a particularly clear and concise articulation of a common paranoiac delusion. It also echoes the world view of the more extreme denominations of Christianity, such as Pentecostalism, which can effect a similar sense of the radical estrangement of the reality we inhabit.

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[161] Derrida, 1982, p. 11.
[162] Owens, 1984, p. 213.
[163] Melville, 2004, p. 86.
[164] Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2.

Postmodernism regards the world as an overabundance of signs—there is nothing but the endless play of signifiers, and content is dislocated from form. Pentecostalism regards the world as a similarly insubstantial mask or temporary stand-in for a true reality which is endlessly deferred into the near future. Music is, generally speaking, the preferred and appropriately intangible form of creative expression for this religious denomination that regards tangible, mundane reality as an illusion and the ephemeral, ecstatic sensation of spirit baptism as a brief taste of the true reality. Stevenson's paintings therefore, can paradoxically be seen as primarily concerned with illusion *because* they are tangible representations of physical objects and buildings.

Stevenson's paintings rarely allow any sense of spatial depth. His depictions of church halls are set amongst lumpy greenery and anonymous landscapes that are articulated crudely, if at all. When the sky is shown, it is almost always strangely blank, or at least uniformly covered with a wash of streaky cloud, rather like a stage backdrop. His still lifes often take a shelf or open cupboard as a framing device, adopting a close-up view that gives little or no context. There is a pervasive feeling of enclosure in these shallow, stage-like spaces, and of being too close—almost claustrophobically close—to the object of inquiry. The painted stage backdrop in *One Baptism*, 1988, which depicts the River Jordan winding into the idyllic landscape of the promised land, provides a rare moment of depth—but of course this is merely a stage backdrop (fig. 13). What seems like an opening onto real space is in fact a solid surface and the setting for a performance. Still life works such as *Crowns are Waiting By and By*, 1989, and *Wise Men*, 1990, depict the low-budget costumes of a nativity play (figs. 22–23). Like the stage backdrop in *One Baptism*, these are temporary stand-ins for the anticipated reality of God's Kingdom: the stage backdrop depicts the renewed Edenic landscape that the faithful will inhabit, and the paper crowns and robes of the nativity Wise Men indicate the honour they are accorded in the eyes of God, and the divine accolades that will be forthcoming in his kingdom. As Paul instructed his disciple Timothy in the biblical narrative, the faithful will have their reward:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.[165]

It is also telling that the props and costumes in Stevenson's still lifes are shown, explicitly in the case of *Wise Men*, in storage. Folded into an upside-down apple box that has been carefully marked with a masking-tape label, these costumes are awaiting their moment. Similarly, the stacks of Bibles and hymn books that Stevenson painted repeatedly (and obsessively: he produced at least six variations in acrylic wash of a still life of stacked Bibles on a single day, 27 August 1987) are waiting to be used. Works like *Large Stack of Hymn Books*, 1987, and *Two Stacks of Bibles*, 1987, slyly allude to minimalist sculpture while depicting the minimal physical presence of this otherworldly religion (figs. 24–25). In this, they resemble Stevenson's paintings of the spare—minimal—functionality of Pentecostal church halls. However, the stacked Bibles also operate as signs which point to something beyond or other than themselves: a future use and a future experience that they will help facilitate. As Stevenson noted, "On Sundays these halls come to life. The objects within are taken from their neat rows and stacks and put to use."[166] The religious worship that will bring these objects "to life" echoes in micro, of course, the ultimate apocalyptic moment towards which Christianity as a whole is oriented, and towards which Pentecostalism strains with particular urgency: a moment in which the illusion of this world will be shattered and the truth will finally be revealed in full.

Stevenson's paintings are representations of representations: they show objects that are themselves only signs, and a world that is a stage backdrop for the performance of the salvational drama; a temporary stand-in for an as-yet unrevealed truth. The Pentecostal world view that they communicate is both more conservative, and much more radical than the postmodernism to which he was exposed at art school. This is primarily because of the unusual temporal-historical orientation established by the strength of Pentecostalism's otherworldly focus. Believers are held in a perpetual state of anticipation, teetering on the brink of the eschaton, in an end-times moment that is punctuated and perforated with signs, echoes and irruptions of other times. This

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[165] 2 Timothy 4:8, (King James Version).
[166] TMM, Michael Stevenson Artist's File, Michael Stevenson, "Back Home," *c*.1987–89.

world view finds surprising resonance with postmodernism's apocalypticism, its sense of a endlessly static present in which history recurs in the form of parody or pastiche, and its sense of the endless deferral of meaning in signification. As Craig Owens wrote, postmodernist art narrates its own "contingency, insufficiency, lack of transcendence. It tells of a desire that must be perpetually frustrated, an ambition that must be perpetually deferred."[167] Pentecostals believe, fervently, in the imminent transcendental fulfillment of desire, but they currently occupy an infinitely prolonged moment prior to this fulfillment.

Stevenson's paintings of the late 1980s were produced, as I have demonstrated, in the space of intersection between the postmodern ideas then circulating in New Zealand art and his Pentecostal religious beliefs. The interaction between these intellectual and religious systems established the core problematic of Stevenson's ongoing practice. His later works developed a postmodern critique of Pentecostalism's fundamentalist and primitivist tendencies, and also, conversely, deployed an eschatological model of historical time as a corrective to endless postmodern relativity. As do his early paintings, Stevenson's later works centre on what Owens described as "a desire that must be perpetually frustrated, an ambition that must be perpetually deferred."

I have shown in this chapter that the contradiction which fractured Stevenson's 1980s paintings, a contradiction which would come to a head in his works of the 1990s, has to do with the revelation of truth that Pentecostalism constantly defers and postmodernism (at least in its darker moments) categorically denies. Both Pentecostalism and postmodernism are examples of what I have called "radical orthodoxy": they both confuse linear time by recalling the past to act in the present. Within Pentecostalism, this is a form of fundamentalism or primitivism in which the powerful spirituality of first-century Christianity can be re-experienced in ecstatic worship, and can be mobilised as a critique of the institutionalised *status quo*. Postmodernism's appropriative and quotational practices, in contrast, tend to flatten and homogenise the distinction between past and present. Unlike the radical and transcendental otherness evoked by Pentecostalism, postmodernism regards past and present as equally distant, equally inaccessible and equally subject to mediation.

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[167] Owens, 1984, p. 235.

Pentecostalism is a religious denomination that self-consciously maintains a minimal physical presence in the profane world it inhabits. Believers' transcendent experiences during worship are supposedly direct, unmediated bodily connections with the deity: a window miraculously opens between God and the profane world, unaided by the edifices, clergy, equipment and rituals of institutionalised religion. However, Stevenson's paintings show that these transcendent, supposedly unmediated experiences are in practice facilitated by religious accoutrements that are invariably present but remain unacknowledged: the architectural space in which worship takes place with its carefully impoverished décor, the stacks of bibles and hymnals, the cups and saucers of the communal morning tea. The paintings uneasily straddle the Pentecostal insistence on the direct, transcendental nature of believers' experiences of God, and the postmodern insistence that all knowledge and experience is inescapably mediated. They offer these banal stand-ins—the props and paraphernalia of worship—as evidence of the existence of the deity, and also as evidence of its utter inaccessibility. In this central contradiction which unsettles Stevenson's paintings of the 1980s can be seen the religious critique which has been the engine of his subsequent practice.

The 1987 stockmarket crash was likely regarded by most New Zealand Pentecostals as yet another sign of the corruption and hedonistic decline of human history, and therefore as additional confirmation that they were indeed living in the end times. However, for Stevenson, it seems to have provided the beginnings of a sense that the apocalyptic forces at play in the world were not restricted to the religious framework with which he was familiar. By crashing immediately prior to his inaugural commercial exhibition, the economy revealed itself as a force to be reckoned with, and as a system in which Stevenson was already embedded, whether he liked it or not. Cultural isolation of the sort practiced by exclusive religious communities was, it seemed, simply not possible. In a note to Christina Barton from April 1989, he wrote: "I stupidly thought I could potter away down here [in Palmerston North], painting away, and avoid the whole career thing. Now I'm trying to work it all out."[168]

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[168] EMRL, Michael Stevenson Artist's File, Michael Stevenson, note on exhibition invitation, *One Small Town,* 1989, Southern Cross Gallery, Wellington.

Chapter two: After the end

"Fundamentalism is the conviction that mediations may be bypassed."[169]

The religious critique that was nascent in Stevenson's paintings of the late 1980s came to a head in his works of the 1990s. Against Pentecostalism's insistence that believers' contact with the Holy Spirit is unmediated and direct, Stevenson's 1980s paintings depicted the hymnals, Bibles, church halls and other props and paraphernalia of worship which perform the mediation that Pentecostalism both depends on and denies. Stevenson's works of the 1990s were made during the difficult process of his departure from faith. They confront the possibility entertained by postmodernism at its most nihilistic: that there is *nothing but* mediation, that all knowledge and experience is socially constructed and therefore endlessly relative and ultimately meaningless.

In 1990, Stevenson made a magazine-page artwork which was published in the final issue of the short-lived Auckland literary journal *Antic*.[170] The work is an anomaly in his practice from this time, which was otherwise dedicated to painting. Titled *Moon Fever Hits Inglewood*, Stevenson's modest double-page spread anticipated ideas that would became central to his practice in subsequent years (fig. 26). Working through the religious critique that formed an unacknowledged contradiction at the core of his painting practice, *Moon Fever* also departed from this practice in its reference to actual historical events and its use of archival material. Foreshadowing central themes and strategies of Stevenson's subsequent works, *Moon Fever* is situated in ambiguous relation to events of the historical past.

Two images and a text caption occupied a double-page spread in the magazine. On the left was a photograph of a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, open to a page showing the titular article from a 1969 issue of the *Taranaki Herald*. The article detailed local responses to the landing of United States astronauts on the moon,

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[169] Latour, 2005a, p. 41.
[170] Stevenson, 1990.

mostly from students of Inglewood High School, Stevenson's *alma mater*. The scrapbook pages to which the clippings were glued were not blank paper: the book was a re-purposed, and upside down, mathematics textbook. Inverted fragments of algebraic equations seeped out around the margins of the newspaper clippings. The right-hand page of Stevenson's work was a photographic still life of objects in a boy's bedroom, complete with cowboy print curtain, model space rocket, issues of *Popular Mechanic*, and a figurine of an astronaut standing under a US flag. The caption to this still life image, printed underneath, was quoted from the Inglewood High School class magazine of 1969: "With that I shut my comic and tried to sleep, but the story was firmly embedded in my memory. I would never know whether this imaginary tale would actually become fact."

Moon Fever was a dense tissue of contradictory or dubious temporal coordinates. It pointed to an insurmountable distance between an event and its subsequent reception. This distance between the certainty of first-hand experience and the uncertainty of mediated information—a melancholy, frustrating distance, which is both temporal and epistemological—appeared in all of Stevenson's work from this decade. Drawing on the apparently evidential nature of both newsprint and photography, *Moon Fever* seemed to offer a factual account of a well-known event. However, text and image conspired to dismantle any sense of straightforward documentation. Fact and fantasy were given equal status, dates and times became slippery and malleable, and nobody seemed to be sure precisely what had happened. The caption underneath the photograph, for example, suggested that the moon landing defied credibility, seeming more like a comic book narrative than factual news. The United States' conquest of the final frontier, their space race triumph which registered as a symbolic Cold War victory, was received sceptically by Inglewood residents: "I won't believe it until I see it on TV," fifteen-year old Calvin Campbell told the *Taranaki Herald*'s reporter.

Campbell's scepticism was supported by the temporal disorientation of the news clipping's text. The article was littered with highly specific temporal coordinates, which nevertheless failed to adequately locate the moon landing in time. In 1969, New Zealand did not possess a television satellite receiver. The moon landing, therefore, was broadcast live on radio and a recording was flown across from Sydney for a delayed television broadcast. This temporal delay was further complicated in

Moon Fever by the fact that the article's publication date did not appear on the scrapbook clipping. The historic date of the moon landing is well known: 20 July 1969. According to New Zealand time, however, it occurred on 21 July. Confusing matters further is the fact that the only date to appear in the news scrapbook related to another article pasted on the same page, which was published on 26 July. Within the text of the article, both reporter and interviewees continually attempted to locate the moon landing in time. We are told, for example, that Inglewood's residents received a "second by second" account of the landing, and that it revealed "how much progress had been made in the last ten years." The Mayor was impressed by "how everything was timed so accurately." The reporter's careful inclusion of the age of many of the interview subjects provided an additional level of meaningless temporal specificity. The reporter's bland conclusion—"this event has happened"—also, of course, contradicts the claims of conspiracy theorists the world over, who declare precisely the opposite.

The eccentric framing of the news clipping on an upside down maths textbook-turned-scrapbook added an additional layer of confusion. What is the significance of the maths textbook? Who pasted the clipping into it, and why? When was the scrapbook made? Was it also produced in 1969, or can we suppose yet another temporal lag occurred between the original publication of the article in the *Taranaki Herald*, its re-presentation in the scrapbook, and Stevenson's third-generation re-presentation of it in 1990?[171] A similar sense of temporal uncertainty was introduced by the photographic still life on the facing page of Stevenson's work. The objects in this photograph are strongly evocative of a particular period. The clock, the brush and comb set and the cowboy print curtain are all stylistically redolent of the late 1960s. At the centre of the composition is a certificate attesting to the fact that Calvin Campbell—the sceptical Inglewood High School student quoted in the news clipping opposite—completed a trail riding course at the 3rd Asia-Pacific Scout Jamboree in Oamaru. However, despite the ribbon paper-clipped to this certificate which proclaims it to be "Official," Campbell's name is on a sticker that has been

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[171] The scrapbook is part of the Butler Collection at New Plymouth Public Library. According to Stevenson, the collection belonged to a local eccentric who subscribed to every Taranaki newspaper, cut out almost all the articles and rearranged them into scrapbooks according to subject matter. He bought old books by the kilo and glued the clippings into them. There are apparently several books just containing the newspaper weather report. Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 10 December 2013.

fraudulently affixed to the face of the document. The photograph was clearly staged using period objects. Rather than an authentic expression of the late 1960s *zeitgeist*, it was a retrospectively choreographed artifice. *Moon Fever* nostalgically revisited the fantasies of a young boy coming of age in a time of heroic space exploration, but it did so in a way that continually undermined not only its own credibility, but the credibility of reportage as such. Born in 1964, Stevenson was only five years old at the time of the moon landing. *Moon Fever*'s attention to this moment in the late 1960s was therefore an articulation of cultural, rather than personal, nostalgia. It described, above all, the insurmountable distance separating us from a historical moment which Stevenson himself was born too late to properly experience, and a profound scepticism regarding the veracity of this moment's documentation.

This chapter traces the distances that are built into Stevenson's works of the 1990s, which are temporal and epistemological at least as much as they are geographic. In the absence of the knowledge afforded by first-hand experience, and in the absence of a trustworthy authority, Stevenson's works of this period were plagued by uncertainty. The corrupting mediation between an event and its reception, between cause and effect, was always of central concern. Focusing on canonical US art of the late 1960s and 1970s—the same Cold War period addressed in *Moon Fever*—Stevenson adopted the stance of a conspiracy theorist to retroactively impose an alternative order onto this canonised art history. In the aftermath of the collapse of modernity's narratives of heroic historical progress, and after the shattering of the Cold War's antagonistic binary, authority was suspected of having ulterior motives. Stevenson's work of the 1990s is a highly ambivalent, self-satirising attempt to re-impose meaningful historical structure on a seemingly anomic world.

In the following analysis, I depart from the established interpretation of these 1990s works as articulations of a problematic provincialism.[172] I also show that Stevenson's Oedipal aggression towards a canonised older generation of US artists differs from the classic avant-garde gesture of clearing away the past in order to make room for something new. His conspiracy-theorist persona was neither an articulation of fragmented postmodern subjectivity, nor an ironic parody of modernism's political

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[172] Smith, 1974. This was David Craig's interpretation. See Craig, 1994a; 1994b; 1997b and 2003.

transgressiveness.[173] On the contrary, as Chris McAuliffe has observed, Stevenson's 1990s work adopted a perspective that has affinities with faith-based systems of meaning that are "premodernist, even superstitious."[174] Recognising that Stevenson's conspiracy-theorist persona allowed him to propose that there is some ultimate order to the world, McAuliffe rightly observed that Stevenson's work sketched a worldview with strong affinities to a premodern religious perspective. However, while McAuliffe claimed that the conspiracy theorist's worldview is characterised by linear causation and powerful agency, I see the opposite: opaque causal connections and a conspiracist subject at the mercy of covert forces that he has no power to control, but can only helplessly witness. Stevenson's works of the 1990s wove together a ludicrous miscellany of references from the 1960s and 1970s with events current at the time. In these works, the 1960s counterculture, bikie gangs, 1990s multiculturalism, minimalism, Henry Kissinger, the formation of the European Union and the introduction of the Euro as an international currency, formalist abstract painting, Marlboro cigarettes, Jeff Koons, the Ku Klux Klan, NASA and Fleetwood Mac were all presented as enigmatic manifestations of a single, covert and all-encompassing plot. This performance was clearly intended to be comical. Stevenson's conspiracist persona drew attention, primarily, to the distance between the conspiracy theorist's perception of a web of covert causal connections and a chaotic, fragmented world where such convictions were more likely to be nostalgically remembered than actually felt.

This period of Stevenson's career was prolific. In what follows, I focus on the drawings for which he was best known, limiting my attention to four discrete series which each specifically addressed a canonical US artist. However, it is important to note that Stevenson was simultaneously making several other bodies of work. These included a voluminous library of VHS cassette cases, which was sometimes exhibited under the collective title *Watch-Dogging Art* (fig. 27). Individual cases bore titles such as *Sex, Lies and Minimalism*, 1996, *What Your Children Should Know About Conceptualism*, 1996, *Contemporary NZ Painters N–Z: The Cover-Up*, c.1996, and the box set *Decline of Western Civilization Part Three: The Minimalist Years* and

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[173] As, for example, Rex Butler suggested. Butler, 2002.
[174] McAuliffe, 1996, p. 24.

Part Four: The Conceptualist Years, 1996.[175] During the late 1990s and early 2000s Stevenson was also an active member of the art/music collective Slave Pianos, with artist Danius Kesminas and musicologists Neil Kelly and Rohan Drape. Slave Pianos riffed off Peter Tyndall's "Slave Guitars" concept and explicitly responded to John Nixon's *Anti-Music* project of the early 1980s. They produced a sprawling archive of material—drawings, sound recordings, sheet music—and live performances of sound art works by visual artists. These sound pieces were transcribed into sheet music which was then played by a mechanical player piano in an absurdly conservative mistranslation of the original work, which had often been improvised.[176] Slave Pianos targeted Nixon's avant-garde pretensions, responding in particular to the low-fi tape recordings of "artist's music" which he and his collaborators had produced under the collective title *Anti-Music*. As Francis Plagne has noted, these tapes were "masters only," that is, "they were unique objects, produced in editions of one."[177] Situating themselves as the slaves to Nixon's master, Slave Pianos' mechanised reproductions mocked the authority of the intuitive and spontaneous original. The strategies of purposeful mistranslation and destructive over-investment which characterised the work of Slave Pianos during this period were also at play in the drawings that are my focus.

I regard Stevenson's work of the 1990s as an articulation of epistemic doubt which can be framed in terms of iconoclastic scepticism. This was a stance characteristic of the post-Cold War environment in which Stevenson was working, and it also clearly relates to his personal religious apostasy. The long history of Judeo-Christian iconoclasm derives from a core uncertainty about the reliability of the icons and agents that mediate between the faithful and their God. The corrupting mediations and suspicious doubles which populate Stevenson's works of the 1990s trigger scepticism

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[175] A large collection of these VHS cases were displayed as a kind of art conspiracist's video lending library in Stevenson's solo exhibition *Video A.R.T.*, 1995, at legendary Auckland artist-run gallery Teststrip. See Malone, 1996 for a comical "movie review" of some of Stevenson's VHS titles. *Contemporary NZ Painters N–Z: The Cover-Up*, c.1996, is a New Zealand art in-joke: it refers to an incomplete publication project of the early 1980s. Alister Taylor published the first volume (*Contemporary New Zealand Painters A–M*) of a two-volume set before running out of money—the second volume never eventuated.

[176] Slave Pianos reproduced works by artists such as Jean Tinguely, Louise Bourgeois, George Brecht and Allan Kaprow, as well as Australian and New Zealand artists like Nixon, Tyndall, l budd, Ronnie van Hout, Dominico de Clario and Marco Fusinato.

[177] Plagne, 2011, p. 22. Plagne quotes from Nixon's *Anti-Music* newsletter *Pneumatic Drill* 33: "all tapes are masters only."

akin to the religious iconoclasm of, for example, the aggressive repudiation of the icons and edifices of institutionalised religion in the Pentecostal faith of the artist's early life. Stevenson's religious paintings of the 1980s had focused on the tangible mediators of faith in a strangely iconophile response to Pentecostalism's no-frills iconoclasm. His works of the 1990s swung wildly between the extremes of iconoclasm and iconophilia: attacking the recently canonised icons of US art history with both devastating sarcasm and with a passionate over-investment in their cultural and political power.

For students of Stevenson's generation, minimalism, earth art and conceptual art provided the climactic conclusion to the grand narrative of Euro-American art history taught in undergraduate classes across the Western world. Stevenson's work of the 1990s subversively reappraised this US canon with a scepticism paralleling that of his attention to the moon landing, that other symbol of US geopolitical dominance during the Cold War. He showed that what had been a radical refusal of conventional form in works by Michael Heizer, Joseph Kosuth and Donald Judd had itself ossified, by the 1990s, into a new set of formal conventions: one that, like Pentecostalism's, was a purposefully impoverished but nevertheless recognisable aesthetic language. The formal conventions that facilitate and shape religious worship, like those that facilitate and shape the experience of artworks, effectively pre-determine the experiences of the faithful. In the final part of this chapter, I demonstrate how Stevenson drew on Robert Smithson's concept of the non-site for his 1998 trilogy of drawings *Conventional Aircraft Activity, Double Nonsite Nevada/Nevada* and *Counting Antelope*. Stevenson's analysis, in these works, of the discursive pre-construction of the experience of an artwork connects to the iconoclastic scepticism and epistemic doubt that stemmed from his religious critique of the 1980s.

Michael Heizer / Marlboro Man: brand loyalty

In the years after he produced *Moon Fever,* a new way of working crept into Stevenson's practice. Through the late 1980s he had customarily used an easel to work on his oil paintings, while to make his acrylic-wash line drawings—which would drip if they were produced on a vertical surface—he crouched on the floor of his Palmerston North studio. The paintings were made by day; the drawings by night.

At some point in 1993, Stevenson started working on a new kind of drawing. He made several charcoal copies of the black and white photodocumentation of canonical 1960s and 1970s earth works by Michael Heizer. While these new drawings were entirely unlike his faux-naive acrylic-wash line drawings—they were carefully rendered in a dry medium, and aimed to accurately reproduce their photographic sources—Stevenson continued his habitual practice of drawing on the studio floor. The two practices which characterised his work of the 1980s and of the 1990s thus coexisted for a time, although they occupied different spaces in the studio and different times of day. By day, Stevenson would paint at the easel, and by night he would crouch on the floor and make charcoal copies of photographs lifted from back issues of *Artforum*.[178] It didn't take too long, however, before Stevenson turned his attention entirely away from the easel: his last paintings were produced in 1994, the same year that he moved from Palmerston North to Melbourne.

In 1993, artist Jeff Gibson described the Sydney and Melbourne art scenes as a "post-faith" environment.[179] In his recent effort to periodise postmodernism, literary theorist Brian McHale agreed, describing the 1990s as an uncertain interregnum following the deconstructive enthusiasm of "peak phase" postmodernity.[180] During this volatile decade, bookended by the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Twin Towers, McHale observed that "the dualistic or manichean world-view of the Cold War era was temporarily suspended, replaced by a vision of multi-polarity, or even *a*-polarity, that was at once baffling, risky, and rich with possibilities."[181] In the Western world, following the collapse of Soviet communism, the Cold War's antagonistic binary shattered into unstable multiplicity. What had seemed self-evident to many in the West during preceding decades—the heroism of the pioneering avant-garde and the righteousness of US-led liberal democratic capitalism—dissolved into a form of cynical black comedy which now seems a distinctive attribute of the decade.

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[178] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.

[179] Gibson, 1995, p. 45.

[180] While McHale acknowledges that the developments of postmodernism proceeded unevenly across disparate geographies and cultural domains, he nevertheless proposes a loose four-part periodising scheme marked by "more or less transparently *fabricated* boundar[ies]." His scheme identifies postmodernism's onset phase beginning in the mid-1960s, a peak phase in 1973–89, an interregnum phase roughly coinciding with the 1990s, and a conclusion "on or about" September 2001. McHale, 2015, p. 5, 7 and pp. 174–5.

[181] McHale, 2015, p. 125, emphasis in original.

Beginning with *Moon Fever*, Stevenson's 1990s works are steeped in this broadly "post-faith" cultural climate. With *Moon Fever*, he observed the mediatised delays that had rendered New Zealand's coverage of the moon landing problematic. At around the same time, journalists reporting on the Gulf War were beginning to notice a "credibility gap" in the US Defense Department's handling of information about the conflict.[182] After the anti-war backlash stimulated by media images of the Vietnam War, press coverage of George Bush Snr.'s "Desert Storm" was carefully choreographed. Journalists complained that their view of the Gulf War was stage-managed by the military. In *Moon Fever*, Stevenson retroactively subjected the United States' earlier, symbolic Cold War victory to scepticism mirroring that of journalists reporting on their current military activities. His retroactive scepticism about the reliability of representations of the moon landing paralleled a broader scepticism regarding both the political and cultural hegemony of the United States and the reliability of the mass media. Such scepticism was memorably manifested, for example, in the 1997 film *Wag the Dog*, and also in McKenzie Wark's 1990 announcement of a dawning antipodean disillusionment: "America, heroic, masterful America is dead. . . . Only we have not quite woken up to the fact that America is dead. Our cultural life revolves around a void we do not quite know is there."[183]

A number of New Zealand and Australian artists who were born, as was Stevenson, in the 1960s, gleefully satirised canonical US art during the 1990s.[184] Kathy Temin produced silver lamé soft-toy versions of David Smith's 1961–65 *Cubi* series and fake-fur Frank Stellas, Mikala Dwyer painted miniature colour-field abstracts with nail polish,[185] Julian Dashper reinvented Jasper Johns's "target" paintings as drum skins, and Ronnie van Hout made needlepoint versions of band posters ("Bass wanted to complete four-piece, must have own gear") on stretched canvas. These works deflated the heroic aspirations regularly attributed to their artistic predecessors by comically confusing them with handicraft, the personal apotheosis promised by women's cosmetics advertising, or adolescent guitar-hero dreams. Stevenson's fascination with the work of Michael Heizer in the early 1990s rendered Heizer

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[182] Apple, 1991. See also MacArthur, 2004.

[183] Wark, 1990, p. 21.

[184] This was also a wider trend. See for example Meyer, 1998.

[185] On Temin see McKenzie, 1993 and Gellatly, 2009; on Dwyer see McKenzie, 1993 and *No, Not Ever,* 1994; on Dashper see Dashper, 2010, Kirby, 2006 and *The Twist*, 1999; on van Hout see Leonard, 1997 and Neate, 1994.

similarly ludicrous by noting the parallels between his tough-guy image and the Marlboro Man.[186] As he recalled in 2003, "I wanted to generate subversive unacceptable readings of works that had been ring-fenced intellectually."[187] Stevenson's drawings of Heizer's site-specific and formally radical earth works converted the originals into two-dimensional images made using traditional artistic techniques. As in postmodern painting's response to the dominance of conceptual art during the late 1970s, Stevenson's subversive reappraisal of Heizer's works took an oddly conservative form. In these drawings, Heizer's desert earth works also became landscapes in Marlboro advertisements, backdrops to an omnipresent floating "white peak" logo.

When they were exhibited in 1994, these works were accompanied by two catalogue essays by Stevenson's close friend, the New Zealand sociologist David Craig.[188] Craig was then working on his PhD thesis on the use of Western medicines in Vietnam, and he approached Stevenson's work with a conceptual toolkit derived from his research into postcolonialism and international cultural influence.[189] For Craig, Stevenson's attention to US art of the 1960s and 1970s was ultimately about New Zealand. He interpreted the drawings as an exposé of New Zealand regionalism's previously unacknowledged American unconscious: while "the work is apparently about the western desert of the US, and a sort of macho posturing therein," it "can be read as a reminder of our own complicity in international projects and practices, including the global marketing of cigarettes, and local reception of the tropes and trash of 1970s US culture."[190] For Craig, Stevenson's drawings articulated the political confusion and cultural misunderstandings of "a generational identity formed in the political and economic flux of the 1970s."[191] At the core of New Zealand's

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[186] In a 1994 interview with Stevenson, Robert Leonard quotes from the artist's stock of Heizer research: "For all his genuine sophistication and acute sensitivity, Michael Heizer affects the parlance and mein of the tight-lipped, diffident man of the plains—the brooding good-looking cowboy of Marlboro Country. Indeed the thirty-three-year-old artist, best known for his visionary desert structures . . . seems entirely constrained and uncomfortable within the urban setting of an elegant East Side Gallery, even when that gallery—Xavier Fourcade, Inc.—happens to be where he exhibits . . . [He] is happiest when recklessly driving a big-wheel open truck across the Nevada desert, racing toward his *Complex I* which rises like an ancient and atavistic pyramid on a high plateau in the vast and endless desert space." Leonard, 1994, p. 39 n. 1.
[187] Michael Stevenson quoted in Leonard, 2003a, p. 58.
[188] Craig, 1994a and 1994b.
[189] See Craig, 1997a; later published as Craig, 2002.
[190] Craig, 1994a.
[191] Craig, 1994b.

cultural identity, according to Craig, Stevenson had discovered a whole host of imported ideas, mangled almost beyond recognition. These imports had been smuggled into New Zealand's self-conception as a result of the systemic international provincialism enforced by the cultural, economic and political hegemony of the United States.[192]

Drawing on Homi Bhabha's theory of colonial mimicry, Craig positioned Stevenson's work as a form of resistance to the geopolitical dominance of US culture, and New Zealand's imprisoning provincialism. He described the drawings and paintings Stevenson exhibited in 1994 as:

> a disturbing body of work dead set on surviving its own enforced provinciality, while teasing out and showing up what it can in the way of complicity and contradiction in culture and identity, down here at the post-neo-whatever-colonial nether end of Western civilisation.[193]

Over the next few years Stevenson carved out a reputation in Australia with his often hilarious performance as a cranky provincial conspiracy theorist, grotesquely aping the canonised art of the centre while also denouncing it as a manifestation of a systematic global abuse of power.[194] Craig's geopolitical interpretation of Stevenson's work has proved remarkably tenacious, in part because of the willing collusion of the artist himself, and in part because of its connections to local cultural mythologies. Extending the dominant interpretation of Stevenson's paintings of the 1980s, Craig read his works of the 1990s as a cynical response to New Zealand regionalism. He also positioned Stevenson's work as a witty contemporary articulation of the "tyranny of distance" mythology which was formative of both Australian and New Zealand national identity. Craig's response also embedded Stevenson's practice in the conversations about postcolonial identity which dominated Western art discourse of the 1990s. Understood in these terms, Stevenson's conflation of Michael Heizer and the Marlboro Man became a savage, performative exposé of the confused antipodean

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[192] While he does not reference it directly, Craig's argument here has strong affinities with Terry Smith's much earlier article "The Provincialism Problem." He made an explicit connection to Smith's work in a later piece, see Smith, 1974 and Craig, 2003.
[193] Craig, 1994a.
[194] See for example Chapman, 1995.

absorption of US high art and commercial culture during the accelerated globalisation of the 1970s.

My interpretation of these works is different. Craig's reading of Stevenson's work of the 1990s, which coloured the reception of Stevenson's practice for some years subsequently, needs to be suborned within a broader problematic. Stevenson's body of work from the 1990s is concerned with distance, but not only the gaps in cultural comprehension and geographic distances that Craig identifies. The temporal distance separating Stevenson from his source material, which Craig read as a tongue-in-cheek performance of provincial belatedness is, as Charles Green noticed in 1995, often "mournful, tragic, and distant" rather than primarily satirical.[195] Stevenson's work of the 1990s insistently returns to the particular historical moment of the late 1960s and 1970s, and to a particular kind of art that was made at that time in the US. It articulates a temporal distance, and also an epistemological distance that is more than simple cultural misrecognition. The works are concerned about the covert exercise of power, but their focus isn't exclusively (or even primarily) on contemporary geopolitics and US hegemony. I would map them much more firmly onto a Christian metaphysics of representation that is intensely concerned with the reliability or otherwise of divine images. Stevenson's portrayal of Michael Heizer as a version of the Marlboro Man is the first in a long series of suspicious doubles and confusing substitutions that populate his work of this period. The distance in Stevenson's work of the 1990s is that between certainty and suspicion, between the belief that the world is as it appears and a creeping paranoiac awareness of alter-egos, ulterior motives, and clandestine operations. The Marlboro Man, after all, is an actor—or, to be precise, he was a series of actors, four of whom have died of smoking-related illnesses.[196] Marlboro advertising co-opted powerful cultural myths in order to generate brand loyalty to a fatal product. Observing Big Tobacco's sinister manipulation of the United States frontiersman image, Stevenson perceived a similarly diabolical duplicity at play in the art world.

Stevenson's drawings of Heizer's works brand them with the white peak of the Marlboro logo, displacing onto Heizer the branding from which Richard Prince's

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[195] Green, 1995, p. 109.
[196] Pearce, 2014.

Cowboys were liberated. In *Double Negative (Under Construction) Part 6*, 1994, a waterfall of earth cascades down the side of the desert mesa, sending up dust clouds into an otherwise serene landscape (fig. 28). As Stevenson's title makes clear, the blasting is underway for Heizer's monumental *Double Negative,* 1969. Stevenson's drawing, done with charcoal and (in a nod to commercialised US patriotism) Budweiser on paper, contains none of the grit and diesel fumes of its subject matter. The soft charcoal renders the image slightly out of focus, and the tone of the work is distant and strangely quiet. It is the product of several generations of image reproduction. Heizer's heroic efforts (which in this image resemble Robert Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown* of the same year) have been documented on camera, published as a black and white photograph in a book or magazine, borrowed from the library (or, more likely, photocopied in the library) and then reproduced again by hand. As Lawrence Alloway asserted in 1976 and as many others have agreed, earth art is made to be experienced in person, not in the degraded form of image reproductions.[197] However, when Stevenson visited *Double Negative* in person—at least, according to his *Double Negative (Fleetwood Mac Version)*, 1994—he found Fleetwood Mac's name carved into the soft rock of the work's northeast cut (fig. 29). A renegade fan of both kinds of 1970s soft rock had been there before him, revealing in their graffiti the sheer datedness of the whole enterprise. The distance, it seems, was insurmountable. The Marlboro logos floating in front of these desert landscapes are the only part of the drawings that are crisply in focus. The white peaks, even without any accompanying text, are instantly recognisable. Reduced to abstract forms, the shape and proportions are enough to trigger recognition. They seem like a corporate stamp of approval, or some arcane cult symbol marking Heizer's activities.

While the connection that Stevenson formed between Heizer and Marlboro is technically more defamation than revelation, it is true, as Robert Rooney noted in a 1994 review, that Marlboro's parent company, Philip Morris, had a substantial record of art sponsorship. The company supported avant-garde exhibitions like Harald Szeemann's 1969 *When Attitudes Become Form,* which included several works by Heizer.[198] While *Double Negative* was not funded by Philip Morris, it was commissioned with private money. The profits of John C. Dwan's Minnesota Mining

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[197] Alloway, 1976.
[198] Rooney, 1994.

and Manufacturing Company (now 3M) were redirected through the New York gallery of his daughter Virginia Dwan to finance Heizer's vision, and formed a significant source of financial support for several other artists who had rejected commercially viable modes of art practice in the late 1960s.[199] As a gallerist and philanthropist Dwan supported artists like Carl Andre and Robert Smithson to produce ambitious works—she provided part funding, for example, for Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, 1970—and she later became a major donor of artworks to museums across the United States. *Double Negative* was gifted by Dwan to the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art in 1985, making the work the first permanently sited earth artwork to be held in a museum collection. The scale and ambition of Heizer's *Double Negative* was apparently a key inspiration for Heiner Friedrich, one of the Dia Foundation's three founding members, to establish that organisation.[200] Dia went on to provide extraordinarily generous financial support to artists like Walter de Maria and Donald Judd, both of whose work also regularly appears in Stevenson's drawings of the 1990s.[201]

The devoted philanthropic support of select artists by private individuals and foundations like Dwan and Dia did much to form, and institutionalise, United States minimalist and earth art. By the time Stevenson's drawings were made in the mid-1990s, works like Heizer's *Double Negative* were thoroughly canonised, and private sponsorship of the arts had become increasingly corporate. Philip Morris was an industry leader in this trend to use art philanthropy as a marketing tool.[202] By the mid-1990s, traditional philanthropy had been "almost completely replaced" by lifestyle marketing.[203] As Alfred Schreiber, a corporate consultant on event sponsorship,

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[199] In a 1984 interview Dwan acknowledged that her willingness to back non-commercial art was at least in part a result of her personal wealth: "As much as I don't like to think of it as a money issue, I have to acknowledge the fact that I had a private income myself which made it possible for me to take a more idealistic stand, or devote myself more to the artist than perhaps a lot of other dealers would do. I knew I was going to be able to keep the doors open." Virginia Dwan, quoted in Jessica Dawson, "Whatever Happened to Virginia Dwan?" *X-tra Contemporary Art Quarterly* 14, no. 2, Winter 2011, accessed 26 March 2015, http://x-traonline.org/article/whatever-happened-to-virginia-dwan/. See also *Los Angeles to New York*, 2016, the catalogue for *Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959–1971*, the 2016 exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, which celebrated Dwan's role as gallerist and patron and included highlights from Dwan's promised gift to the NGA of her personal collection.
[200] See Tomkins, 2003.
[201] Tomkins described the extent of Dia's financial support of artists in these years as "ecstatically impractical." Tomkins, 2003, p. 46.
[202] Apparently Philip Morris distributed free cigarettes at *Documenta*. Rectanus, 2002, p. 31.
[203] Rectanus, 2002, p. 28.

enthused in 1994: "Lifestyle marketing . . . goes beyond [giving money away]. It shares values. It's an overt demonstration and statement that a company not only gives cash but shares certain attitudes and beliefs with its consumers."[204] Such strategies were, of course, particularly attractive to tobacco companies seeking to improve their public image in a climate increasingly hostile to smoking. Cigarette smoking's slide from widespread public acceptability took place in the years that separated Heizer's generation from Stevenson's. In the US, this process began with a Surgeon General's report in 1964 and it finally finished off the Marlboro Man in 1998, when tobacco advertising was legally prohibited from depicting human beings. In 1987, tobacco companies collectively spent a total of $980,000 on arts sponsorship in Australia, the same year that there were public protests against Benson & Hedges's sponsorship of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.[205] Tobacco advertising was completely banned in both Australia and New Zealand in the early 1990s, shortly before Stevenson began producing his drawings emblazoned with Marlboro logos.[206] In fact, according to a guide to the new legislation published by the Australian Government, which specifically lists the Marlboro chevron as a prohibited trademark or design, Stevenson's drawings may constitute illegal tobacco promotion.[207]

Stevenson's Heizer drawings point to ways in which the production and canonisation of US art of the late 1960s and 1970s was facilitated by big business with sinister ulterior motives. The increasingly corporate nature of art funding between the 1960s and 1990s, which made large-scale non-commercial art projects such as Heizer's possible, coincided with tobacco companies' use of corporate sponsorship as a means to promote a socially unattractive product. However, Stevenson's works are more than a cynical exposé of late modern US art's corporate affiliations. The abstract but highly recognisable Marlboro logo uses a visual language of specialised convention,

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[204] Alfred Schreiber, quoted in Rectanus, 2002, p. 28.
[205] Galbally, Borthwick and Blackburn, 1997, p. 444.
[206] New Zealand's Smokefree Amendment Act 1990 restricted tobacco advertising to some point-of-sale advertisements and some sponsorship arrangements. The Australian Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992 prohibited almost all forms of tobacco advertising and sponsorship. Stevenson explored the prohibition of tobacco advertising for the first time in his series of *Badlands* paintings from 1992–93. He recalled in 1994, "It was during my time in the South [of the United States] that I became interested in smoking as a subject. . . . Smoking is a marginal thing now, at least here in New Zealand. But it was different in America. The Marlboro Man was everywhere. There'd even be cigarette drops where they'd send out free cigarettes in the mail. It was incredible." Michael Stevenson, quoted in Leonard, 1994, pp. 35–7.
[207] Information Solutions Group, 1996, p. 6.

not unlike the specialist knowledge of art *cognoscenti* who can easily distinguish Heizer's *Double Negative* from a non-art section of the Nevada desert. In both cases, the image refers to a kind of addiction, formed and perpetuated by the establishment of canonical brands which have the power to compel behaviour. The institutionalisation of earth art, as exemplified by Los Angeles MOCA's acquisition of *Double Negative* in 1985, occurred in parallel with the late-twentieth-century growth of art tourism. Large-scale events like biennials and art fairs, in addition to canonised and geographically remote site-specific artworks, increasingly lured viewers into long distance travel.[208] By pairing *Double Negative* with the tobacco industry, Stevenson made art tourists' pilgrimages into the desert to revere Heizer's work in person seem Lemming-like, the product of irresistible cultural suggestion rather than astute critical interest. The gradual institutionalisation and commercialisation of earth art, like the formalisation of Pentecostalism's anti-aesthetic stance into a recognisable aesthetic language, is a narrative about a radical, critical, outsider position becoming itself institutionalised.

Joseph Kosuth / Hal Lindsey: fundamentalism

Most of Stevenson's Heizer works were made in 1993 and 1994, around the time of his move from Palmerston North to Melbourne. This movement away from his home country literalised his movement away from the faith of his early years. The cultural "a-polarity" of the 1990s, and the general sense of baffling volatility which commentators like McHale have retrospectively recognised, coincided, for Stevenson, with a literally post-faith situation. While it was not recognised as such at the time, in retrospect Stevenson's solo exhibition at Darren Knight Gallery in Melbourne, *Some Latter-Day Art*, 1994, clearly scrutinised theological questions. However, perhaps because the work was framed as comedy, and perhaps because it was complicated by references to more familiar topics such as the counterculture of the late 1960s, its

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[208] See Dempsey, 2006 for an example of a global itinerary of officially sanctioned art experiences, which of course includes Heizer's *Double Negative*, as well as Walter de Maria's *The Lightning Field*, 1977, and Donald Judd's Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas. See Trainor, 2005, for a discussion of the rise of art tourism in relation to United States earth art.

religious subject matter remained largely unacknowledged and certainly underanalysed.[209]

Stevenson's conspiracy-theorist stance was a deeply ambivalent effort to reinstate something like religious certainty in a world that seemed to lack any such certainty. The "awful truth" seems to hover just out of reach behind each of his subversive allegations. However, while Stevenson's works from this period seem like a dossier of evidence detailing covert abuses of power, in fact they are far from coherent. Taken collectively, Stevenson's drawings describe a labyrinth populated by guerrilla warriors and double agents. It is impossible to gauge who is on which side, or whether the figures holding guns are freedom fighters or terrorists. It is a murky universe where people may be brainwashed and objects could be stand-ins for the real thing. While, as in *The X-Files*, the truth seems to be "out there," it is impossible to know who to trust, as players (including Stevenson himself) do not occupy fixed positions. This is why art historian Rex Butler's concerted effort in his 2002 *Secret History of Australian Art* to determine once and for all if Stevenson was being genuine or ironic was doomed to failure.[210] Butler grappled with Stevenson's conspiracy-theorist persona, attempting to decide if he was transgressively resisting conservative forces or if he was merely parodying such resistance and therefore complicit with the establishment. Stevenson's works from this period, however, are devoid of the conviction required for either position. They grasp at certainty, while also continually lampooning their own endeavour.

Stevenson's drawings *Pre-Millennial Tribulation, Russia is a Gog, Rev 13: 16–18, Restoration of the State of Israel, Kissinger, One World Currency–One World*

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[209] When I asked Chris McAuliffe about this aspect of Stevenson's 1990s works, he remembered that Stevenson didn't want to be portrayed as "a religious nut." Chris McAuliffe, conversation with the author, Melbourne, 24 October 2014. Charles Green, on the other hand, felt that neither he nor McAuliffe were equipped at the time with the background knowledge of Christianity necessary for such an analysis. Charles Green, conversation with the author, Melbourne, 19 January, 2015. While Green recognised in 1995 that Stevenson's drawings in *Some Latter-Day Art* were "mournful," he attributed this to the retrospective recognition of "the countercultural chic that led to Altamont" or in other words the violence that marked the demise of the US counterculture. During the late 1960s and 1970s, of course, Stevenson had been a member of a religious community which sought to distance itself from a mainstream society of which it was critical, as had the counterculture movement. The connections between the international growth of charismatic Christianity and the Western counterculture are deserving of more scholarly attention. Green, 1995, p. 109, and see also Eskridge, 2013.
[210] Butler, 2002.

Government, Mother of Harlots and *Armageddon*, all 1994, were all shown in *Some Latter-Day Art* at Darren Knight Gallery (figs. 30–35). In each of these works, the titular phrase was drawn as a glowing neon sign, which radiated white light onto darkened art gallery walls.[211] Stevenson's drawings copied the format of black and white photodocumentation of neon works by artists like Bruce Nauman and Joseph Kosuth. The signs spell out their doomsday predictions in the familiar typography of Kosuth's neon *Self-Described and Self-Defined*, 1965 (fig. 37). However, the words and phrases that Stevenson reproduced were lifted from the biblical Book of Revelations, and also from publications such as the Christian writer Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a populist guide to the imminent apocalypse which was the number one non-fiction bestseller of the 1970s.[212] While neon art from the 1960s and fundamentalist Christianity seems an odd pairing, Stevenson's combination points to their unexpected commonality: the insistence that traditional systems of representation can be bypassed. Stevenson's drawings of Heizer's *Double Negative* positioned it as a kind of logo, a canonical brand that masked sinister ulterior motives and wielded the power to compel behaviour. However, they also articulated a melancholy distance from the original. His drawings of apocalyptic neons are similarly split between cynicism and a kind of wistful nostalgia. On one hand, Stevenson mocked both Kosuth and Lindsey's fanaticism by posing as a convert who has seen the light. On the other hand, these drawings constituted mournful echoes of a moment of long-past and utterly outdated religious conviction in some ultimate truth, some ultimate plan for the world.

Stevenson is no longer religious. He is not a member of a church, and not only does he not profess any religious faith, it is clear that he finds remembering his early religious experiences both difficult and painful. However, a response to the religious

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[211] Two other series of Stevenson's drawings from this period depicted texts that were written in light. He produced a large number of drawings of slide projectors (again, riffing off the formal strategies of conceptual artists), such as those in the series *The Free Exchange of Ideas*, 1995–96 (Auckland: Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, C1997/1/17, C1997/1/18 and C1997/1/16). The second series consisted of charcoal and pastel drawings containing subversive messages written in ink that only became visible under the ultra-violet lights built into their frames, which would switch on periodically to reveal the texts. These works were exhibited in *Pre-Millennial: Signs of the Soon-Coming Storm*, 1997–99, a touring exhibition of works by Stevenson and Ronnie van Hout organised by Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney. See *Pre-Millennial*, 1997, pp. 20–29 for images.

[212] Lindsey, 1970. "When it came time, last December, to take a retrospective look at the book world during the 1970s, many a knowledgeable resident of Publisher's Row was surprised to discover that the decade's best selling work of nonfiction—accounting for nearly 7,500,000 copies—was *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey." Walters, 1980, p. 7.

beliefs of his early life remains central to his practice. His art is therefore ostensibly secular, but it centres on a deeply felt critique of certain religious beliefs. The writer Flannery O'Connor wrote of Hazel Motes, the protagonist of her Southern Gothic novel *Wise Blood*, that he was a Christian *malgré lui*. For O'Connor, Motes's integrity lay not in his desire to depart from faith but in his inability to do so. Motes could not "get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind," despite his best and most desperate efforts.[213] To the extent that Stevenson's art could be described as religious, it could only be in the critical sense exemplified by Motes and theorised in Thomas Crow's 2017 book *No Idols*. Borrowing from philosopher Mark Johnston, Crow defined a properly religious critical piety in opposition to conventional belief. Unlike the unquestioning acceptance of conventional belief, which only simulates faith, Crow argued that true religiosity can be recognised by the criticality that stems from the force of its convictions. As do Stevenson's drawings of the 1990s, Crow's analysis of contemporary religious art centres on questions concerning representation or mediation, and the phenomenon of religious iconoclasm.

The question of whether an image can be an adequate conduit for faith—whether an object made by human hands can mediate reliably between the faithful and their God—has occupied scholars of monotheistic religion for millennia. Early Christian apologists writing in the second century were, like their Jewish predecessors, deeply concerned to differentiate their religion from idolatrous pagan worship. The most extreme iconoclastic position is one of fanatical intolerance: the differentiation of a "true" religion from a "false" one. However as Moshe Barasch has described, these writers were also concerned with the questionable ontological status of a representation as such:

> What is crucial [in the writing of early Christian apologists], and what was transmitted to later generations, was the attempt to derive the rejection of sacred

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[213] O'Connor, 1962, author's note to the Second Edition. Stevenson is familiar with O'Connor's book. His acrylic wash drawing *If You Repent*, 1987, is based on a screen shot from John Huston's 1979 film adaptation. Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 11 November 2013.

images not only from the portrayed gods being alien, false gods, but also from the unbridgeable gap between God's nature and the character of the image.[214]

The problem articulated by early Jewish and Christian iconoclasts isn't simply that the pagans worshipped false idols. It is that any God able to be adequately represented in material form cannot possibly be the one supremely transcendental God, and therefore must be false. Physical representations of the divine used as a vehicle for worship are therefore either the product of human hubris or diabolical intervention. Either way, for iconoclasts, they are imposters that divert devotion away from its appropriate target, thereby assuring the idolater's damnation at the hands of a jealous God. As I discussed in chapter one, the broadly Pentecostal and fundamentalist faith of Stevenson's childhood religious community inherited this suspicion of representation. Fundmentalism is precisely "the conviction that mediations may be bypassed."[215] Pentecostalism's radically embodied mode of worship rejects any kind of intermediary. Pentecostals have no need of grand churches, beautiful icons or elaborate hierarchies of clergy because their relationship with the divine is direct.

Early iconophiles like John of Damascus (675–749) claimed, conversely, that there is a distinction between the iconic vehicle and the divine target of devotion and, moreover, that representations are an essential conduit for faith. John pointed to the biblical pronouncement that men were made in God's image, and he also reasserted the Pauline doctrine that Christ was the image of God. With these divine precedents, John claimed, God had shown that visible form was not antithetical to his true nature, and in fact the visible evidence of Christ's Incarnation constituted "the very proof of [God's] existence." He argued that while representations are qualitatively different from that which they represent, they provide a privileged point of access to something that cannot be otherwise known:

> While we might grasp God by the mind, we are led up to him by the splendid material object, the object that is the image of the prototype it represents . . .

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214 Barasch, 1992, p. 104.
215 Latour, 2005a, p. 41.

Certainly it was not the things themselves that the faithful worshiped; it was what they represented.[216]

Between those who accept, as John of Damascus did, that images are not only a valid but a crucial avenue for accessing the Christian divinity, and those who will acknowledge no material manifestation of a categorically transcendental God, there are a spectrum of positions concerning the validity of representation. In the late 1960s and 1970s, these debates from the deep history of Western art resurfaced in minimalist, earth and conceptual artists' explorations of the ontology of the art object. Crow uses the work of several artists active during this period—Robert Smithson, Mark Rothko, James Turrell, Corita Kent and New Zealander Colin McCahon—to argue for the existence of contemporary Western religious art that is both theologically and artistically ambitious. However, not all the artists who engaged with theological ideas during the 1960s and 1970s did so knowingly, or with such critical sophistication.

Minimalist artworks were intended, for the most part, to be understood as material facts without metaphysical implications. As the culmination and simple expression of their own material conditions of possibility, they claimed there was "no truth apart from one's immediate encounter with empirical reality."[217] As Robert Morris retrospectively recalled in 1989:

When I sliced into the plywood with my Skilsaw, I could hear, beneath the ear-damaging whine, a stark and refreshing 'no' reverberate off the four walls: no to transcendence and spiritual values, heroic scale, anguished decisions, historicizing narrative, valuable artifact, intelligent structure, interesting visual experience.[218]

This was a drastic departure from the Western art tradition that grew out of the iconophile position. Central to this tradition is the presumption that artworks somehow encode and materialise a metaphysical referent. As Hans Belting has

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[216] John of Damascus, quoted in Freedberg, 1989, p. 402.
[217] Meyer, 2005, p. 25.
[218] Robert Morris, quoted in Nagel, 2012, p. 93.

narrated, the icon's "claim to being immediate evidence of God's presence revealed to the eyes and senses" was retained on the level of metaphor in modern Western artworks.[219] Michael Fried outed himself as a modern-day iconophile when in 1967 he famously rejected minimalism's non-metaphysical materialism, declaring it to be not Art, merely an Object.[220] Fried's passionate defence of modernist abstraction against "the heretical threat of its evil twin" situated minimalist work as a diabolical imposter and a menace to the properly transcendental nature of the artwork understood as a contemporary icon.[221]

Conceptualism extended minimalism's exploration of the material conditions of the artwork's possibility into a further exploration of its non-material (discursive, institutional, political) contexts and conditions. Ironically, the rigorously material focus of minimalism contributed to a train of thought that led to what Lucy Lippard and John Chandler famously called the "dematerialisation" of art.[222] The anti-object tendency of some of conceptualism's more extreme practitioners resembled the religious iconoclast's refusal of representation and the material object. Lippard and Chandler's declaration rightly attracted a volley of condemnation. Art & Language scathingly observed, for example, that art's material presence was never successfully reduced to "thought forms and telepathy": an administrative aesthetic still requires material form.[223] As Stevenson's paintings of the 1980s also pointed out, even Pentecostal worship involves physical objects and architectural edifices, though—like much conceptual art—they are intentionally aesthetically impoverished and utilitarian.

The contortions of art practice in New York in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as artists and critics attempted to position themselves in relation to this seemingly new (but actually very old) set of problems regarding the efficacy and validity of the

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[219] Belting, 1994, p. 15. See also Lenain, 2011, particularly chapter 3, "Before the Age of the Obsession with Art Forgery," pp. 148–233.
[220] Fried, 1968.
[221] Van Schepen, 2009, p. 47.
[222] Lippard and Chandler, 1999.
[223] Art & Language, 2006, p. 114, n. 1. As early as 1973 Lippard felt the need to defend her position, writing: "since I first wrote on the subject in 1967, it has often been pointed out to me that dematerialization is an inaccurate term, that a piece of paper or a photograph is as much an object, or as 'material,' as a ton of lead. Granted. But for lack of a better term I have continued to refer to a process of dematerialization, or a deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)." Lippard, 1973, p. 5.

traditional art object, gave rise to some very extreme positions. In 1970, *New York Times* art critic Peter Schjeldahl described conceptual art as a "moral crusade" whose members, he felt, were struck by "the romance of purity." Reviewing that year's *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* at the New York Cultural Center, he observed a tendency among the exhibiting artists towards:

> a lofty contempt for traditional forms and for artists whose continued attachment to 'the object' they regard as inauthentic and possibly immoral. . . . If conceptual art is in some sense a moral crusade, its Savonarola is Joseph Kosuth, a young New York artist who has emerged as its most didactic practitioner and passionate theoretician.[224]

Comparing Kosuth to a particularly relentless, puritanical and ambitious fifteenth-century religious reformer, Schjeldahl acknowledged his unusual zealotry. Kosuth's pronouncements—both in his text-based work and in his published writing—are spoken with the sublime assurance of a religious prophet, and his often breathtakingly vitriolic comments about the work of his artistic peers and predecessors contain something of the crusader's moral imperative.[225] As Pamela Lee has observed, conceptual art's demotion of the art object in favour of the artist's conceptual proposition often functioned (despite artists' intentions) to reinstate a conventional model of authorship. Unlike dada and surrealism's exploration of chance, for example, or minimalist and pop artists' use of industrial processes, conceptual art tends to suggest "a privileging of the *subject that proposes*—that is, the insistently declared 'I' that conceives, and subsequently produces, the conceptual work."[226]

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[224] Schjeldahl, 1970. Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) was a Dominican monk and strict ascetic who came to prominence in Renaissance Florence with his passionate preaching denouncing immorality, vanity, and corruption within the Church, and for his apocalyptic prophecies. While Savonarola was the virtual ruler of Florence in 1494–5, his uncompromising attitude ultimately resulted in him being hung as a heretic. "Savonarola, Girolamo," in *A Dictionary of World History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, accessed 15 May 2017, http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/view/10.1093/acref/9780199685691.001.0001/acref-9780199685691-e-3254.

[225] For example: "The conceptual level of the work of Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Morris Louis, Ron Davis, Anthony Caro, John Hoyland, Dan Christensen *et al*. is so dismally low, that any that is there is supplied by the critics promoting it." Or: Michael Heizer "is a 'one idea' artist who hasn't contributed much. If you have thirty men digging holes and nothing develops out of that idea you haven't got much, have you? A very large ditch, maybe." Kosuth, 1991, p. 31, n. 11 and p. 32, n. 34.

[226] Lee, 1996, p. 19. In Kosuth's case, Lee's claim receives additional support by the artist's tendency to aggressively assert his artistic originality and authorial primacy. See for example the extended

Kosuth's self-identification as the prophet of a reformed art—an art purified of corrupting materiality and metaphysical signification—went beyond even this position of reinstated authorship and deep into the terrain of artistic visionary.

Kosuth was deeply influenced by Donald Judd's minimalist sculpture, which refuses metaphysical signification by stating its own materiality with an "it is what it is" implacability. He wanted to create artworks that were similarly—even tautologically—self-contained, that did not point beyond themselves, did not signify, evoke or express. As Benjamin Buchloh observed, for Kosuth "artistic propositions constitute themselves in the negation of all referentiality."[227] By creating works that attempted to deny art's historical context, social function (and, I would add, metaphysical referentiality), Kosuth aimed to achieve art's point of absolute zero: artworks that would simply and tautologically present themselves as artworks and no more. In 1969 he claimed: "I'm using language to go beyond language. One begins to realize that if one uses language, as a medium it becomes invisible . . . language is very neuter."[228] He had been making text pieces using neon tubes or photostats of dictionary definitions since the mid-1960s in an effort to get "beyond" the promiscuous and apparently uncontrollable referentiality of physical media. With works like *Self-Described and Self-Defined* and *Neon*, both 1965, the titular phrase is written as a wall-mounted neon sign (figs. 36–37). The closed circuit of signification in these works was intended to stymie any perception of expressive, allusive or transcendental content.

Kosuth's mid-1960s turn to language as a supposedly transparent medium paralleled, as Stevenson's pairing of his work with that of fundamentalist writer Hal Lindsey made clear, the tendency of Christian iconoclasts to fetishise the supposed purity of language. Since the Protestant Reformation, reformers and fundamentalists like Lindsey have stressed the authority and inerrancy of scripture.[229] As Belting noted,

discussion of his now-fraught relationship with the other members of Art & Language in King, 2010, pp. 591–93.

[227] Buchloh, 1990, p. 126.

[228] Joseph Kosuth, quoted in Siegelaub *et al.*, 1997, p. 131.

[229] Interestingly, given Kosuth's similar propensity, Stephen O'Leary writes: "The appeal to rationality is a standard feature of modern fundamentalist discourse, which, taking for granted the charismatic authority of scripture and revelation, applies itself to the task of its rational interpretation. It should be noted that the bestselling apocalyptic author of all time, Hal Lindsey, developed many of the themes of

their "fixation on the authentic word of God" was posed precisely against the mediations of the icon, and the Roman Church's institutionalisation of grace and privilege through its use of relics and icons.[230] As Alexander Nagel has related, Martin Luther used words to control the referential equivocations and auratic presence of the image. The images that Luther called *merkbilder*, or "sign-images," were didactic illustrations of a pure textual narrative:

> Through these message-carrying images, art approached the mediations of language. Protestant images regularly incorporated words, as if to insist that the work of art carried no immediate, magical effect of its own but was instead something that needed to be read, something that provided an occasion for reflective thought.[231]

Like Luther's *merkbilder*, Kosuth's neons were presented as something to be read, rather than interpreted or sensorially experienced. Stevenson's drawings, in contrast, emphasised both their own materiality and that of their subject matter. By carefully hand-rendering the soft glow of neon against white walls, and the electrical wiring which snaked with artful carelessness across the art gallery floors, reflected in the dull gloss of their tiles, Stevenson re-presented the neons as aesthetic objects. The drawings contradicted Kosuth's efforts, therefore, in terms of their form, but also in terms of their content, as Stevenson ventriloquised the older artist's work in order to make doomsday predictions.

The Late Great Planet Earth interpreted political events of the 1970s in terms of the apocalyptic prophecies of the Book of Revelations. The book's author Hal Lindsey claimed that interpretive labour was "not necessary" for this task, because current events matched biblical prophecy with such perfect clarity:

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his books on the evangelical lecture circuit, where his nickname was 'Mr Logic'." O'Leary, 2000, p. 348.
[230] Belting, 1994, p. 15.
[231] Nagel, 2012, p. 93.

All we need to do is know the Scriptures in their proper context and then watch with awe while men and countries, movements and nations, fulfill the roles that God's prophets said they would.[232]

Lindsey exhorted his readers to recognise the signs of the end-times, which he insisted were clearly visible to those willing to perceive them. Stevenson, with tongue firmly in cheek, played the part of a true believer. From the thunderous *Armageddon*, 1994, to the accusational *Kissinger is the False Prophet*, 1995, his drawings injected Kosuth's neons with the full gamut of Lindsey's political and religious subject matter (figs. 35 and 38). Radiant against the walls of darkened art galleries, the signs make their apocalyptic declarations with unwavering conviction. They are signs of the times that insist, with Lindsey, that the world is entering its prophecied state of final collapse, and the longed-for apocalyptic return of Christ is near. By importing this metaphysical baggage—so utterly antithetical to Kosuth's stated intentions—into the older artist's works, Stevenson's drawings made clear how the neon originals also exploited a deeply traditional association between light and religious revelation. Far from excluding the possibility of transcendental reference, Kosuth's oracular pronouncements, wrought in glowing neon, clearly articulate the moment of blinding revelation that is exemplary of religious faith.

Stevenson's critique of the fundamentalist effort to bypass mediation was scathing of Kosuth's theological naivety. It also complicates the politically-inflected opposition that Thomas Crow has established between a radical, critical and pious iconoclasm, and the conservatism of institutionalised belief. Stevenson's critique is directed precisely against the hypocrisy of Pentecostalism's iconoclasm, which is to say, believers' refusal to acknowledge the material objects that facilitate their transcendent worship. Twentieth-century Christian fundamentalism is both iconoclastic and deeply conservative. It has institutionalised radical critique, and it has formalised what was originally an opposition to iconophile practices into new rituals and a new aesthetic language. Stevenson's drawings of neons mock both Hal Lindsey's and Joseph Kosuth's certainty, and their attraction to the absolute and unconditional. However, the drawings also mourn the loss of such certainty. Melancholy echoes of a past

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[232] Lindsey, 1970, p. 77.

moment of conviction, Stevenson's drawings were made long after Lindsey's apocalyptic predictions had proved to be inaccurate.[233] Like distantly produced and tragically degraded copies of icons, utterly compromised by their own belatedness, they ambivalently repeated these proclamations which claimed to reveal an essential truth about art, and an ultimate plan for the world.

Donald Judd / Patricia Hearst: brainwashing

With a series of drawings of works by Donald Judd which he produced in 1995, the year following *Some Latter-Day Art*, Stevenson's subversive allegations about the work of canonised US artists of the 1960s and 1970s escalated in severity. His drawings of Kosuth neons showed that Kosuth's works reinstated the problematic iconic structure and metaphysical referentiality they claimed to bypass. His *The Donald Judd Incident* series raised the more serious charge that Judd's sculptures are not simply unreliable (or unwilling) facilitators of transcendental aesthetic or religious experience, but might actually be operating as agents for the other side. As in his earlier allegations that Michael Heizer was working in support of sinister corporate interests, *The Donald Judd Incident* drawings operate as a dossier of incriminating evidence linking Judd's work with subversive—or possibly even diabolical—forces.

The materialist focus of Judd's minimalism was intended to refuse metaphysical signification. With his relentless focus on the material facts of his "specific objects," he aimed to abolish *a priori* concepts and generalisations from the viewer's mind, focusing it on the here-and-now of empirical certainty. In Judd's works, pure material fact operated in opposition to what he considered a corrupt inheritance of ideological supposition. Early Christian writers set up a similar opposition, but with the inverse moral association. As Barasch notes, "In early Christian thought, 'matter' or 'material' has a pejorative ring."[234] For these thinkers, light was associated with revelatory divinity, and material was equivalent to darkness and the demonic. The unreliability of physical representations and the cunning dissimulations of the devil

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[233] Lindsey scheduled the apocalypse for some time in the 1980s. As Stevenson has observed with some pleasure, reprintings of Lindsey's book continued unabated long after the world manifestly failed to end as predicted. The date on the book's colophon page now operates in direct contradiction of its contents. Michael Stevenson, conversation with the author, Berlin, 11 November 2013.
[234] Barasch, 1992, p. 101.

were thereby linked. Both dangerously misappropriated signs of divine authority, and both had the potential to misdirect devotion away from its proper target and towards sinful idolatry. Art, in short, was suspected of being in bed with the devil. Stevenson has recalled that despite centuries of positive humanist press, art's negative associations were still in effect in the church of his youth: "Pentecostals don't know about art and they don't want to know about art. And that was the basis for my idea that art isn't a good thing, that it could be a force of evil."[235]

Judd's strict exclusion of external reference from his work was intended to eliminate all such traditions of association and signification. However, his rigorous materialism has not been able to prevent the subsequent perception or introduction of such content to his work. For example, in its institutional canonisation, Judd's empiricist sculpture has come to signify the kind of ideological authority that it allegedly opposes. Stevenson's *The Donald Judd Incident* drawings regard Judd's works, which so insistently point to their own material nature and which have received such widespread institutional veneration, with dark suspicion. They suggest that these sculptures are not what they seem. They have either been taken over by hostile forces, or perhaps—even worse—they had sinister affiliations from the start.

Stevenson's *Donald Judd Incident #3*, 1995, shows two gun-wielding figures stalking past a group of Judd's sculptures, which are arranged in a grid formation reminiscent of his permanent installation in the Artillery Sheds at Marfa (fig. 39). The scene is viewed from the acute high angle synonymous with images taken by a ceiling-mounted security camera, and the drawing has the hazy quality of such footage. Objects in the middle distance are apparently blanched by photographic overexposure and the background of the image dissolves into white invisibility, making it impossible to precisely identify its setting. The sculptures are installed in what is obviously a large, high-ceilinged room. A square column on the right of the composition, and the sculptures' reflections in the highly polished floor could equally position this scene in the complex at Marfa, or in many other large art galleries or corporate buildings. An upholstered bench in the style of Mies van der Rohe's

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[235] Michael Stevenson, quoted in McAuliffe, 1996, p. 25.

Barcelona Chair, ubiquitous in both art galleries and corporate foyers, shares the foreground with the two protagonists.

These figures might be recognisable to some viewers as Patricia Hearst and Donald DeFreeze, a.k.a. Cinque Mtume or "Cin," who in 1974 were captured on security camera while they and other members of the leftist terrorist group the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) performed an armed bank robbery in San Francisco. The robbery occurred after the SLA's high-profile kidnapping of Hearst, granddaughter of millionaire media mogul William Randolph Hearst, and her subsequent scandalous conversion to the group's revolutionary cause. The nineteen-year-old Hearst participated in several armed actions with the SLA before being arrested, tried, and eventually convicted for armed robbery and other crimes in 1976. The "heiress turned desperado" narrative of her kidnapping, conversion, trial and imprisonment dominated the US press during these years, stimulating widespread speculation about Hearst's guilt or innocence.[236] The Hearst-owned press argued ferociously, as did her legal defence during her criminal trial, that she was an innocent victim of coercion and brainwashing. Hearst became a poster girl for the dangers of the mind control techniques of the radical left, which commentators feared was targeting vulnerable and idealistic young people.

In Stevenson's drawing, Hearst and DeFreeze each hold a semi-automatic weapon tensely on a shoulder strap. DeFreeze's face is too out-of-focus to be legible, but Hearst's seems pale and anxious. Stevenson's source image for the two figures was one of the stills taken from the bank's security film which were released the day after the robbery, becoming "the most widely syndicated pictures of their kind ever taken."[237] The original security image does actually contain the upholstered bench reproduced in Stevenson's drawing, and two rectangular counters which are not, it has to be said, completely dissimilar to Judd's sculptural boxes.

An article by art historian Anna Chave which Stevenson read around this time also links minimalist sculpture and corporate furniture.[238] "Minimalism and the Rhetoric

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[236] Bryan, 1975, p. 271.
[237] Boulton, 1975, p. 156.
[238] Chave, 1990.

of Power" is a feminist re-reading of work by Judd and others. In this revisionist account, Chave undermined the claim that minimalism's formal purity rendered it impervious to expression or narrative association. Arguing for recognition of the sexual and political content of works that have been, in her opinion, too often misunderstood as "blank" or "neutral," she maintained that "[w]ith closer scrutiny . . . the blank face of minimalism may come into focus as the face of capital, the face of authority, the face of the father."[239] Chave's analysis discovered a plethora of expressions of sexual and political authoritarianism in the works of Judd, and other artists of the (overwhelmingly male) New York scene of the late 1960s. Moving beyond the identification of telling similarities between the formal qualities of minimalist art and other signifiers of corporate power and political authority, she also explicitly linked minimalism with political violence, contending that it "might well be described as perpetrating a kind of cultural terrorism, forcing viewers into the role of victim."[240] Chave's article is framed with an anecdote about two young female museum visitors kicking (and then insouciantly kissing) a Judd sculpture in an apparent refusal to submit to such victimisation, or to the sculpture's implicit endorsement of patriarchal authority.

Chave's aggressive re-interpretation of minimalist art certainly aligns with Stevenson's desire, in his work of the 1990s, to "generate subversive unacceptable readings of works that had been ring-fenced intellectually."[241] Her description of a literal assault on a Judd sculpture as a kind of symbolic self-defence no doubt also informed Stevenson's *Donald Judd Incident #1* and *#7*, both 1995, which both depict club-wielding figures attacking Judd sculptures in art galleries (figs. 40–41). The revisionist violence Chave performed on Judd's work is not, in fact, unlike the physical and psychological violence the SLA inflicted on Patricia Hearst when they took her as a hostage and media mouthpiece. Chave's allegation that Judd's work is an expression of patriarchal authority amounted to a hostile takeover: a guerrilla raid like those depicted in (and enacted by) Stevenson's drawings.

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[239] Chave, 1990, p. 51.
[240] Chave, 1990, p. 49.
[241] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Leonard, 2003a, p. 58.

Chave's claims about the latent authoritarianism of Judd's work were indignantly refuted by Judd scholar David Raskin, who argued that the sculptures are, if anything, a subtle call to arms: "In sharp contrast to Chave's widely shared opinions, Judd thought his works opposed incumbent forms of political and cultural power."[242] Raskin asserted that Judd attempted to provoke viewers into confronting and overturning existing epistemological categories so as to think independently: he "wanted his art to be broken off from history, always in a here and now in which the viewer's sense-data flushed her mind of cognitive presuppositions in the wake of material fact."[243] By refusing metaphysical signification, by focusing resolutely on the material facts of his sculptures, Judd was encouraging his viewers to challenge precisely the kind of prescriptive ideology that is perpetuated in organised religion. However, he did this by appealing to a mode of positivist empiricism that is similarly institutionalised and authoritative. As Chave also rightly recognised, minimalist sculpture has become emblematic of a particularly dominant, and male dominated, Euro-American art historical narrative. As she additionally recognised, minimalism's industrial chic and blank inexpressiveness is perfectly compatible with expensive corporate décor. As always, art's canonisation occurred in concert with the work's appreciation by those with power and authority. Despite Raskin's protest, by the 1990s at least, Judd's works were certainly not opposed to institutional power. Unlike Chave however, Stevenson seems unsure whether Judd's works are ultimately victor or victim of their institutional acceptance. In some of his drawings, the sculptures provide cover for cowering hostages evading gun-wielding terrorists, in others they themselves are the victims of violent attacks (fig. 42). Sometimes they seem to oversee or authorise violence, as in the vertiginous *Donald Judd Incident #6*, 1995, where a row of Judd's wall-mounted units stand as impassive witnesses to a scene of carnage in the National Gallery of Australia (fig. 43). Sometimes, as in *Donald Judd Incident #5*, 1995, they seem to menace bound and kneeling victims (fig. 44).

The Donald Judd Incident series generates a clear association between Judd's works and political violence. However, the drawings hesitate between portraying them as aggressor or victim. In Stevenson's works, history has stormed Judd's pristine, eternal "here-and-now" of empirical awakening. Disrespecting Judd's rigorous exclusion of

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[242] Raskin, 2001, p. 683.
[243] Raskin, 2001, p. 702.

anything resembling narrativity from his works, the hostages and armed guerrillas in Stevenson's drawings enact their human dramas around the sculptures. As the "incidents" depicted in Stevenson's series of drawings accumulate, like a dossier of criminal evidence, Judd's works are increasingly unable to remain aloof. They seem increasingly implicated in the fracas, and increasingly culpable. Like Patricia Hearst, Judd's works seem to have been caught on camera in incriminating circumstances. However, also like Hearst, Stevenson leaves open the possibility that the sculptures might have become the puppets of some other authority. Brainwashed into compliance, they might be helplessly acting against their own better judgement. This was made clear when Stevenson returned, three years later, to the subject matter of *The Donald Judd Incident #3* with the drawing *Two Guns Pointing at Me . . . Cin and Fahizah*, 1998 (fig. 45). This work depicts Hearst, in the same ambiguously located Judd exhibition, being targeted by the armed DeFreeze and another SLA member, Nancy Ling Perry (a.k.a. Fahizah). The drawing refers to a key piece of evidence presented by Hearst's defence during her trial. Hearst claimed that the bank's security footage showed that the SLA members kept their guns trained on her throughout the bank robbery, proving that she participated in the robbery unwillingly, and only under threat to her life.

Whereas Stevenson made unequivocal allegations of complicity and hypocrisy against Heizer and Kosuth respectively, a number of possibilities are held in tension in his *The Donald Judd Incident* series. Judd's work might represent, as Chave suggested, the blank inexpressive face of patriarchal authority and corporate power against which the leftist freedom fighters populating Stevenson's work desperately do battle. Alternatively, Judd's anarchic political aspirations for his sculptures might have been suppressed by the institutions who have canonised and thereby co-opted his unwilling work into their sinister programme of ideological control. Judd's inexpressive forms offer no comment either way, allowing themselves to be ventriloquised by both factions. However, a final, third, interpretation of these drawings also exists. The careful realism of Stevenson's drawings operates to persuade his viewers that the images can be trusted as documentary evidence of actual events. However, it is entirely possible that Stevenson himself might be fudging the evidence in order to fabricate a case against Judd. The traditional diabolical associations of the artist—as a manipulator of base matter, and as a person who traffics in dangerous deceptions—

might, in fact, be more readily applied to Stevenson himself. The true source of the malevolence Stevenson associates with Judd's works might in fact be his own hostile possession of these inert, vulnerable forms.

City / Area 51: Double Nonsite

In the final section of this chapter, I focus on a trilogy of drawings Stevenson produced in 1998, in which he returned once again to the work of Michael Heizer. In one of these drawings, Stevenson also made explicit reference to Robert Smithson's *Double Nonsite, California and Nevada,* 1968 (figs. 46–47). While Smithson appears only rarely in Stevenson's works of the 1990s, Stevenson's archived research material from this period is dominated by photocopied articles about his work.[244] Stevenson used works by Heizer, Kosuth and Judd primarily as subject matter—as canonised objects which he took delight in subversively reappraising. Stevenson's approach to Smithson is more characteristic of the veneration that so many contemporary artists accord him. Smithson's concept of the nonsite intersected productively with Stevenson's interest in doubles and stand-ins, and Stevenson used Smithson's *Double Nonsite* more as a model than as subject matter.

There are a number of telling similarities between Smithson's and Stevenson's bodies of work. As Jennifer Roberts has shown, Smithson, like Stevenson, was raised Christian, and produced an early body of explicitly religious work which suffered critical neglect in later years.[245] As Roberts elegantly demonstrated with regard to Smithson's practice, and as I assert of Stevenson's, religious ideas about the nature of time and history continued to inform the later, secular, work of both artists. Roberts argued that Smithson's concept of material entropy was in fact a reiteration of his earlier religious yearning for transcendental timelessness which "attempts to produce a kind of secondhand eternity from the materials of historicity itself."[246] From this perspective, the entropic "wan stillness of posthistory" towards which Smithson was oriented was a materialist equivalent to the postapocalyptic timeless eternity of God's

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[244] One of the few examples is Stevenson's *The Phantasmic Cameraman*, 1996. The drawing depicts an astronaut on the surface of the moon with Smithson's *First Mirror Displacement*, 1969, made in the Yucatán peninsula, in the background.

[245] Roberts, 2004, particularly her first chapter pp. 13–35 which analyses Smithson's little-known religious paintings and collages of the early 1960s.

[246] Roberts, 2004, p. 9.

Kingdom.[247] In his later work, Smithson attempted to recapture a sense of eschatological timelessness not by transcending history but by working through it in anticipation of a future moment when the confusion of the material and historical world would finally resolve into static homogeneity. He was interested in moments of entropic collapse that seemed to foreshadow the projected final thermodynamic equilibrium of the universe.

Both Smithson, in his nonsites, and Stevenson, in his drawings of the 1990s, were engaged in a critical examination of representation. Smithson's work repeatedly pointed to the mutual construction of the material world and our intellectual frameworks for comprehending it, showing how the two continually interpenetrate. Stevenson's drawings also peer into this epistemological void, entertaining the vertiginous possibility that the world can not, in the end, be distinguished at all from our distorted and partisan representations of it.

Stevenson's trilogy of drawings intentionally confuse two locations in the Nevada desert. Both contain large-scale installations that are publicly inaccessible and take advantage of Nevada's vast tracts of unpopulated land to remain surreptitious. *Conventional Aircraft Activity*, *Double Nonsite Nevada/Nevada* and *Counting Antelope*, all 1998, overlay Michael Heizer's monumental earthwork *City*, 1972–, and the United States military's infamous Area 51 (figs. 48–50). The two sites are about four hours drive apart. The shortest route between them includes a section of State Highway 375, a road which was officially renamed the Extraterrestrial Highway by the Nevada Tourism Commission in 1996 due to the number of claimed UFO sightings in the area.[248] Stevenson's earlier drawings of Heizer's *Double Negative* positioned the work as a kind of logo or brand image, by forming a connection between Heizer's public image and the Marlboro Man advertising campaign. As a critical comment on art's changing relationship to corporate sponsorship it suggested that viewers' pilgrimages to see *Double Negative* were scripted and touristic: the product of brand loyalty rather than critical insight. As his *Double Negative (Fleetwood Mac Version)*, 1994, showed, even Stevenson's own first-hand experience of Heizer's famous earthwork was contaminated by the associations already brought

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[247] Roberts, 2004, p. 9.
[248] Regenold, 2007.

to it by others. His return to Heizer's work in 1998 addressed a similar set of ideas. This trilogy of drawings examined a situation in which knowledge had become cultish and ritually prescribed, where maps and guidebooks predetermined what it was possible to see and know.

Heizer places considerable emphasis on his works' connection to their sites. He has described, for example, how he considers the desert a source of raw material. When he purchased the site for *City*, he was also buying "sands and gravels that could make concrete, and clay soils that could be used for soil cements, and running water. . . . If you bought an acre of land in that part of the world you were buying all the material you could use in a lifetime."[249] *City* is literally made from the land it occupies, giving it a feel of indigeneity which is further underscored by the work's primitivist reference to ancient American sculptural and architectural forms. Incidentally, Donald Judd's retreat from New York to Marfa in 1978 was in pursuit of a not dissimilar sense of groundedness. Seeking to escape the treadmill of temporary exhibitions in what he regarded as unsatisfactory gallery spaces, Judd wanted to create an exemplary permanent installation of his work which would be fully and coherently articulated in its architectural setting. Smithson's nonsites, in contrast, trouble such fantasies of emplacement. While Smithson conceived of his nonsites as abstract representations of particular sites, as he observed in 1969, "The nonsite itself tends to cancel out the site."[250] Like Smithson's nonsites, Stevenson's drawings point to a distant location; also like Smithson's nonsites, the drawings stage an effacement of the site they purport to represent. Stevenson's use of *Double Nonsite* amplified the critique of the original work into a series of drawings that describe the formation of absurd, ritualistic knowledge, and enact the excessive over-representation of a location that remains stubbornly imperceptible.

Michael Heizer's *City*, which is not yet open to the public but was declared "basically done" by the artist in 2015, is being built on privately owned land which Heizer purchased in the early 1970s with initial support from Virginia Dwan and ongoing

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[249] Michael Heizer, quoted in Brown, 1984, pp. 11–12.
[250] Robert Smithson, quoted in Wheeler, 1991, p. 113.

support from the Dia and Lannan Foundations.[251] A monumental installation of abstract architectonic forms on a twenty-eight-acre site, *City* is modelled on ancient American ceremonial plazas like the Great Ball Court at Chichen Itza in Yucatan, Mexico. *City* consists of several discrete "Complexes" built from earth compressed into geometric ramparts, angular concrete slabs and cantilevered horizontal concrete columns. The work's interplay of volume and void carefully choreographs a series of internal views, its epic proportions echoing, but dwarfed by the surrounding landscape of vast plains and mountain ranges. Heizer's thinking about the work has been explicitly eschatological from the outset, predicated on a dismal view of what he sees as the terminal state of human civilisation. Like the pre-Columbian structures it invokes, he expects *City* to be "here for the millennia."[252] As he explained to Julia Brown in 1984:

> It interested me to think about building *Complex One* on the edge of a nuclear test site in Nevada, and having the front wall be a blast shield. . . . Part of my art is based on an awareness that we live in a nuclear era. We're probably living at the end of civilization.[253]

Living and working near the border of the military's vast Nevada Test and Training Range, which also includes Area 51, Heizer has been exposed to a daily reiteration of the apocalyptic thinking that drove him out to the desert in the first place.[254] Nuclear weapons are tested in underground explosions about sixty miles from Heizer's house, which is adjacent to the site of *City*. As Douglas McGill reported in 1990:

> The Environmental Protection Agency maintains a complex sensory instrument at the Heizer ranch, and on their kitchen windowsill the artist and his wife keep radiation dosimeter badges, which must be checked every month. Sometimes,

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[251] Michael Heizer, quoted in Kimmelman, 2015. See also Kimmelman, 1999 for details of the project's funding.
[252] Michael Heizer, quoted in Kimmelman, 2015.
[253] Michael Heizer, quoted in Brown, 1984, p. 16.
[254] "I started making this stuff in the middle of the Vietnam War. It looked like the world was coming to an end, at least for me. That's why I went out in the desert and started making things in dirt." Michael Heizer, quoted in McGill, 1990, p. 11.

after a particularly large underground explosion, the Heizers can feel a ripple pass through the desert itself.[255]

Both Heizer and the occupants of Area 51 are famously concerned about maintaining their privacy. As Heizer complained in 1999, the year after Stevenson's drawings were made, "All these rubberneckers show up as if it's entertainment. People fly over the place. This is private property. People presume that I want them to see it. That is a rash presumption."[256] The restricted zone popularly known as Area 51 (but also called Dreamland, Homey Airbase, Restricted Area 4808 North or Paradise Ranch, depending on who you ask) was acquired by the US Air Force in 1955 as a test site for the then top-secret Lockheed U-2 aircraft, which was developed to perform covert high-altitude surveillance of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. After "whistleblower" Bob Lazar publicly claimed in 1989 to have worked at the site analyzing the propulsion systems of crashed extra-terrestrial aircraft, Area 51 became simultaneously the most famous and the most secret US military base.[257] Lazar's revelation, which came only months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, attained unlikely credence amongst a generation whose mistrust of authority seemed to often take the form of extra-terrestrial fantasies. While feverish speculation and activity around the site peaked in the mid-1990s, Area 51 didn't officially exist until the CIA declassified a number of documents in 2013.[258] Prior to this, and despite not yet existing, Area 51 became a magnet to those hankering for a brush with the unexplained. An industry catering to the "watchers" who gathered on the base's perimeter, binoculars and cameras at the ready, sprang up in the sparsely populated Nevada desert. A key participant in this industry was Glenn Campbell, a.k.a. "Psychospy." Campbell sent out a regular email newsletter from his "Area 51 Research Center," a mobile home in the town of Rachel, Nevada, and occasionally appeared in the media as an Area 51 expert. He also self-published a 114-page *Area 51 Viewer's Guide*, which Stevenson used as a source of information for his drawings.[259]

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[255] McGill, 1990, p. 20.
[256] Michael Heizer, quoted in Kimmelman, 1999.
[257] See Sands, 1991 and Powers, 2008.
[258] See for example Gorman, 2013; Nagourney, 2013 and Leiby, 2013.
[259] Campbell, 1995. Campbell's website details his involvement with the site in the 1990s. See Glenn Campbell, "Glenn Campbell History," *Glenn Campbell: Peripatetic Hyperprolific Content Generator*

Stevenson's trilogy of drawings combine images and carefully hand-drawn text captions to mimic the pages of a guidebook. Unlike Campbell's low-budget *Viewer's Guide*, however, Stevenson's *Conventional Aircraft Activity* and *Counting Antelope* resemble pages in a glossy coffee-table anthology of major earth art sites (figs. 48 and 50). Both show aerial views of Heizer's incomplete *City* with inset text panels containing paragraphs adapted from the *Area 51 Viewer's Guide*. For example, *Counting Antelope* warns its viewer about the camouflage-clad security teams patrolling the boundary of the "Restricted Zone":

> These are anonymous, well-armed chaps known to watchers as the "Cammo Dudes"—they will admit only to working for a "civilian entity." . . . Once one of the Cammo Dudes, the one with the cigar asked what I was doing out here, and I said just looking down on Complex One, what was he doing here? He shrugged and said he was counting antelope.

Counting Antelope alludes to the carefully unacknowledged game of cat and mouse that, according to Campbell's *Guide*, played out between watchers and security patrols around the Area 51 perimeter. Neither party would admit their true intentions, although both knew perfectly well what the other was up to. The security presence, of course, had the unintended effect of convincing the watchers that there was something of real significance concealed within the restricted zone, and making them even more vigilant in their surveillance. Campbell himself demonstrated the hyper-detailed knowledge of the most dedicated watchers, whose considerable expertise about the desert landscape came from having spent countless nights minutely cataloguing every sound and light emitted from behind the fences. The interaction Campbell had with the "Cammo Dudes," which Stevenson reproduced in his drawing, is like a piece of absurdist theatre. The text describes a meeting in the middle of nowhere, between individuals who are both, for very different reasons, hawkishly patrolling the boundaries of an area that doesn't exist, while both steadfastly denying that they are doing so. Area 51's very *lack* of existence, paradoxically, generated these cultish

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Author, Videomaker, Nonstop Traveler, Former Area 51 Guy, accessed 28 June 2017, http://glenn-campbell.com/past/.

bands of specialists, each with their own highly developed body of knowledge about the other.

Conventional Aircraft Activity depicts a Bell 47 helicopter buzzing around Heizer's *City*. The helicopter's two occupants, clearly visible through the bubble-shaped canopy, crane their necks towards the installation with evident fascination.[260] As in *Counting Antelope*, the tracks of large earth-moving vehicles have carved great arcs into the ground around the strange monumental forms of the sculptures. No activity is visible on the site, although clearly work of some magnitude has surreptitiously been going on here for some time. Beyond the installation, the otherwise unmarked and unpopulated desert stretches expansively to a distant mountain range on the horizon. The text panel at the bottom of the drawing, which is again a collage of fragments adapted from Campbell's *Viewer's Guide*, reads:

> Most viewers have already made an emotional investment in what they expect to see at the Complex before they arrive and it takes very little evidence to confirm their views. At first glance the very spectacular displays in the skies surrounding the installation can appear to be out-of-this world, however almost all of the sightings can be attributed to conventional aircraft activity.

Both *Conventional Aircraft Activity* and *Counting Antelope* address the extent to which people see what they expect to see. Experience is coloured by the power of discursive suggestion. As Campbell noted in the *Viewer's Guide*, among those gathered outside Area 51:

> UFO proponents expect to see flying saucers, and they do. Hardened skeptics expect to debunk the saucer stories, and they do. Spiritualists see spirits. Doomsdayers see the end of the world. Conspiracy buffs find just the evidence they need to link AIDS with JFK.[261]

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[260] In an interesting supplement to the theme of surveillance in Stevenson's drawing, a Bell 47 became the first "Telecopter" when in 1958 television engineer John Silva devised a way to produce live television footage from an airborne helicopter. Silva's invention is now a staple of live television news reportage. See Pool, 2012.

[261] Campbell, 1995, pp. 34–5.

Similarly, future viewers of Heizer's *City* are primed by rhapsodic accounts like that of Los Angeles County Museum of Art director Michael Govan, who described the work as "huge in size, but antimonumental in its relentless horizontality and its sinuous, continuous curves. It's also unphotographable and impossible to capture in its totality."[262] Echoing Lawrence Alloway's 1976 assertion, Govan insisted that *City* "has to be experienced."[263] However, the aesthetic transcendence that is available to earth art pilgrims in their hard-won first-hand experience of Heizer's geographically inconvenient work will likely tally with their pre-existing expectations. With the institutionalisation of art, knowledge about the work becomes ritualised, cultish, prescribed: experience conforms to pre-set parameters.

The final work in Stevenson's 1998 trilogy of drawings, *Double Nonsite Nevada/Nevada* mimics the map component of Smithson's *Double Nonsite*, 1968 (figs. 46 and 49). Smithson's work linked two volcanic sites in California and Nevada. For the sculptural component of the work, he placed obsidian from Truman Springs, Nevada in a square central bin, and pumice collected from the Maul Mountains in California in four trapezoidal bins "framing" the central square. The map Smithson helpfully provided for his viewer corresponded to the arrangement of the bins. A central map of Truman Springs, printed in white on a dark ground, overlaid a larger map of the Maul Mountains which was printed black on white. As Ron Graziani explained:

> The vicinity [Smithson] chose was a 'burned-out volcanic' environment, a once-active site fossilized in a low-level energy state. After scanning the 'ore' at the site, Smithson arranged the inner/outer configuration for *Double Nonsite* to mirror the volcanic process itself, how the collected rock scattered during a volcanic eruption. Obsidian, which has a greater heat breakdown point due to its density, remains close to the center of an eruption, whereas the lighter pumice defines the outer perimeter of a volcanic site.[264]

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[262] Michael Govan, quoted in Kimmelman, 2015.
[263] Michael Govan, quoted in Kimmelman, 2015.
[264] Graziani, 2004, p. 85.

Stevenson's drawing replicated the structure of Smithson's map, but substituted two maps of Nevada showing the locations of Heizer's *City* and Area 51. Stevenson's *Double Nonsite Nevada/Nevada* pointed its viewers towards the sites described by (and confused in) *Counting Antelope* and *Conventional Aircraft Activity*. However, like Smithson's nonsite, the map in Stevenson's work did not actually function to direct its viewer to the location it described. Smithson's original experience of Truman Springs and the Maul Mountains could not be reconstructed from the general information given in his map, which didn't provide particulars such as the artist's trajectory through the landscape, the location from where the rock sample was taken, or any of the myriad other factors that came together to create the particular quality of his experience. As he observed to Dennis Wheeler in 1969, "the site is evading you all the while [the nonsite is] directing you to it."[265] Rather than operating as a signpost directing the viewer to a particular real-world landscape, *Double Nonsite* reformed the real landscape according to the terms of a mental landscape. In an inversion of the normal approach to mapping, the reality of the nonsite fictionalised its referent. As Smithson explained:

> [*Double Nonsite* is] like an invented volcano that doesn't exist anywhere. But then suddenly the existence of the nonexistent thing is invaded with raw material which in a sense solidifies the hypothetical. So it's taking a kind of nonexistent thing and making it existent. . . . It's like building a volcano out of my mental experience of these two sites which are a great distance apart from each other.[266]

The absent site was effectively remade in the image of its representational mediator, the depiction that both effaced and created its real-world referent. A similar inversion of referentiality was at play in Stevenson's version of *Double Nonsite*'s map. Given that the site Stevenson actually depicted in his drawings was a fictitious conflation of *City* and Area 51, the coordinates on his maps would be little use to any would-be navigator. Technically, of course, the viewer of Stevenson's drawings could travel to the two locations. Although they would undoubtedly be denied entrance to both, on arrival they would likely find their experience of Heizer's *City* strangely inflected by

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[265] Robert Smithson, quoted in Wheeler, 1991, p. 113.
[266] Robert Smithson, quoted in Wheeler, 1991, p. 114.

the conspiratorial mutterings of the watchers gathered outside Area 51, while their approach to Area 51 might take on some of the hushed, reverential quality of art spectatorship. Stevenson's map, like Smithson's, called into being the site which it purported to represent by fictionalising the existing terrain.

Smithson and Stevenson's works both inverted the standard referentiality of the map in order to trouble the authenticity of the original site. However, the different media in which the works were presented makes a key difference between them clear. The central focus of all of Smithson's nonsites was a sample of rock that the artist removed from the site. As Alexander Nagel has observed, this displaced material gave Smithson's nonsites a relic-like character.[267] Like souvenirs or historical artifacts, the rocks provided an actual material link to their former location. Therefore, even as they effaced the real particularity of the site, Smithson's nonsites attested to the fact that it was directly experienced at least once, by the artist. The body parts of saints or fragments of holy objects that are preserved as religious relics can boast a literal physical affinity with the divinely endowed person or thing of which they were once part. Icons, however, are another step removed from supernatural power by virtue of the fact that they were made by human hands. Unlike Smithson's relic-like rock samples, which functioned as tangible evidence of the site that the artist subsequently fictionalised through the abstractions of the nonsite, Stevenson's drawings could claim no such authenticity. A further step removed from their referent, Stevenson's laboriously hand-rendered drawings underlined the hopelessly mediated nature of knowledge and experience by more forcefully emphasising the artist's own intervention. The careful realism with which Stevenson depicted the light reflecting off the helicopter's windscreen in *Conventional Aircraft Activity*, or the tyre-tracks of Heizer's earth moving machinery in *Counting Antelope*, only served to emphasise the artifice—and potential fraudulence—of his endeavour.

In Stevenson's *Conventional Aircraft Activity*, the distance between the earth work and the viewers in the hovering helicopter who peer down at it with such fascination literalised the distance between Stevenson's and Heizer's works, which was both temporal and epistemological. As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, a

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[267] Nagel, 2012, particularly chapter ten, "Non-site Specificity," pp. 116–32.

mournful and seemingly insurmountable distance separated these drawings from the artworks they depicted. As Stevenson suggested in *Double Negative (Fleetwood Mac Version)*, 1994, *Conventional Aircraft Activity* and *Counting Antelope*, even direct first-hand experience is mediated by the ritualised discourse surrounding these objects. And as all of his carefully hand-rendered drawings point out in their very media, they are themselves merely another mediation, another corrupt human-made screen through which to perceive and comprehend the world.

The religious critique that was buried in Stevenson's paintings of the 1980s emerged in his works of the 1990s. Concerned, at root, with the insurmountable distance between profane reality and divine truth, Stevenson's works of the 1990s were haunted by the loss of the conviction that this gap could be bridged. His drawings focused on the iconic forms, cultish knowledge and ritualistic practices that serve to mediate and shape experience. Adopting the stance of a conspiracy theorist allowed Stevenson to suggest that these mediators were diabolical imposters, working surreptitiously for a covert and sinister power rather than facilitating true knowledge of the world. As I have shown, however, they also went further than this. At the heart of Stevenson's works of the 1990s was the vertiginous inversion of his earlier religious faith. This was the suggestion, raised by postmodern thought at its most nihilistic, that the discourses, forms and practices that continually and unavoidably mediate knowledge and experience mask the fact that *there isn't, and was never* a divine truth underpinning the confusion of profane reality, and that the apocalyptic revelation anticipated by Christian eschatology will never arrive. This bleak suspicion, which is the source of the mournful sense of loss and distance in Stevenson's works from this period, as well as the source of their savage comedy, began to be dismantled in his installations of the 2000s.

Chapter three: The return

"Eternal time is the result of skepticism, not belief."[268]

In early 2000, Stevenson moved from Melbourne to settle in Berlin. Shortly after this move he returned to his childhood home in Taranaki, New Zealand, for a four-month residency at New Plymouth's Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. This return to the place of his upbringing also occasioned a return to New Zealand subjects in his work. In three projects produced in 2000–2003, Stevenson conducted an extended investigation into his own historical roots. *Genealogy*, 2000, *Call Me Immendorff*, 2000–2002, and *This is the Trekka*, 2003, were origin stories of sorts. They each presented an episode in recent New Zealand history. *Genealogy* attended to the generational shift in New Zealand art history from the craft-based work of the 1950s and 1960s to the radical "post-object" practices that preceded Stevenson's own artistic education in the 1980s. *Call Me Immendorff* narrated the saga of German *Neue Wilden* painter Jörg Immendorff's visit to Auckland in 1987–88. Here, Stevenson observed that Immendorff's arrival in New Zealand coincided with that of the international market forces that profoundly reshaped the country's economy and political landscape. *This is the Trekka* was a prequel to *Call Me Immendorff*. It teased out how the simmering contradictions of New Zealand's protectionist economy of the 1960s and 1970s—the period of Stevenson's childhood—erupted in sudden, revolutionary change in the 1980s. Arthur Danto has argued that Western art became "post-historical" during this same period. He observed, therefore, that "it is urgent to try to understand the decade of the 1970s, a period in its own way as dark as the tenth century."[269] Stevenson's examination of New Zealand histories in and around the 1970s conduct this investigation. His projects of the early 2000s trace how Cold War logic gave way to the increasingly widespread influence of neoliberal economic theory, and how the radical left of the 1960s counterculture found itself usurped, in the 1980s, by an equally radical right.

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[268] Smithson, 1967, p. 4.
[269] Danto, 1997, p. 12.

My analysis of these works brings together the two theoretical ideas that underpin my interpretation of Stevenson's practice. The first of these is my argument, central to this thesis, that Stevenson's work is based on a model of historical time at odds with the progressive linear time of modernity. I argue that the theory of history manifested in his work draws from a Christian model. This model is not animated by sequential cause and effect, or by dialectical processes as in the secularised version of it produced during the Enlightenment. Rather than a linear timeline in which temporal difference is described in terms of *before* or *after*, this model would be more accurately diagrammed as two concentric circles. Rather than the *before* and *after* of sequential causation, in this model there is a distinction between *inside* and *outside*, which is to say, it is concerned with the interactions between the profane temporal world and an atemporal, external, and profoundly otherworldly deity. The second theoretical idea underpinning my interpretation concerns the way Stevenson presents tangible, historical artefacts as keys to this external, meta-historical reality. Stevenson's critique of Pentecostalism centred on the denomination's failure to acknowledge the physical vehicles of believers' transcendent spiritual experiences. In chapter one, I described how his early religious paintings presented material things— the architecture and accoutrements of worship—as temporary stand-ins for an absent or inaccessible divine truth. In an approach I named "parochial-supernatural," Stevenson's paintings offered the most commonplace and inelegant forms as unlikely local proxies for an otherworldly deity. In the works discussed in chapter two, this intimate relationship between the profane and the sacred, which Stevenson had previously presented as self-evident, was subjected to iconoclastic scepticism. His "conspiracy" works of the 1990s offered a post-faith view of the world that was comical—almost manically so—but nihilistic. Representations could no longer be trusted. From around 2000, a shift occurred in Stevenson's practice. He began to articulate a non-linear model of historical time in which temporal and metaphysical otherness could be apprehended—although never fully known—through an engagement with material things.

It is difficult to overemphasise the importance of this turning point, which formed a foundation for all of Stevenson's subsequent work. While his core preoccupations— established during the 1980s—remained unchanged, several key differences were apparent in his practice from 2000 onwards. One of these was the tone or mood of the

works. While Stevenson's signature mix of dry wit and heretical scepticism was still in effect in these later works, his installations of the early 2000s abandoned the manic nihilism of his 1990s works. As in Hal Foster's 2004 description of "archival art," they were "more 'institutive' than 'destructive,' more 'legislative' than 'transgressive'."[270] Another difference is that from 2000 onwards, Stevenson began presenting his works as factual histories rather than—as in his 1990s works—fictional conspiracies imported from the lunatic fringe. They explored modes of historical connection such as coincidence, which departed from sequential or "billiard ball" causation and also departed from the related modern myth of humanity's ability to direct historical change and thereby maintain mastery over its own fate.[271] They increasingly began to describe a mode of causation whereby local events (or, more precisely, particular documents or artefacts that index local events) also registered the impact of distant, external or aggregate forces.

Stevenson's installations of the early 2000s have much in common with Foster's description of "archival art," and can rightly be grouped with those of artists such as Tacita Dean, Sam Durant, Simon Starling and Gerard Byrne. Demonstrating what Foster called a "will to connect," Stevenson's installations from this period assembled archival and artefactual fragments of the past into narratives in which past and present were meaningfully, if poetically or tenuously, related. However, it is the philosopher and scholar of the Byzantine Marie-José Mondzain, more than Foster, who has provided a productive theoretical framework for my analysis of Stevenson's practice.[272] Foster's archival paradigm described a melancholy art, awash in the turbulence following the collapse of twentieth-century Western art's alliance with both linear time and progressive politics. Drawing from Mondzain's work has allowed me to approach Stevenson's works from a different perspective: one that is not exclusively focused on the transition from Western modernism towards a global and pluralist contemporaneity.

Situating Stevenson's work within Mondzain's cosmological-philosophical framework brings out aspects of his practice that, as we will see, can later be

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[270] Foster, 2004, p. 5.
[271] See Schmaltz, 2014, for a discussion of the history of causation in Western philosophy.
[272] Mondzain, 2005.

productively folded back into this narrative of contemporary art history. Based on her reading of the iconophile Byzantine patriarch Nikephoros, Mondzain outlined a Christian philosophy of history keyed to questions about representation. She connected an eschatological Christian model of historical time to the religion's paradoxical assertion that a supremely intangible God did, in fact, make an appearance in human history in the physical person of Christ. In this sense it could be said that the unrepresentable can be represented. The Incarnation was a strategic translation of divine mystery into physical form. It allowed the utterly unknown to enter the concrete here-and-now. The flexible system of relationships that Mondzain called the *oikonomia* is modelled on this strategic translation. Through the *oikonomia*, distant things can take local effect in the form of proxies, and local events can conversely be considered a manifestation of cosmic impulses. Borrowing Mondzain's concept of the *oikonomia*, I argue that Stevenson's projects similarly tackle the question of how distantly authored historical changes take effect in the here and now. The model of historical time he developed was, I repeat, deeply informed by Christian eschatology, while the historical moment under consideration was that of postmodernism.

Genealogy, 2000

The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's residency programme, which in 2000 was run in association with Taranaki Polytechnic, accommodates the production of new work by one New Zealand artist and one international artist. Stevenson's residency was undertaken jointly and concurrently with US artist Steven Brower. Resident artists were expected to engage with Polytechnic students during their stay. The exhibition culminating from Stevenson and Brower's visit took their pedagogical obligation to the students of Taranaki Polytechnic seriously, by providing them with a warning about the dangerous influence of education on artistic development. *Genealogy*, 2000, was a two-part examination of the artists' pedagogical and familial artistic roots, which developed from the starting point that both Stevenson and Brower's parents are also artists.

The exhibition was symmetrically split across two rooms. Entry to Stevenson and Brower's twin installations was via a corridor in which two doors faced each other

(fig. 51). Brower's door was a replica of the door to his father's shed, Stevenson's was a reproduction of the door to his father's art classroom at Inglewood High School. Inside these rooms, each artist revisited his father's influence on his teenage creative pursuits. The centrepiece of Brower's room was a hinged, splayed open scale model of the Brower family home (nicknamed "Falling Lumber") in West Virginia. During his adolescence, Brower helped build multiple additions to the back of this house to accommodate his father William's book collection, which had become "so large that it threatened to strangle typical functions of a home."[273] As the model revealed, the progressive additions and their partial collapse "derange[d] the exterior as a view of a model home."[274] Presented in juxtaposition with a number of William Brower's ribald satirical paintings (in which *Sketch for Painting Depicting a Bondage Queen Cavorting on a Large Revolver*, *c*.1980, was one of the least sexually explicit), the result was a comically dark invocation of Freudian personality development gone awry.[275]

Stevenson's morally upright room stood in contrast to Brower's tongue-in-cheek case study of psycho-sexual disorder (fig. 52). As in Brower's room, the majority of artworks Stevenson showed were made by his parents. Both Alan and Margaret Stevenson studied at Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts, the school Stevenson also later attended, and Alan had taught his son's high school art class. For *Genealogy*, Stevenson made a loose reconstruction—in effect, a stage set—of his father's classroom. A series of regulation School Certificate art folios, ostensibly the very early work of New Zealand artists Christine Hellyar, Michael Parekowhai, Julian Dashper, Paul Hartigan and also Stevenson himself, occupied the centre of the space.[276] The room's walls were hung with a selection of the Stevenson family's prolific, community-oriented creative output from the 1950s onwards. There were landscape paintings, drawings of churches and chaste figure studies by Stevenson, his parents and his two sisters; cast plaster sculptural studies; the Inglewood High School

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[273] Burke, 2000.

[274] Burke, 2000.

[275] Considered too explicit for a public art gallery, two of William Brower's paintings were removed from the exhibition at the last minute, and were also censored in the catalogue.

[276] School Certificate was a secondary school qualification for New Zealand students in the Fifth Form (now Year 11), which was replaced by the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) level 1 in 2002. Candidates in School Certificate Art were expected to produce a folio of work which was submitted for examination attached to four A0 boards, folded accordian-style.

badge designed by Margaret Stevenson; her ambitious allegorical painting *Twentieth Century Attitudes Towards the Cross*, 1955 (for which family members had acted as models); the easel that Alan Stevenson designed and built for fellow artist Carole Shepherd and a dove-tailed wooden bookcase he made in the 1960s (figs. 53–54). This solidly traditional body of work was interspersed with lettering exercises, handmade instructional posters for student assignments, a notice board displaying clippings from the local press (featuring an article about the 600 hours of volunteer labour Alan Stevenson, assisted by his son, spent carving a wooden sculptural relief for the local Anglican church), and a twice-graffitied classroom stool inscribed "PICASSO S(h)AT HERE." While the pieces by Stevenson's family members on display and Stevenson's School Certificate folio were original works, the other folios and much of the classroom paraphernalia (including the Picasso stool) were mock-ups described on the exhibition's room sheet as reproductions "after lost originals."

Stevenson's literal return to his childhood home for the Govett-Brewster residency occasioned an examination of the familial, art historical and institutional structures that shaped him as an artist. *Genealogy* was a deeply satirical response to the twin engines of modernity's forward momentum: education and the avant-garde. If the revolutionary dynamism of the avant-garde leads the way, mass education is supposed to disseminate new ideas, thereby facilitating general cultural progress. *Genealogy*'s twin exhibitions jointly demolished any such sense of triumphal progression. Stevenson and Brower's approach to their cultural inheritance did not celebrate their position as heirs to a proud tradition, but nor did they flatten the past into an empty play of signifiers. They didn't dismiss their predecessors in a gesture of revolutionary renewal, but they also weren't bound by the precepts of those predecessors. In *Genealogy*, Stevenson and Brower confronted their artistic inheritance as a set of constraints, which paradoxically acted as an obstacle to practice while also providing the means of practice. Reframing artistic influence as pathological recurrence and education as a form of abuse (and perhaps with therapy in mind), they delved back into the traumas of the awkward adolescent years and unfashionable early influences that are generally edited out of hagiographic art historical accounts.

In light of such reflections, Alan Stevenson's beautifully rendered "lettering exercises" on display in *Genealogy*—"Silence: Talking in class assists nobody," and

"Design and lettering must be practised to be appreciated"—start to take on a disciplinarian tone. Like Mike Kelley's *Educational Complex*, 1995, which is clearly its artistic precedent, *Genealogy* mapped well-established ideas about trauma stemming from early institutional or familial discipline onto the authoritative influence of art education. Kelley's work established a connection between artistic development, education and pathology, in which artistic training was reconceived as a traumatic experience of dominance and overbearing influence.[277] The Oedipal implications of this line of thinking are racheted up considerably in Stevenson's case, of course, given that his original art teacher was also his father. However, neither Kelley nor Stevenson was advocating a romanticist-style escape from some imagined straightjacket of tradition. On the contrary, Stevenson's playful acknowledgement of the lasting scars left by his early art education was created using precisely the disciplined practice of craft techniques he was taught by his parents. As he observed at the time, cynicism about the processes of education does not necessarily imply an inability to appreciate its motives or results:

> My work is always read like 'this is so cynical.' But I don't think it's ever one thing or the other . . . The processes of everything I've been involved in are much more tender than people would make me out to be.[278]

In *Genealogy*, artistic influence and education constitute a pervasive (and, as is demonstrated by Stevenson and Brower's adherence to craft traditions, ongoing) constraint on present practice, dictating the terms within which new work can be conceived, while also providing the skills to achieve it. Hand-drawn artistic "family trees" by each artist, reproduced in the exhibition's catalogue, embedded them and their parents into multi-generational art-historical networks.[279] Rather than providing

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[277] See *Educational Complex Onwards*, 2009, particularly Mike Kelley, "Educational Complex," pp. 21–25 and Howard Singerman's essay "Memory Ware," pp. 307–25.

[278] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Laird, 2000, p. 14.

[279] Stevenson recites the lineage: "My parents were taught by Lois White, who was taught by Archie Fisher, who came out from England to run Elam. He ran the joint according to where he came from, which was the Slade school. He was taught by Augustus John. And it all gets filtered down to my parents who start making this art that looks like Thomas Hart Benton, but they don't know who Benton is, because they've only been taught about Augustus John. Benton has become famous because he was the teacher of Jackson Pollock, and of course Pollock is connected to Max Gimblett, who taught Steven [Brower] at the Pratt Institute. . . . Get this: in 1970, when the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery opened, the guy who did the first show there, which was this sound-light installation called *Real Time*, Leon

a traditional platform from which to leap towards innovation, the work of these predecessors seemed more like a problematic inheritance, a form of artistic baggage being handed down through the generations that continually dragged new work back to the concerns of the past.

If *Genealogy* reframed artistic education as an intergenerational trauma, its perspective on the second great driver of modern progress, the avant-garde, was no less caustic. However, unlike Stevenson's earlier assaults on the processes of art historical canonisation in his works of the 1990s, his focus in *Genealogy* was firmly on the New Zealand canon and specifically on the role his host institution played in forming it. A determinedly innovative contemporary art gallery, founded with a private bequest in 1970 and situated deep in the conservative heartland of provincial New Zealand, the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's history has been marked by antagonism with its surrounding community. In his history of New Zealand art galleries, curator Athol McCredie was forced to summarise: "Public controversies at the Govett-Brewster were too numerous to describe more than a handful briefly."[280] The gallery's self-conscious avant-gardism continually rankled the local artistic community, who were largely excluded from its exhibition programme. Early exhibitions of work by now-highly respected New Zealand artists such as Don Driver, Christine Hellyar and Billy Apple at the Govett-Brewster were met by vigorous local disapproval. When, for example, Hellyar's monumental *Country Clothesline*, 1972, was acquired (for $270) by the Gallery in 1977, one councillor in local government publicly described it as "the most appalling misappropriation of public money I've ever seen," and another said it was "the last straw" (fig. 55).[281] A fierce debate raged on the letters page of the local newspaper.[282] Faced with "formidable and conservative political pressure" the Gallery took steps to mollify its critics, which included instituting *Taranaki Review,* an annual open-entry survey of local art.[283] Stevenson's mischievous decision to use his residency at the Gallery as an opportunity to exhibit local community art reflected his familiarity with this history. With Brower, he produced a mocked-up newspaper "opinion" page, which was displayed in the

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Narbey, was on section at my father's high school art department during the day, and at night he'd go and set up *Real Time.*" Michael Stevenson in Laird, 2000, p. 15.

[280] McCredie, 1999 p. 218.

[281] A. C. Squire and W. I. Elliott, quoted in *Taranaki Herald*, 1977.

[282] See *When Art Hits the Headlines*, 1987, pp. 33–34.

[283] Schulz, 1981, p. 51.

corridor between their two installations (fig. 56). Mimicking the angry letters to the press that are so prominent in historical news coverage of the Govett-Brewster, Stevenson and Brower's send-up was comprised of letters decrying *Genealogy* as "just another example of civilisation in decline."

Christine Hellyar was one of Stevenson's teachers at art school. In addition to acknowledging her significance by re-creating her high school art folio in his School Certificate canon, Stevenson paid homage to Hellyar's radicalism by including a model of her controversial *Country Clothesline* and a news clipping about the furore it triggered in his installation.[284] In this imaginary art classroom, Hellyar was in the curriculum. Without skipping a beat, *Genealogy* also displayed genuine admiration for the work of Alan and Margaret Stevenson, bastions of community-spirited art and skilled makers, trained in a craft tradition that was evicted from Elam during the conceptually-oriented 1970s (the period between Stevenson's parents' attendance at the school and his own, and also the period when feminist artists like Hellyar began to achieve prominence). Despite the aspiration of much feminist art of the 1970s to erode the distinction between avant-garde and traditional or community-minded art practices, the local debate surrounding Hellyar's *Country Clothesline* firmly situated them in intractable opposition. Rather than weighing in on this debate, *Genealogy* showed how the two were related. The common ancestor of all these practices, according to Stevenson, was School Certificate-level art education, which he described as New Zealand art's "lowest common denominator." He explained to Tessa Laird:

> In the community, general knowledge about art gets developed by people doing
> School C art . . . It's about being given a crayon, or a pot of student-grade,
> smelly acrylic paint, and being told to paint a stylised version of your Nomad
> shoe. You know exactly what I'm talking about because everyone did it.[285]

By replicating Hellyar's School Certificate folio, he grounded her work in the same baseline, hormone-saturated adolescence as that of every other unrecognised artist. This egalitarian manouvre denounced the idea—which underpinned the foundation of

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[284] *Taranaki Herald*, 1977.
[285] Laird, 2000, p. 14.

the Govett-Brewster—that the avant-garde enjoys some inherent distinction from other kinds of creative practice. Recalling anthropologist Johannes Fabian's landmark observation of his discipline's practice of "temporal distancing," Stevenson's work in *Genealogy* pointed to the coeval interpenetration of the avant-garde and community art.[286] Fabian described how anthropology habitually "others" the people it studies by allocating them a different stage of historical development to the anthropologist's own. This denial of shared time is comparable to the common assertion of art historians that avant-garde artists were somehow "ahead of their time," able to be temporally distinguished from their contemporaries. By contextualising his own work in a genealogy that included both "advanced" and "traditional" practices, Stevenson pointed to the peculiar artificiality of art history's notions of historical development.

It would be difficult to imagine a work more scathing of modern visions of historical progress. *Genealogy* framed artistic expression as a libidinous malfunction; it claimed that education is a form of intergenerational abuse and artistic influence is a pathological inability to escape the past; and it perceived the avant-garde as an eccentric hierarchical distinction formulated in an act of intellectual dishonesty. Stevenson's faked folios, however, were documents of the past that were retroactively constructed in the present. In these objects, the past was reworked by the present, just as much as it shaped the present as a pathological inheritance or abusive constraint.

Genealogy offered an alternative art historical archive, a revised family tree for Stevenson's own work and that of other artists, which acknowledged the community art and craft traditions informing New Zealand's recent artistic canon. As Tessa Laird noted, the carefully crafted nature of Stevenson and Brower's installations suggested that "there is a certain unquantifiable value in laborious endeavour."[287] Stevenson's installation acknowledged, for example, the influence of artists like Alan and Margaret Stevenson, which was precisely what the avant-garde canon excluded. In the classroom of *Genealogy*, education was a means of disciplining the subject and also formulating the conditions of possibility for practice. As the faked School Certificate folios and other works produced "after lost originals" also suggested, however, this relationship of influence was not temporally unidirectional. They manifested a way of

[286] Fabian, 2002, p. 31.
[287] Laird, 2000, p. 45.

looking at the relationship between the past and present as mutually constitutive—or perhaps mutually abusive. This interest in the production and re-production of history clearly situates Stevenson's work from this period in the "archival" tendency that Hal Foster recognised and described in 2004.

The archival impulse in contemporary art

The tendency that has been variously described as an "archival impulse," a "historiographic turn," or attraction to an "archaeological imaginary" is a key inclination in recent, and predominantly Western, art practice. As increasing numbers of writers have determined, this tendency towards retrospection began to take shape during the 1990s in the work of artists from both sides of the North Atlantic such as Reneé Green, Sam Durant, Mike Nelson, Thomas Demand, Tacita Dean, Stan Douglas, Gerard Byrne and Douglas Gordon, along with many others. In addition to these usual suspects of a Euro-American narrative, and responding to a different political and historical terrain, were artists like the Slovenian collective IRWIN and The Atlas Group in Lebanon. As was Stevenson in Melbourne during the 1990s and then in Berlin during the 2000s, all these artists were engaged in an examination of history different to that encompassed in art historical quotation, postmodern appropriation, or other intra-disciplinary modes of engagement with past art. As Mark Godfrey has observed, archival art practice also differs from the interest in historical representation exhibited by older artists like Gerhard Richter and On Kawara, in that those artists were primarily concerned to demonstrate the opacity of archival images and the difficulty of commemorating past events.[288]

Central to the archival impulse is a focus on the material relics or tangible documents of the past and a tendency towards the narrative re-interpretation of this material. In his still-definitive 2004 description of archival art practice, Hal Foster noted that such art is "recalcitrantly material," a characteristic which differentiates it from the floating simulacra and dreamy virtualities of earlier appropriation art and also current post-Internet art.[289] The fundamental premise of the archival impulse is that documents or artefacts of the past can offer testimony on that past: it is the materiality of these

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[288] Godfrey, 2007, p. 142.
[289] Foster, 2004, p. 5.

things that makes them seem like evidence. Archives lack the museum's universalising taxonomies, they are fragmentary and eccentric deposits of material that are able to provide insight into particular histories, however their gaps and inconsistencies also enable them to be read alternately, and this is the appeal. The proposal that knowledge about history can be gleaned from its remains occasions an impulse of reconstruction or assembly that is also a creative impulse.[290]

All archival artists, including Stevenson, leverage the archive's charge of factuality—what Okwui Enwezor described as its "self-evidentiary claims"—into a play on fact and fiction.[291] They take advantage of the gaps and elisions in the archive to enact a movement from documentation to narrative. This is why, as Foster also observed, archival artworks "favor the installation format" in their presentation of juxtaposed objects, documents and images.[292] Installation reproduces a "join-the-dots" movement of connecting-together-into-narrative, in which factual material lends itself to emergent or fictive orders of meaning. The "self-evidentiary claims" of archival material also give archival art its secondary, revisionist character. This art takes documents that were made and preserved for one reason as raw material for a different purpose. One thread of archival art practice produces counter-archives that reframe or fictionalise historical material. Stevenson's "conspiracy" drawings of the 1990s, which reworked photodocumentation of artworks into a dossier of evidence implicating artists like Donald Judd and Michael Heizer in various sinister schemes could be included in this category. The School Certificate art folios he produced "after lost originals" for *Genealogy* could also be considered a counter-archive, as could the material in the Slave Pianos archive.[293]

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[290] The 1998 exhibition *Deep Storage*, curated by Ingrid Schaffner and Mathias Winsen, explored artists' use of storage and archiving as imagery, metaphor or process. See *Deep Storage*, 1998.

[291] Enwezor, 2008, p. 18. See Jasper, 2011, for a discussion of fact and fiction in Stevenson's practice.

[292] Foster, 2004, p. 4. Stevenson's turn towards installation in the early 2000s built on his existing tendency to present works alongside supporting props. He had made arrangements of collected research material in his studio as early as the 1980s, and many of his exhibitions of the 1990s were presented as arrangements of artworks and found objects. For example, *Decline of Western Civilisation Part 3: The Minimalist Years*, 1994, at Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington, was an exhibition of Stevenson's paintings of Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*, 1969. These were accompanied by a boy's chopper-style push bike, a poster of the film *Easy Rider* hung in the iconic corner position of Malevich's *Black Square*, 1915, a Jack Daniels branded t-shirt, *Easy Rider* magazines, a copy of Neil Young's *Decade* album, 1977, cans of Budweiser, and beef jerky.

[293] For example, the limited edition boxed set of audio recordings, documents, texts and music scores *Slave Pianos: A Diagnosis, 1998–2001*, 2001 (Collection of Art Gallery of New South Wales, 19.2002.a-d).

Another thread of archival art practice focuses on performance, exploiting the interplay between the immobility of a script and the unpredictable divergences that each new performance brings to a scripted work. This tension between score and improvisation parallels that between the archival document and its reinterpretation. The performance-oriented exhibitions *A Little Bit of History Repeated*, 2001, curated by Jens Hoffmann at Berlin's Kunst-Werke, and *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, 2005, curated by Sven Lütticken at Witte de With, Rotterdam, centred on processes and strategies of re-enactment, featuring works such as Barbara Visser's *Lecture on Lecture with Actress*, 2004, and Omer Fast's *Spielberg's List*, 2003, for example. Slave Pianos, operating within this performance-focused trajectory of archival art practice, gained international visibility—predominantly in Germany and the US—during the late 1990s and early 2000s. They exhibited in curator Rene Block's 1999 survey of New Zealand art, *Toi Toi Toi*, which toured to the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel, and in 2000 at China Art Objects in Los Angeles on the invitation of Stevenson's close friend and collaborator the New Zealander Giovanni Intra. Slave Pianos also exhibited in *Wiederaufnahme* [Retake], 2001, a group show co-curated by Susanne Titz and Ulrike Groos at the Neuer Aachener Kunstverein (NAK), which explored how the logic of the musical cover version was increasingly featuring in the work of visual artists. The curators aimed to present "a perception of not only the possibilities offered by 'musical quotations,' but also of questions regarding authorship, the original, and uniqueness, which have been circulating since the 1990s."[294] Through his work with Slave Pianos and through friends like Intra, Stevenson formed an expanded network during these years which provided fertile ground for the development of his interests. At New York's Lombard Freid gallery in 1998 and 1999, for example, he exhibited alongside artists such as Jeremy Deller, Reneé Green and IRWIN. Through Intra, Stevenson came into contact with art publisher Christoph Keller and the US science fiction writer Mark von Schlegell. Artists like Sam Durant and Steven Brower also became friends and collaborators: both worked with Stevenson and Danius Kesminas from Slave Pianos on the artist-initiated exhibition *What Your Children Should Know About Conceptualism*, 1999, which was shown at Aachen's NAK and the Brandenburgischer Kunstverein, Potsdam.

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[294] *Wiederaufnahme*, 2001, p. 10. Titz later curated Stevenson's solo exhibition *Art of the Eighties and Seventies*, 2005, at the Neuer Aachener Kunstverein.

However, into the 2000s, Stevenson's solo practice moved away from Slave Pianos' fluxus-inspired performance orientation, in which archival documents became springboard and raw material for chaotic, collaborative absurdist theatre and a sprawling constellation of associated publications, objects and recordings.[295] From 2000, in his solo practice Stevenson produced sculptural installations which focused instead on the *revelatory* aspect of archival material: the "self-evidentiary claim" or charge of factuality that derives from the archive understood as an assemblage of tangible artefacts of the past. During this time, Stevenson also moved away from the very common tendency among archival artists to construct alternative histories or "counter-memories" based on a revisionist reading of the archive. With his installation *Call Me Immendorff*, 2000-2002, Stevenson departed from the more revisionist approach he had taken in *Genealogy* in favour of an exploration of archival material as evidence or revelatory trace.

Following Foucault, Okwui Enwezor characterised the archive that is so fascinating to so many contemporary artists as not simply an inert repository of historical documents, but as an "active, regulatory discursive system."[296] In *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault formed an association between the archive and a regulative inheritance that he referred to as the "historical *a priori*" which conditions talk and thought in any given discourse.[297] The archive, which is constantly changing, determines what can be said, and it is the system that gives form and order to statements. This Foucauldian association of the archive with authority—with the discursive structures which govern what counts as authoritative knowledge—has had long standing influence. Allan Sekula's 1986 essay "The Body and the Archive," for example, offered a Foucauldian interpretation of police officer Alphonse Bertillon's nineteenth-century invention of the criminal database. Bertillon established an archive of photographic and biometric data as a "bureaucratic-clerical-statistical system of

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[295] For example, Slave Pianos' *The Broccoli Maestro* was a 36-minute chamber opera in two acts for six voices, six players and two-channel tape performed at the North Melbourne Town Hall in 2001. The libretto was based on writing by Australian artist Tony Clark and his circle, and the performance was staged in front of large copies of Clark's paintings. Reviewer Stuart Koop described the work's "sheer excess of material . . . [and] rampant, fever-pitched citation." Koop, 2001.
[296] Enwezor, 2008, p. 11.
[297] Foucault, 2002, p. 143.

'intelligence'" for identifying and disciplining unruly subjects.[298] Bertillon's archive makes explicit the regulatory function that—after Foucault—is implicit in every archive, and that makes artists' efforts to read archival material against the grain seem like defiant or liberatory gestures.

Dieter Roelstraete, Claire Bishop and Mark Godfrey have all seen a renewed political impetus for art in the archival impulse. Roelstraete's exhibition *The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art*, 2013, connected the "archaeological imaginary" of works by a long list of artists, including Stevenson, to the tradition of the artistic vanguard.[299] Roelstraete argued that the critical impetus behind these artists' works was their redemption of:

> the castaways and the downtrodden, the abandoned and the deserted, those
> forgotten or otherwise left behind by mainstream history; they look at the
> overlooked and conjure the voices of the stifled and the unheard.[300]

He framed the redemptive revisionism of this art as an activist mode connected to emancipatory politics: it sought justice for the victims of mainstream history. Operating in the critical tradition of the avant-garde, it challenged the *status quo* by digging into the past rather than looking to the future. In *Radical Museology*, 2013, Bishop similarly advocated a partisan and strategic approach to history as a means of support for present-day political struggles. Observing the temporal multiplicity of works of art—their ability to bring different times into dialogue with the present—she argued that a strategic deployment of this capacity could contribute to a political project of rethinking "where we can and should be heading."[301] For Bishop, a renewed future orientation could be formed out of a strategic re-engagement with the past. In Mark Godfrey's 2007 analysis of artist Matthew Buckingham's work, he showed that the artist's historical research has been conducted in response to the urgency of present-day issues, and argued that it has thereby generated "a politicized reinterpretation of the present."[302] Beyond the way in which Buckingham has offered

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[298] Sekula, 1986, p. 16.
[299] Roelstraete, 2013, p. 20, n. 8.
[300] Roelstraete, 2013, p. 29.
[301] Bishop, 2013, p. 23.
[302] Godfrey, 2007, p. 147.

a historical perspective on current political issues, Godfrey also interpreted the installation format of his works in political terms. The dislocations and fractures between (and within) the texts, still images and moving images in Buckingham's installations, their requirement that their viewers actively "join the dots," seemed to Godfrey designed to trigger the viewer's recognition of his or her own political responsibility in deciding how to interpret the material.[303] He framed the "fragmented spatialized narrative" of Buckingham's installations as a model of political pedagogy.[304]

Neither Roelstraete's redemptive revisionism, Bishop's call for the strategic and partisan redeployment of history, or Godfrey's vision of installation as a model of political pedagogy adequately describes Stevenson's art. While Stevenson has a deep interest in power and how it is exercised, he is not motivated by an effort to reinstate art's link with progressive politics. His primary goal is not to resurrect countermemories, unearth lost truths or give voice to historically marginalised populations, although his works sometimes do these things. Nor does he specifically aim to encourage his viewers into political engagement. Stevenson does not instrumentalise the past for political purposes, but nor does he present quirky or eccentric histories as an end in itself. In his words, "it's not just about . . . doing, like History Channel or something. There's something else going on."[305] In Stevenson's art, archival documents and historical artefacts are offered as evidence: not simply of past events, but of this "something else," which is an unnamed meta-historical force or agency that can only be perceived indirectly, in its historical effects.

The archival impulse at play in Stevenson's practice centres on the narrative reinterpretation of material relics of the past. It is an impulse towards the assembly of archival evidence into narrative, and it is both reconstructive and creative. In the installations Stevenson produced from around 2000 onwards, certain historical events—or, more precisely, certain historical documents or artefacts—were regarded as the products of, or openings onto "something else" that sits outside normal

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[303] This is similar to Claire Bishop's earlier observation that from the late 1960s onwards "the multi-perspectivalism implicit in installation art [came] to be equated with an emancipatory liberal politics and an opposition to the 'psychological rigidity' of seeing things from one fixed point of view." Bishop, 2005, p. 54.

[304] Godfrey, 2007, p. 150.

[305] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 11 November 2013.

causation. As with Foucault's posthumanist stance, Stevenson reconceived history as something other than a series of events initiated and performed by individual agents. Both displaced the human subject from its position of centrality and focused instead on forces that condition and curtail human historical agency.

However, Stevenson doesn't subscribe to Foucault's elevation of contingency and discontinuity to universal principles. Where Foucault emphasised the profound historical mobility of truth claims and the intimate relation of knowledge to power, Stevenson's works offer speculative glimpses of an order that seems to exceed human knowledge and underpin human power. With *Call Me Immendorff*, for example, Stevenson discovered a cache of archival material that lent itself to narrative interpretation. The story of artist Jörg Immendorff's 1987 visit to Auckland, as it unfolded in Stevenson's installation, contained various coincidences, echoes and resemblances that—as I detail below—connected to a broader political and economic history. The archival documents seemed not only to provide testimony on the events that were their ostensible subject but also to reveal another dynamic at play, some larger system of causal relationships operating behind the scenes. Hal Foster rightly suggested that archival art practice is driven by a paranoiac "will to connect": an associative urge that "projects meaning onto a world ominously drained of the same."[306] Stevenson's creative reconstruction of archival documentation into revelatory narratives relies on this mindset: when you look at things in a certain way, sometimes "something else," something unexpected, stands revealed.

Call Me Immendorff, 2000–2002

In 1999, the year before his residency in Taranaki, Stevenson began investigating a peculiar incident in recent New Zealand art history. During December 1987 and January 1988, the German painter Jörg Immendorff was artist-in-residence at Auckland City Art Gallery, as the first (and only) recipient of the Gallery's projected series of Foreign Artist Projects. Immendorff was commissioned to produce a painting for the Gallery's collection and was accommodated in the Gallery's small guest apartment. The arrival of an international artist of such renown in Auckland

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[306] Foster, 2004, p. 21. See also Hughes, 2015, pp. 199–202 for a useful elaboration on the paranoid logic at play in Mike Nelson's practice.

produced a ripple in the local media. This was nothing, however, to the sensational news that a death threat in the form of the giftwrapped corpses of a rabbit and a bird had been left on Immendorff's doorstep weeks into his residency. Syndicated press coverage of this bizarre event appeared in community newspapers throughout the country. After the death threat, Immendorff was moved to the safer and more luxurious accommodation of the Hyatt Hotel. Despite his traumatic setback, he managed to complete the commissioned painting, which he titled *Readymade de l'histoire*, 1987. He also made no fewer than ninety-eight smaller works exploring the psychological impact of the death threat and articulating his fierce resistance to such intimidation, participated in the production of a television documentary about his experiences, made a thorough exploration of Auckland's nightlife and champagne reserves (and, allegedly, the city's population of young women), and generated a room service bill totalling $9,407.27. The Hyatt Hotel forwarded this itemised bill signed by Immendorff to the Gallery for payment, where Stevenson later discovered it preserved alongside other material related to Immendorff's visit in the institutional archive. Stevenson's *Hotel Bill*, 2002, an immaculately rendered graphite drawing of this document, is exemplary of the dry comic tone of his response to the saga (fig. 57).

Stevenson first exhibited *Call Me Immendorff* in 2000 at Galerie Kapinos, Berlin (figs. 58–60). He reprised it at Auckland Art Gallery as a nominee for the 2002 Walters Prize exhibition, and also produced a number of related works and events throughout 2002–2003 (figs. 61–62).[307] Using archived news reports, the installation wove together the tale of Immendorff's Auckland residency with multiple other contemporaneous events to form a work that took a local history as an allegory for a much broader historical transition. *Call Me Immendorff* marked the first appearance of Stevenson's long-running interest in economics, and it largely abandoned the stage-set quality of *Genealogy* to manifest as a looser, more open constellation of material. The work traced a broad historical shift from the late Cold War period towards global neoliberal dominance, and from the radical left of the 1960s counterculture towards the radical right of 1980s economics. Woven together with the story of Immendorff's stay in Auckland were narrative threads addressing the radical

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[307] Auckland City Art Gallery changed its name to Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki in 1996.

political and economic reforms undertaken in New Zealand during the 1980s, the international stock market crash of October 1987, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Immendorff, who himself underwent a dramatic transformation from a leftist radical in the late 1960s to *Neue Wilden* market-fuelled superstardom in the 1980s, was offered as a personification of the dramatic arrival of these historic changes in New Zealand.

The material displayed in *Call Me Immendorff* was emphatically factual in appearance. It was presented as an archive replete with "self-evidentiary claims," and an index of a particular historical moment. The bulk of the work was derived from archived newspaper clippings held in Auckland Art Gallery's E. H. McCormick Research Library. Stevenson made graphite and pastel copies of these newspaper articles, and presented them alongside a series of mocked-up newsstand posters in wire frames bearing headlines quoted from various media sources. Unlike his semi-fictional composite drawings of the 1990s, these drawings of news clippings exhibited extreme fidelity to the original (figs. 63–64). They precisely rendered the irregularly clipped edges of the source articles, and each Times New Roman serif was carefully reproduced. Such visible accuracy operated as a kind of aesthetic guarantor of the accuracy of the installation as a whole. The newsstand posters each bore a screenprinted headline, the banner logo of one of New Zealand's major newspapers of the time, and a small caption at the bottom of the sheet giving the date of publication. The posters were less fastidiously accurate than the drawings: most did quote actual news headlines or published statements, but Stevenson took minor liberties with the publication details in order to arrange his material into a continuous chronology.[308] Lined up edge to edge around the perimeter of the room, the posters formed an unrelenting parade of dramatic sound bites, each announced in blaring block capitals. They clicked forwards through the months: beginning with the international stock market crash of October 1987 and concluding with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. At this point, the sequence reversed direction and rewound back to its starting point, before beginning again.

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[308] The sequence is presented chronologically according to the dates printed on the bottom of each poster, which are often historically inaccurate by a small margin.

In addition to the drawings and newsstand posters, the installation included several other items which were each firmly anchored to current events or a particular moment in time. For example, there was a monitor playing *Call Me Immendorff*, the 1988 television documentary about Immendorff's residency from which Stevenson's installation took its name.[309] Reeking of late 1980s fashion, the documentary featured some outrageous period hairstyles. In his Berlin installation, Stevenson also included protest-style placards—like newspapers, protest placards respond directly to current events—bearing Immendorff quotations (figs. 58 and 60). A final example was provided by an event Stevenson staged at Auckland's Hyatt Regency hotel in June 2002. *An Evening With Jörg Immendorff* took the form of a party that the artist hosted amongst a number of works installed in the same hotel room Immendorff had occupied in 1988.[310]

Stevenson's Hyatt event leveraged Immendorff's seedy reputation to create an uncomfortably intimate link between the two artists—a link already present due to the fact that while in Auckland Stevenson was staying in the same Gallery guest apartment that Immendorff had occupied in 1987.[311] The work on display in the Hyatt hotel room included a bedspread embroidered with the dates of Immendorff's residency in Gothic typeface, and several newsstand posters that reiterated the installation's tone of gutter humour: "BIGGEST ARTIST SINCE GAUGUIN," "JORG'S A MIGHTY MAN AMONGST ARTISTS," "IMMENDORFF IMMINENT" (figs. 65–68). During the 1990s Stevenson had recognised, and mocked, the equation of creativity with masculine virility in Michael Heizer's work, and he also recognised it in what he called the "big brash conquering-the-world" approach of some German artists during the 1980s.[312] The Hyatt event also expressed a deeply cynical view of the ongoing influence of the past. In *Genealogy*, Stevenson had reframed artistic influence as a form of abuse. The embroidered bedspread

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[309] Rood and Price, 1988.

[310] At least, the claim that it was the same room was made in the invitation letter to *An Evening Without Jörg Immendorff*, a follow-up event Stevenson held in his Berlin studio in 2003. MSS, Invitation to *An Evening Without Jörg Immendorff*, 5 September 2003.

[311] Stevenson included the bed from this apartment in the Auckland version of his installation. As the New Zealanders interviewed in the television documentary *Call Me Immendorff* (which was also playing in Stevenson's installation) all attested, Immendorff liked to party. His public reputation was sealed in 2003 when he was arrested after being discovered in a Düsseldorf hotel suite with nine prostitutes and a considerable quantity of cocaine. See Paterson, 2004.

[312] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Leonard, 2003a, p. 59.

presented in *An Evening With Jörg Immendorff* could be seen, perhaps similarly, as a protest about the injustice of being required to lie in the bed (literally and figuratively) that Immendorff had made. *Call Me Immendorff* presented a collection of material firmly anchored to a specific historical moment. The Hyatt event helped to frame this moment as one of hedonistic excess, which polluted the inheritance of later generations.

Immendorff in Auckland

For many in New Zealand, the late 1980s was a period of unbridled hedonism. For everyone in New Zealand, it was a period of breathtakingly rapid social, political and economic changes. These were facilitated by a number of political decisions that—depending on your perspective—were either inspired or appallingly reckless. Immendorff's arrival in Auckland came hard on the heels of that of international market forces, which in the mid-1980s were felt in the New Zealand economy for the first time in decades. Within the space of four years, a suite of radical economic reforms and a major international stockmarket crash had utterly transformed New Zealand's economic landscape. These were some of the most dramatic events in New Zealand's political and economic history, and the newsstand posters in Stevenson's installation chart their immediate aftermath. Beginning with the news of Immendorff's imminent arrival ("NZ DRAWS LEADING PAINTER"), which was reported in the same week as the stockmarket crash of 20 October 1987 ("COLOSSAL SHARE MARKET CRASH"), the sequence revealed the extent of the damage to the New Zealand economy ("106,409 JOBLESS & COUNTING") (fig. 69).[313] As Stevenson's posters report, the immediate repercussions of these events played out in New Zealand concurrently with Immendorff's residency. The headlines reveal just how quickly events escalated out of control: how high fortunes rose, and how unexpectedly they crashed back down again.

The stockmarket crash of October 1987 couldn't have come at a worse time for the New Zealand economy, which was then several years into the most accelerated transition to a free-market system ever attempted. Stimulated by the policies of

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[313] According to New Zealand time, the crash happened on 20 October 1987 and is therefore known as "Black Tuesday." Elsewhere in the world, it occurred on Monday 19 October 1987.

Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and by the experimental application of free-market economics in Chile under Pinochet, neoliberal doctrine had been "plucked from the shadows of relative obscurity" to become a principle of economic management with global traction.[314] New Zealand's economic revolution was the brainchild of Roger Douglas, Minister of Finance in David Lange's Labour government, which took office in 1984. Rogernomics—as Douglas's economic policies were locally known—was the Lange government's attempt to redress the economic errors made by the previous administration. Prime Minister Robert Muldoon had presided over one of the most regulated and insulated economies in the Western world. It was not in a healthy state when in June 1984 a visibly drunk Muldoon announced a snap election (or, as it quickly became known, a "Schnapps election") on live television. On election day a month later, Lange's party won by a landslide. The new government's clear majority gave them the mandate to effect sweeping changes. Compared to their predecessors, the Lange government was young, educated, and radical. Immediately after gaining office, they responded to the economic crisis with the kind of vigorous market liberalisation that is precisely the opposite of what Labour governments traditionally do, in order to remove a regulative system that had been stubbornly maintained by a nominally right-wing government.[315] In Paul Dalziel and Ralph Lattimore's words:

> There is universal agreement that the reforms shifted New Zealand from being one of the most regulated countries in the developed world to being one of the most open and market-oriented economies anywhere.[316]

The sudden removal of regulations meant that markets appeared where there had been none, and business-minded New Zealanders capitalised on this situation without restraint. Speculative investment and finance companies like Chase Corporation and Equiticorp blossomed into existence, and mirror-glass office towers mushroomed in Auckland's CBD. The growth of these companies was such that astronomical profits

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[314] Harvey, 2005, p. 2.

[315] In this odd political inversion they were not alone. The 1983 "tournant de la rigueur" (austerity turn) of Francois Mitterand's Socialist Party in France, the liberalisation of the Spanish labour market by Felipe González's Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) from the mid-1980s, and the deregulations and privatisations enacted by the Australian Labour Party under Bob Hawke all coincided with the surprising economic reforms of New Zealand's Labour government.

[316] Dalziel and Lattimore, 2004, p. 30; see also Janiewski and Morris, 2005, pp. 2–5.

could be suddenly be made in the stockmarket, and average New Zealanders were lured to invest in unprecedented numbers. Historian David Grant recalls that in the mid-1980s, "students saved their paper-round money or borrowed from their parents, farmers sold land and pensioners withdrew their entire life savings, all to invest on the stockmarket."[317]

Political commentator Colin James has described how, beginning in the late 1970s, there was a broad cultural shift in New Zealand arts, politics and business towards a "new confident—or brash—expression . . . The usual picture of these people is of the got-rich-quick hucksters; but that was only one emanation of a much broader shift."[318] Auckland City Art Gallery's invitation to Jörg Immendorff in 1987 can be contextualised within this culture of confident, entrepreneurial internationalism, both in general terms and also directly, in terms of the initiative's funding. The Gallery's acquisition of Immendorff's painting *Readymade de l'histoire*, 1987–88, was supported by the newly-founded philanthropic group Patrons of Auckland Art Gallery, initiated by Jenny Gibbs with her husband Alan. A member of the free-market think-tank the New Zealand Business Roundtable, Alan Gibbs was a vocal supporter of deregulation and a personal friend of Minister of Finance Roger Douglas. The Gibbses also funded the establishment of Auckland City Art Gallery's New Gallery in 1995, where the Auckland iteration of Stevenson's *Call Me Immendorff* was shown in 2002.[319] As Paul Goldsmith relates, by the late 1980s:

> Alan Gibbs, the local incarnation of capitalism and scourge of the political left, was simultaneously emerging, with his wife, as a leading patron of New Zealand art. He was a horseman of the Apocalypse, but a cultured one.[320]

The stockmarket crash of October 1987 had a devastating impact in New Zealand. David Grant described it as a "massacre."[321] In under four hours, share prices dropped

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[317] Grant, 1997, p. 295. Towards the end of 1986, "Close to 900,000 New Zealanders—some 28 per cent of the population—now owned shares, and the figure was growing." Grant, 1997, p. 284.
[318] James, 1989, pp. 5–6.
[319] Dame Jenny Gibbs continued her role as patron of the arts after her separation from Alan in 1996. She remains easily the most prominent art philanthropist in New Zealand, and was the commissioner of Stevenson's project *This is the Trekka* for New Zealand's representation at the 2003 Venice Biennale.
[320] Goldsmith, 2012, p. 179.
[321] Grant, 1997, p. 307.

$5.7 billion as small investors panicked and fled the market: "A twenty-eight-year-old Wellington panel-beater, a millionaire in Robert Jones shares at the beginning of the day, by the end of it was left with debts of $50,000."[322] Between 1987–92, employment fell by more than seven percent and eventually the government imploded under the strain.[323] When Immendorff arrived in Auckland in December 1987, locals were reeling from the immediate impact of the crash. As Stevenson observed:

> The way the press dealt with him was like a sweetener story amongst all this other grim stuff going on at the time. He drank incredibly expensive champagne after the crash. He was the only person left in town who could shout the bar just as everyone else was feeling the pain.[324]

Call Me Immendorff repeated the hyperbole that characterised Immendorff's media reception in New Zealand. The entire story was recorded in the register of high melodrama. Immendorff's hyper-masculinity, his penchant for black leather and chunky gold jewellery, his active nightlife and his public anxiety about receiving a death threat were all openly mocked by the New Zealand press. However, Immendorff was also utterly complicit in the manner of his portrayal. He made a spectacle of himself, courting media attention and feeding reporters outrageous quotes. In an interview which Stevenson fastidiously reproduced in his two-part drawing *The Politics of Expression (An Artist In Revolution)*, 2000, Immendorff told journalist Adam Gifford "I hate weak artists, and weak people in general" (figs. 70–71).[325] Such absurd posturing is itself a farcical echo of Immendorff's own earlier public identity as an activist of the radical left. He continually alluded to his youthful activism with sloganistic comments ("We must not forget that an artist is part of the community, like a tram driver or a factory worker") which were dutifully transcribed first by reporters like Gifford and then again, thirteen years later, by Stevenson.[326]

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[322] Grant, 1997, p. 307.

[323] "Total employment fell by more than 100,000 (7 percent) between March 1987 and March 1992." Massey, 1995, p. 160. Lange resigned in 1989, and the government was voted out by a disillusioned electorate in 1990.

[324] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Herrick, 2002b.

[325] Jörg Immendorff, quoted in Gifford, 1987.

[326] Jörg Immendorff, quoted in Gifford, 1987.

Immendorff: from leftist radical to *Neue Wilden*

Like a weathervane of historical change, Immendorff's career caricatures the transition from the heady politics of the late 1960s into the hedonistic individualism of the 1980s. His avant-garde and leftist political credentials, established during his late teens and early twenties, are impeccable. Immendorff was, as writers discussing his work invariably emphasise, a student of Joseph Beuys at the Düsseldorf Art Academy in the 1960s. During his early years of artistic practice Immendorff fully internalised Beuys's dissolution of the boundaries between art practice, political activism and pedagogy. From the late 1960s and into the early 1970s Immendorff's work became increasingly performative and largely indistinguishable from political activism. His actions, such as his self-branding with the neo-dadaist nonsense slogan "LIDL," also self-consciously invoked radical avant-garde activities of the past. His artistic and political idealism would stand up, in its sheer exuberance and passionate impracticality, against that of any creditable revolutionary of the period. A series of actions by Immendorff, Beuys and others operating as the "LIDL-academy," for example, resulted in the temporary closure of the Düsseldorf Art Academy in May 1969.[327] At this time, Immendorff also worked as an art teacher at a Düsseldorf secondary school. Following Beuys's example, Immendorff's own art practice, his political activism and his pedagogical role were inextricably intertwined. As curator Harald Szeemann approvingly related:

> He structured his teaching, which was highly respected even by his opponents, around the needs and interests of sixth formers and future apprentices in order to further their critical faculties and to satisfy the schools' requirements. . . . Immendorff's artistic work consisted of documenting the situations and learning processes at the secondary school; these were then exhibited as action reports at the Galerie Michael Werner in Cologne, and later in 1972 at the *documenta 5* in Kassel.[328]

The works of Immendorff's that Szeemann chose to exhibit at his 1972 Documenta also included a series of his "agit-prop" paintings from the early 1970s. These works

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[327] See Szeemann, 1984, for an account of these activities.
[328] Szeemann, 1984, p. 31.

capture Immendorff's agonised attempt to reconcile his political views with his professional ambitions as an artist. In paintings resembling socialist-realist political posters, energetic youthful revolutionaries pump their fists in the air, shout into megaphones and wave red flags. Comic-book style captions exhort the "radical exposure of the capitalist system!"[329] In the display at *documenta 5*, such sentiments were interspersed with paintings bearing written, tortured reflections on Immendorff's own participation in an economy of art geared towards the market and social prestige, as in *Ich wollte Künstler werden* [I wanted to become an artist], 1972 (fig. 72):

> I wanted to become an artist: I dreamed about seeing my name in the newspapers, having a lot of shows, and naturally I intended to do something 'new' in art. My guideline was egoism.[330]

The contradiction Immendorff saw between his desire to paint and his socialist convictions seemed to have dropped away by the time of his rebirth as a member of Berlin's *Neue Wilden* in the late 1970s. However, the artist's radical political credentials continued to inform the reception of his work even as his paintings, and his lifestyle, became increasingly divorced from his youthful ideals.

Benjamin Buchloh's 1981 article "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression" was the least equivocal of a series of denunciations of neo-expressionist painting by defenders of art's leftist avant-garde in the early 1980s: Donald Kuspit called it a "Marxist blitzkrieg."[331] For Buchloh, the paintings produced by artists like Immendorff from the late 1970s were a disgraceful renunciation of the values of earlier politically engaged art—such as Immendorff's own earlier work. Connecting figurative representation to political authoritarianism, Buchloh accused neo-expressionist painting of having the very worst affiliations and intentions. He asked,

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[329] Jörg Immendorff, *Träum fürhen nicht zum Ziel* [Dreams do not lead to goals], 1972. An English translation of the German text on the painting reads: "Dreams do not lead to goals: Give active support to the forces working to eliminate exploitation and suppression, and whose goal is to build socialism—on the basis of a radical exposure of the capitalist system! If artistic work is to serve progress, its content must reflect this." The work is reproduced and translated in *I Wanted to Become an Artist*, 2004, p. 51.

[330] Translation from *I Wanted to Become an Artist*, 2004, p. 49.

[331] Buchloh, 1981 and Kuspit, 1983, p. 43. For critical accounts of neo-expressionist painting, see also Crimp, 1981 and Lawson 1981. Kuspit notes that Peter Schjeldahl, Kim Levin and Joseph Kosuth also "reacted aggressively" to the new style of painting. Kuspit, 1983, p. 43.

rhetorically, to what extent the return to figurative representation "cynically generate[s] a cultural climate of authoritarianism to familiarize us with the political realities to come."[332] Buchloh's warning that the new painting should be considered both symptom and prefiguration of the imminent return of political fascism is a serious allegation to make about the work of a group of young German artists. However, his prediction was actually borne out, if economic neoliberalism—the real challenge to the political left that emerged in the late twentieth century—is substituted for the spectre of fascism that Buchloh raised. As the 1980s progressed, neo-expressionist painting was increasingly associated with the newly wealthy beneficiaries of *laissez-faire* economic liberalism.

The German *Neue Wilden*, along with their counterparts in Italy and the United States, rode a boom in the art market that lasted from the 1970s until the crash of 1990. An incredible chart in Christopher Wood's *The Great Art Boom 1976–1990* shows that the number of artworks sold at auction for over £1 million rocketed from a single work in 1979 to 318 in 1989.[333] Immendorff, and his similarly flamboyant contemporaries like Julian Schnabel, became millionaires and media sensations within a few years: a generation of rock star artists who epitomised the materialistic market-driven excesses of the 1980s.

Most apologists for Immendorff's work connect his famous series of *Café Deutschland* paintings of 1978–84 to his earlier conceptual and performative practice via a vaguely conceived notion of radical politics, while refraining from conducting a precise examination of the actual political stance articulated in Immendorff's later work. As a result, he has a dual political reputation: as a leftist radical whose best-known paintings took the Cold War division of Germany as their major theme, and as an art star of the 1980s who directly benefited from the suppression of the political left by emergent neoliberal capitalism. In 1983, Harald Szeemann defended Immendorff's leftist reputation, claiming his "activism *with* art of previous years, brought about an activism *within* art" that culminated in the space of *Café Deutschland*: "a disco-dive . . . refashioned into a battlefield of ideologies."[334]

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[332] Buchloh, 1981, p. 40.
[333] Wood, 1997, p. 10.
[334] Szeemann, 1984, p. 33 and p. 34, emphasis in original.

Immendorff acknowledged that his approach to politics had changed significantly: "I no longer ask in relation to my work: 'For whom?' But: 'What comes out of me?'"[335] However, like Szeemann he insisted that despite abandoning his activist identity in favour of self-expression, and despite his active participation in "the materialist framework of art," he still regarded himself as a political painter: "because a political thread goes like a red thread through my life and work."[336] Robert Storr echoed Szeemann's claims when he argued in 2004 that:

> in Immendorff, we find not the antithesis of the conceptual art practices of the 1960s and 1970s, as is sometimes thought, but, rather, a uniquely anarchic— playful as well as political—variant of that tendency.[337]

Immendorff's *Café Deutschland* paintings are crammed with symbols, each of which is utterly overburdened with conventional meaning. Eagles, gun turrets, swastikas, five-pointed stars, the Brandenburg Gate, the German flag and the hammer and sickle all appear regularly in Immendorff's imaginary café, which was loosely based on Rattinger Hof, a punk disco in Düsseldorf.[338] The sheer number of symbols in each work renders any kind of political statement incoherent. For example in *Café Deutschland I*, 1978, Immendorff showed himself on the left of the composition dressed half in a black suit and half in jeans and a singlet, dancing with a stiletto-wearing redhead under an eagle holding a swastika in its claws (fig. 73). In the centre of the composition, A. R. Penck, the East German artist who was Immendorff's friend and collaborator, reaches his right hand through a concrete block wall while grasping a fistful of paintbrushes in his left. On the right of the composition, suited figures sit at a table draped in a German flag with a hammer and sickle drawn on it, while a man in the background flirts with a woman who is inexplicably naked. In other works from the series (for example, *Winter—Café Deutschland*, 1978), Immendorff chose to represent the Cold War as a quantity of snow and ice. The symbolism in these works is painfully literal, and so conventional as to be utterly banal. They signify "political art," while remaining closer to libidinous stream-of-consciousness than political statement. Despite the efforts of Szeemann and Storr, their idiosyncratic,

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[335] Immendorff, 1996, p. 256.
[336] Immendorff, 1996, p. 256 and p. 255.
[337] Storr, 2004, p. 63.
[338] Elliott, 1984, p. 6.

expressionistic and surrealistic tendencies can hardly be reconciled with the critique of bourgeois individualism launched by the leftist avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. Far from staging a coherent challenge to the political establishment, these works retreat into narcissism. Far from manifesting a continuation of leftist politics into the 1980s, they chart its disintegration.

Stevenson's *Call Me Immendorff* tracked how, in the West, the radical neoliberal right supplanted the countercultural left at some point in or around the 1970s. Linking Immendorff's Auckland residency—which came as a direct result of his superstar status and the success of his expressionist and politically vacuous paintings in the booming art market of the 1980s—to New Zealand's concurrent economic revolution, the installation invited viewers to connect a number of dots. Such connections proved to be too uncomfortable for at least one viewer. Harald Szeemann, another German art superstar visiting Auckland who also happened to be Immendorff's defender, was invited to judge Auckland's 2002 Walters Prize. He unsurprisingly opted not to award the prize to Stevenson's *Call Me Immendorff*.

In Stevenson's installation, the accelerating market value of Immendorff's work, the Lange government's landslide victory in the 1984 election, and the stockmarket boom that turned average New Zealanders into millionaires practically overnight were presented as the products of something resembling a Latourian network: a synchronic and unauthored coincidence of events, discourses, agents and infrastructures.[339] *Call Me Immendorff* presented the spectacular boom and bust of the stockmarket, the art market (which also crashed in 1990), and the roller-coaster fortunes of the Lange government (which imploded in acrimonious infighting during its second term), using the news reports that helped to generate the hype. As journalist Stephen Stratford has recalled, reporters were far from disinterested observers of the market boom:

> When I was working at the *Auckland Star*, pre-crash, staff members from all over the newspaper—sub-editors, sports reporters, junior sub-managers and

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[339] See Latour, 2005b.

sub-junior managers would all crowd around to check the latest share prices—to see how their portfolio of Equiticorp and Chase shares were doing.[340]

Invested (in this case quite literally) in the news on which they report, journalists are also subject to the climate of the time. Economists describe the aggregate emotional responses to events that constitute a powerful economic force in themselves as "animal spirits."[341] Media-driven feedback loops amplified both the highs and the lows—the melodrama of Immendorff's reception in New Zealand, the hedonism associated with economic deregulation and the stockmarket boom, the devastation of the crash—and Stevenson's installation presented the tangible means by which these feedback loops took effect. The newspaper clippings in *Call Me Immendorff*, anchored to a particular moment in time, were presented not just as a factual record of this moment but as actors in a physical infrastructure of information dissemination. The model of historical time presented in *Call Me Immendorff* was not founded on linear or sequential causation. The installation described a moment in which external forces—international market forces, personified by Immendorff as *Neue Wilden* art star—arrived in a local setting, triggering tumultuous change. Causation was shown as a self-organising aggregate of coincidences and feedback loops, a collective madness that took hold of a population and propelled it through a dramatic historical transition. The newspaper reports that were the focus of Stevenson's work were the means by which "animal spirits" became a force of influence and concrete action.

Marie-José Mondzain's concept of the *oikonomia* also describes a field of relationships that is the means by which history takes effect.[342] In *Call Me Immendorff* as in the *oikonomia*, history arises from the interaction between the concrete here-and-now and an external force (which in Stevenson's work was personified by Immendorff). Local events take shape as a distorted echo of forces that are distant in origin. It is the interplay between distant forces and their local proxies or manifestations that drives historical change in both Stevenson's works and in the Christian philosophy of history described by Mondzain. The join-the-dots quality of *Call Me Immendorff*, which could also be described as its "will to connect," allows an

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[340] Stratford, 2002, p. 105.
[341] See Akerlof and Shiller, 2009.
[342] Mondzain 2005, and see also Mondzain, 2014, for a concise discussion of the concept.

evocation of epic historical change to nebulously emerge from a story that is utterly parochial and completely embedded in the particularities of its place and time.

Marie-José Mondzain's concept of the *oikonomia*

Foster regarded the affective associations and coincidences presented in archival artworks as self-consciously absurd and ultimately ineffectual efforts to reinstate a lost historical order. Marie-José Mondzain, in contrast, has described a historical order that is predicated on such self-consciously "partial and provisional" connections. Mondzain's work is useful as a framework for considering Stevenson's practice primarily because of her particular focus on the *oikonomia* as a foundation for a Christian philosophy of history. I have argued that Stevenson's articulation of a non-linear model of historical time connects to his interest in the relationship between the material and immaterial (or in other words, between the profane and sacred) that was first expressed in his "parochial-supernatural" paintings of the 1980s. Mondzain showed how the *oikonomia* underpins a specifically Christian conception of the way that the sacred and eternal manifests in the profane world, and the way that temporal events connect into the overarching divine salvational plan.

Mondzain's *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* addressed the early development of a Christian philosophy of history. She demonstrated how this Christian worldview adapted ancient Greek terms and concepts and departed from Jewish theology, developing a novel model of historical time that hinges on the religion's particular interest in the interplay between the material and the immaterial. In this early Christian philosophy of history, as in Stevenson's works, we have part of the picture and must join the dots in order to glimpse an underpinning order which nevertheless remains unavailable to full comprehension. Mondzain's book narrated how this Christian philosophical system was developed by patristic scholars in the third century, and came under attack during the Byzantine iconoclastic controversies. It was during this later period that its defenders were forced to fully elaborate its central concepts. Mondzain extracted the

Christian meaning of the Greek term *oikonomia* from Byzantine documents such as the *Antirrhetics* of Nikephoros of Constantinople, which is her major source.[343]

In ancient Greece, the word *oikonomia* referred to a system of good management.[344] Mondzain described how it was adopted by Christian writers and used "almost uninterruptedly from the third century onward—that is, from the moment when patristic and conciliar thought first elaborated a truly Christian philosophy."[345] She showed how the Christian adaptation of the term transformed it into a system in which human legal, administrative, governmental and pedagogical practices were connected to an overarching but mysterious divine plan. The *oikonomia*, in short, is a field of relationships within which the sacred and the profane are linked. It is a deeply pragmatic system that facilitates the good management of an imperfect world. As Mondzain pointed out, such a system was necessary to a religion predicated on the conviction that divine truth is invisible to the human senses, and incomprehensible to the human mind:

> In order to be able to envisage a world radically founded on visibility, and starting from the conviction that whatever constitutes its essence and meaning is itself invisible, it proved essential to establish a system of thought that set the visible and invisible in relation to each other.[346]

The Christian *oikonomia*, therefore, is a system for relating the known and visible to the invisible and unknowable. Its central precedent was Christ's Incarnation, the moment in which an ineffable God condescended to become visible flesh. This concession to the human need for visibility was a divine act of pragmatic artifice. Having taken visible form, God was able to model a perfect human life and thereby

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[343] Mondzain notes that earlier translations of this and other texts have not acknowledged the full meaning of the term. The difficulty apparently stemmed from the seemingly heretical union of contradictory concepts that it encompasses, such as "divine providence," "lie" and "compromise." She writes: "In the most learned translations, the word economy is rendered by different terms such as incarnation, plan, design, administration, providence, responsibility, duties, compromise, lie, or guile, as is relevant, without the reader being warned of the return of the same Greek word—*oikonomia*—in each case." Mondzain, 2005, p. 13. In the following, I will use the original Greek term *oikonomia* to indicate this range of meanings and avoid confusion with the much narrower financial meaning of the contemporary term "economy."

[344] Mondzain dates this usage of the term to texts by Aristotle and Xenophon. Mondzain, 2005, p. 20.

[345] Mondzain, 2005, pp. 13–14.

[346] Mondzain, 2005, p. 3.

show a blind and fallen humanity the way to achieve salvation. Seen in this light, the Incarnation was an adaptation for persuasive purposes: a strategic translation of a novel idea into terms familiar to the audience. Such a pragmatic concession to prevailing conditions ensured that the message was heard, but it also constituted a compromise and a necessary distortion.

The *oikonomia* enables the compromise by which divine truth manifests in an imperfect world. In Mondzain's words, it is the "terrestrial and temporal practice of the truth."[347] In an echo of the Platonic relation between the real and the ideal, the *oikonomia* enables divine mystery to become visibly manifest. However, Mondzain is careful to qualify that this manifestation is always enigmatic. The *oikonomia* is:

> a manifestation in history, but it is not limited by history. It exceeds all strictly historical circumstances in order to reveal the meaning of history itself. The economy is the historical modality of the configuration of truth for fallen souls, and that until the end of time. . . . Once we are saved, we will see God no longer in the economic enigma adapted to our weakness, but 'face to face.'[348]

By relating the sacred and profane, the *oikonomia* reveals human activity and the visible world to be a distorted and enigmatic mirror of historical truth, which is the divine plan. As in its original Greek usage, the Christian *oikonomia* is a system for the management and administration of a reality that is both spiritual and material. Events in human history, according to this view, are an enigmatic representation of the mysterious supernatural order underpinning them, which will only be fully revealed at the apocalyptic end of time. This order is inconceivable to humans but, via the relationships established in the *oikonomia*, its presence can be glimpsed in fragments and clues.

Stevenson's work attempts to discern general historical forces by examining their particular local manifestation. As is Mondzain's *oikonomia*, the model of historical time he deploys is animated not by changes effected in linear sequence but by the interchange between a profane *inside* and an *outside* that is imagined to be

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[347] Mondzain, 2005, p. 49.
[348] Mondzain, 2005, p. 48–49.

supernatural. In Stevenson's works, certain historical events—or, more precisely, certain historical artefacts—are regarded as the products of, or openings onto *something else* that sits outside normal causation. The central conjecture of his work is that it may be possible to extrapolate from the known in order to make inferences about the unknown; or in other words, to reverse engineer causal information from these objects. This is an adaptation of a religious system of thought which insists that, despite an appearance of chaos and confusion, human lives are administrated by a mysterious overarching authority. Where for the faithful, God is this mysterious administrator, Stevenson's work centres on a metaphysical vacancy, a question mark around which history organises itself into legible patterns. This became apparent with his installations of the early 2000s. Moving from *Genealogy*'s rejection of simple linear causation, *Call Me Immendorff* and *This is the Trekka* both explored the way that local events related to broader forces of influence that were never clearly identified, and were always in some way beyond comprehension.

This is the Trekka, 2003

Stevenson was New Zealand's representative at the 50th Venice Biennale with his installation *This is the Trekka*, 2003. The project's co-curator Robert Leonard described how it, like *Call Me Immendorff*, plunged viewers "into an oddly inflected interpretive space."[349] Stevenson agreed: "the relationship between the objects was confused. It was important it remained like that, without any extra labelling. It was up to the viewer to imagine how these things could relate together."[350] *This is the Trekka* presented New Zealand's only mass-produced vehicle, an agricultural utility which was essentially a low budget version of a British Land Rover, to the Biennale's audience. The vehicle was displayed at the centre of an arrangement of objects reminiscent of a 1970s trade show (fig. 74). As I outline below, Stevenson's installation could be (and was) interpreted as a work about nationalism. Using Mondzain's theory of the Christian *oikonomia* as a framework, I will argue that it was also, and perhaps primarily, an elaboration of a model of historical time derived from premodern Christian philosophy. As did *Call Me Immendorff*, the work presented a number of coincidences and resemblances: dots that viewers were invited to connect.

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[349] Leonard, 2003a, p. 57.
[350] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Leonard, 2003a, p. 59.

Nationalism in *This is the Trekka*

This is the Trekka was extremely conscious of the nationalistic framework in which it was produced and situated. Stevenson's response to the invitation to represent a country that he hadn't lived in since 1994, when his work had proved to be thoroughly incompatible with the nationalist preoccupations of the local art criticism, was sardonic. His installation addressed the nationalist trope of New Zealand's distance from the rest of the world at the very outset. Entering Stevenson's exhibition, visitors were faced with a reproduction of an image by the London-born New Zealand photographer Marti Friedlander. Friedlander's *Demo*, 1968, documented a protest against the Soviet repression of Czechoslovakia's "Prague Spring." Standing in Auckland's Aotea Square, the protesters faced the camera and also into the sun. Blinded and bemused, squinting at the world, they impotently proffered their handmade placards. For Stevenson, this photograph condensed the "strange, confused" politics of the time.[351] Calling on the New Zealand government to "Support the Czech Communists," the protesters in Friedlander's image established a view of Cold War politics that was more complicated than a simple communism-capitalism binary.

However, positioned to greet visitors entering New Zealand's enclave in Venice, Friedlander's image of the protesters—squinting and gesticulating with their placards—also comically reenacted the fixed horizon-ward stare of New Zealand painter Bill Hammond's signature anthropomorphised birds, forever looking outwards from their island prison, or poet Charles Brasch's melancholy nationalism with "face turned always to the sea."[352] The tropes of distance and isolation, as Francis Pound wrote in his 2009 book *The Invention of New Zealand*, haunted much of New Zealand's artistic modernism.[353] Restless horizon-gazing, lonely isolation, rootlessness in a hostile landscape: the very *lack* of cultural belonging has itself become a mournful kind of cultural belonging for the descendants of New Zealand's

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[351] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Niall, 2003.
[352] Brasch, 1945, p. 142.
[353] See Pound, 2009, and particularly pp. 38–50.

European colonisers, powerful in its tragic air of displacement, loss and stoicism.[354] As curator Justin Paton wearily remarked in 1999:

> Ah, the beach, the tides, the landscape adrift with cultural ghosts. Have we been here sometime before? We certainly have, in a culture whose artists and writers have returned again and again to themes of distance and isolation, like a dog with an itch it can't scratch.[355]

As Pound and others have argued, this well-worn trope of Pākehā anxiety resolved into a competitive, defensively nationalistic modernism during the middle decades of the twentieth century.[356] Stevenson's *This is the Trekka* examined the economic nationalism that paralleled this cultural one. The narrative underpinning his installation is a kind of prequel to that of *Call Me Immendorff*. It concerns New Zealand's economic protectionism during the period of the post-War "Keynesian consensus" among Western nations.

Stevenson's *Call Me Immendorff* addressed the revolutionary changes enacted by the 1984 Lange government, which blew apart the network of tariffs and trade regulations colloquially known as "fortress New Zealand." One of the products of the earlier period's impenetrable fortress of regulations was the Trekka. The car was produced as a direct response to import substitution policies devised by the architect of New Zealand's post-War economy, William Sutch, which were largely maintained by Robert Muldoon, David Lange's predecessor as Prime Minister.[357] In a 1975 tribute to Sutch, scholar and educator Jack Shallcrass wrote that he:

> has been for four decades a major influence in shaping New Zealand economic policy. . . . his influence on the recent diversification of the New Zealand

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[354] The work of Māori modernists from the same period tells a different story. See Skinner, 2008.
[355] Paton, 1999, p. 46.
[356] See also Leonard, 1992.
[357] Muldoon's "Think Big" projects, for example, adhered to Sutch's import substitution strategy. Muldoon aimed to increase New Zealand's energy self-sufficiency and diversify its economy by investing in a range of large-scale energy and primary processing industrial facilities, such as a synthetic petrol plant at Motunui, and the Clyde Dam, a hydro-electric facility on the Clutha River.

economy is his most significant structural contribution to New Zealand's nationhood.[358]

Sutch's long-running project was to reduce the New Zealand economy's dependence on agricultural export. As the UK's "offshore farm," New Zealand's economy was almost entirely dependent on the export of agricultural products under preferential trade agreements with its colonial parent. It was still, in Sutch's term, a "colonial economy." In 1960, he wrote that "ninety-five per cent of the value of [New Zealand's] exports come from grass which is processed by two animals, the cow and the sheep, to produce four main products, wool, meat, butter, and cheese."[359] Sutch's concern about New Zealand's economic vulnerability was validated by the UK's decision to join the European Economic Community (EEC, now the European Union) in 1973. Severing the colonial ties that poet Rex Fairburn called "the umbilical cord of butter-fat," the UK's reorientation towards Europe and away from its former colonial possessions pushed New Zealand towards economic independence.[360] Sutch advocated implementing a programme of import substitution as a means of transitioning towards increased self-sufficiency. A strategy for building local industry, import substitution policies encourage local manufacturers to create their own versions of products that would otherwise be imported. Import substitution policies typically take the form of taxes imposed on imported goods. Sutch argued that such policies would stimulate the local economy, create jobs, grow local industry, reduce reliance on international trade and—eventually—diversify the range of New Zealand-made products available for export. In the words of Trekka historian and journalist Todd Niall, "fortress New Zealand" was "a wall of import protection behind which a self-sufficient industrial nation could grow."[361]

The Trekka was a tangible manifestation of Sutch's theories. It was a low-cost locally-made substitute for the imported cars that were rendered prohibitively expensive by New Zealand's isolating network of tariffs and import restrictions. Produced by Motor Holdings, the company of Auckland entrepreneur Noel Turner, it grew to precisely fit its "ecological niche" in the policy landscape of late-1960s New

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[358] Shallcrass, 1975, p. 3.
[359] Sutch, 1960, both p. 6.
[360] Fairburn, 1934, p. 214.
[361] Niall, 2004, p. 219.

Zealand. Niall has related how Sutch and Turner had a long-standing friendship, and when Sutch retired from his public service role in 1965 Motor Holdings retained him as a private consultant.[362] With Sutch's support, "Turner was able to manoeuvre his business into line with Government policy almost as quickly as it was taking shape."[363] Pragmatic to its core, the Trekka was New Zealand's answer to the British Land Rover, but it was produced as cheaply and efficiently as possible. In a South Auckland workshop set up as an assembly line, a New Zealand-made body was bolted onto an imported engine and chassis produced by the Czech company Škoda. As Niall relates, "the cheapest way to produce [the body] was simply making flat sheet panels. You know, when a vehicle has got flat sides, a flat end and a flat top, it's going to come out looking like a Land Rover."[364]

Sutch's vision of increased economic self-sufficiency for New Zealand was given additional credence by the Cold War nuclear threat hanging over the world, and by the international oil price shocks of 1973 and 1978. During the 1970s, a fantasy of New Zealand as a post-nuclear survivalist haven emerged, which as Alan Rodgers-Smith notes, tapped "a very deep strain in New Zealand political and cultural life that relishes [a] rustic survivalist dream of living off the land, anticipating imminent *schadenfreude* as the technocratic order of the City collapses."[365] The Trekka's marketing appealed to the pragmatic "number eight wire" stereotype of New Zealand masculinity. It also fed into this fantasy of survivalist self-sufficiency, in which the geographic isolation that had plagued the country would finally become its saving grace and tough, pragmatic, agrarian independence would ensure New Zealand's survival while global power centres were annihilated in nuclear war.

The Trekka, however, was a very short-lived success. Manufactured between 1966–72, only around 2300 vehicles were produced.[366] Tailored, as it was, to be a "perfect exploitation of [government] regulations," the Trekka was unable to compete when

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[362] Niall, 2004, p. 130.
[363] Niall, 2004, p. 130.
[364] Todd Niall, quoted in Kremer, 2003, p. 19.
[365] Rodgers-Smith, 2003, p. 84. Rodgers-Smith also observes that this strain of apocalyptic thinking extended into official New Zealand government planning well into the 1980s. See Rodgers-Smith, 2003, p. 84, n. 2.
[366] Niall, 2004, p. 107 and p. 227; Todd Niall, quoted in Kremer, 2003, p. 23.

changes to import tariffs allowed Japanese vehicles into the New Zealand market.[367] Despite the assembly line set-up in the Motor Holdings factory, New Zealand's tiny population could not muster the economies of scale necessary for the Fordist mass production that Noel Turner's enterprise mimicked. A low-budget version of vehicles produced by larger companies for larger markets, the Trekka was not competitive. As Todd Niall relates, the car's primary appeal was always its low cost: "it's quite a frightening thing to have on the road, to be honest."[368]

Stevenson's *This is the Trekka* emphasised the irony of the Trekka's dual New Zealand-Czech heritage. With its mechanical parts imported from communist Czechoslovakia—behind the Iron Curtain—New Zealand's national car was actually a product of opportunistic alliances that rode roughshod over Cold War political divisions. As Stevenson dryly observed, like nationalist New Zealand art of the time, the Trekka's "key components were sourced overseas."[369] The bonnet of the reconditioned Trekka which was the centrepiece of his installation in Venice was propped open to reveal its Škoda engine (fig. 75). A circular sign bearing the kiwi "New Zealand made" logo on one side and "ČSSR" on the other rotated lazily above the roof of the car (figs. 76–77). While ostensibly part of the First World, and while governed by Robert Muldoon's ostensibly right-wing administration, life in New Zealand during the 1970s was oddly similar to the communist Second World. In his successor David Lange's words, Muldoon ran the country "like a Polish shipyard."[370] Stevenson remembers it as:

> a time when the government looked after you from the moment you were born—Plunket, free health service—till the moment you retired and died. My father . . . had a government-paid job, we lived in a house that was built by the government, everything was supplied by the government.[371]

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[367] Niall, 2004, p. 213.
[368] Todd Niall, quoted in Kremer, 2003, p. 39.
[369] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Leonard, 2003b. In a further twist to the story, William Sutch was also recently revealed to have had surreptitious communist connections. He was charged with acting as a spy for the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB) in 1974 after being arrested during a clandestine meeting with a KGB agent, but was acquitted due to insufficient evidence. In 2014, new evidence emerged which identifies Sutch as a KGB recruit who had been working for the organisation for twenty-four years, bizarrely enough under the codename "Maori." Kitchen, 2014.
[370] David Lange, quoted in Swarts, 2013, p. 95.
[371] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Niall, 2003.

In a complex Cold War political environment, New Zealand was poised to cut its colonial ties and "come of age" as an economically independent nation. Sutch steered the country towards import substitution as a means of achieving this goal, and the Trekka was very much a product of his ideas. However, while "fortress New Zealand" aspired to achieve US-style Fordist industrial production, Sutch's policies created conditions that were closer to the highly regulated industries of communism. Against the triumphant rhetoric that positions the fall of the Berlin Wall as capitalism's natural victory over its inferior ideological other, in New Zealand, it seems, entrepreneurial capitalism was quite literally bolted onto the fruits of communist industry, and the engine of economic independence was imported from Czechoslovakia.

Stevenson's *This is the Trekka* poked gentle fun at the Trekka's awkward derivativeness, and the naive optimism of New Zealand's ambition to compete internationally with this manifestly uncompetitive product. The wry, self-deprecating humour of his installation recalls that of comedian-musicians Flight of the Conchords (famously "New Zealand's fourth most popular folk-comedy duo"), who came to prominence around this time with an HBO television series about their own efforts to crack the US market.[372] The humour of Stevenson's project also deflated the competitive and commerce-oriented nationalism of its own funders and supporters. *This is the Trekka* was made for New Zealand's second outing at the Venice Biennale, and the government arts funding body Creative New Zealand (CNZ) was determined to demonstrate the value for money of their cultural export. New Zealand's participation at Venice was framed publicly as an opportunity to increase the country's visibility on an international stage, with an eye to tourism and export markets. As CNZ chief executive Elizabeth Kerr put it: "It is very important to let people know the exhibition is from New Zealand, so we are not just taking the visual arts exhibition to Venice—New Zealand is going to the biennale and that's how we see the project."[373] The project's promotional material, designed by Eion Abernethy, managed admirably to convey New Zealand's national "brand" while also indicating

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[372] Flight of the Conchords' success has effectively created a new international "brand" for New Zealand comedy. Formed in 1998, they began to receive attention internationally at the 2003 Edinburgh Fringe Festival and for *Flight of the Conchords*, 2004, a BBC radio series. In 2007 their self-titled television series premiered on HBO in the US.

[373] Elizabeth Kerr, quoted in Herrick, 2002a.

something of the comical mismatch between the aspirations of the Trekka's manufacturers and the car's actual capacities. A set of posters, postcards and the exhibition invitation were designed around the motif of a tyre track in the shape of the famous silver fern logo worn by the All Blacks rugby team (figs. 78–79). Riffing off the absurdity of bringing a car to Venice—the city of canals—the designs show a variety of Venetian scenes marked by the tyre tracks of the Trekka. True to its own original (and hugely optimistic) marketing slogan, the Trekka "goes most anywhere" including, it seems, straight across the surface of the water.

In an essay published in the pamphlet accompanying *This is the Trekka*, the project's curator Robert Leonard wrote that "Stevenson always offers an outsider perspective, a view at odds with the prevailing mindset."[374] For Leonard, this oblique perspective is what characterises Stevenson's practice, positioning him as a marginal observer perpetually at odds with the ideas and practices of the cultural centre. Reiterating his own earlier interpretation of Stevenson's works of the 1990s, David Craig also argued in 2003 that their "New Zealand dimension" is in their "wilfully provincial attitude . . . [which] was an attitude very much learnt here."[375] For Craig, Stevenson's works "have enacted a version of what Terry Smith called the Provincialism Problem."[376] I agree that Stevenson's works are structured around a failure of adequate representation, but I disagree with the exclusively geopolitical terms Craig uses. These terms limit Stevenson's practice to a commentary on the nationalism that, in 2003, he had been struggling to escape for well over a decade. Craig has consistently interpreted Stevenson's works as the self-conscious products of a marginal culture that is structurally unable to overcome its own secondary and derivative status. In my view, the failure of representation that Stevenson's practice explores is primarily historical (and metaphysical), and only incidentally geopolitical.

The work of William Sutch, as Jack Shallcrass observed, was a long-running investigation of "the theme of the impact of an imperial power on a colony."[377] Sutch demonstrated "the very great extent to which New Zealand's economic and, therefore, social, decisions are made outside New Zealand." He recognised that the New

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[374] Leonard, 2003b.
[375] Craig, 2003, p. 63.
[376] Craig, 2003, p. 63.
[377] Shallcrass, 1975, p. 9.

Zealand economy was a system shaped and determined by external forces and influences. Historian and postcolonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty has described how this colonial power structure—where local events and practices are understood primarily according to the terms of an external authority—also impacts the colony's perception of their own historicity.[378] Chakrabarty has observed how India, as a former colony, has had the history of its coloniser imposed as a master narrative, a template for correct historical development. The colony is understood as a nation-in-transition, a not-yet nation striving to achieve the level of civilisation exemplified by the coloniser. In this linear model, the international example operates as an external measure of the colony's validity, progress, and its historicity. Terms such as "pre-Industrial," "post-Industrial" or "developing economy" measure historical progress according to this linear developmental scale, on which, as Chakrabarty points out, Western Europe (or, now, the United States) occupies the "most developed" end. It is the colony's movement towards this goal, or in other words its increasing resemblance to the external model, that makes its history identifiable as such.

Stevenson's *This is the Trekka* took this colonial power imbalance as an analogy for a power imbalance on a cosmic scale. He perceived the New Zealand economy of the late 1960s, and its effort to overcome its colonial status (by, ironically enough, mimicking international industrial processes), as an analogy for a theory of history. The colonial logic that Sutch battled, a logic which would always position New Zealand as secondary to the "more advanced" UK, strangely parallels a Christian worldview in which humanity's conditions of possibility are always pre-determined by an external authority and exemplar. The work of Marie-José Mondzain demonstrates that the Christian philosophy of history developed in the third century regarded human history as a system shaped and determined by utterly external—in fact, supernatural—forces. In this system, history is the movement of humanity towards its reconciliation with the deity, which will occur at the moment of the eschaton. In this Christian worldview, history is recognised as such by an event's resemblance to a divine precedent. As Mondzain argues, profane events take on sacred (i.e., historical) significance when they echo the overarching divine plan, and the *oikonomia* is the field of relationships in which such connections are made.

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[378] Chakrabarty, 1992.

This is the Trekka and the _oikonomia_

The Trekka's emphatic incongruity with its surroundings in Venice is key to my interpretation of Stevenson's installation. This comical mismatch, which indicated the gulf between the aspirations of the vehicle's original manufacturers and the actual capacities of their product, parallels the imperfect correspondence of the sacred and profane in Mondzain's description of the _oikonomia_. Presented in the style of a low-budget industrial trade fair exhibit _c._1970, _This is the Trekka_ antagonised its architectural setting.[379] The project was installed in the eighteenth-century neoclassical church La Maddalena, on Venice's La Strada Nova. La Maddalena is an unusual round building with a domed roof and central lantern which recalls the Roman Pantheon. Its grand front entrance, flanked on the exterior by pairs of ionic columns, is located directly opposite the chancel and altar, creating a strong classical symmetry within the building's circular form. The nave's hexagonal floor plan is established by six pairs of ionic columns, which alternate with four recessed side chapels. Each chapel contains a painting, and figurative sculptures stand in niches between the pairs of columns. Stevenson's installation occupied this elegant religious building with aggressive disregard for its functionality and its classical symmetry.

In the centre of La Maddalena's chequerboard pink and grey marble tiled floor stood a reconditioned 1968 Trekka which had been laboriously returned to working order and restored to gleaming near-showroom condition. The car was oriented at an angle to the central symmetry of the church, with its bonnet pointed towards the left of the chancel and an oblique view of its tailgate facing visitors entering the church. Both bonnet and tailgate were open, inviting inspection of the engine and load capacity. Suspended above the car was a red and white, circular, mechanically rotating sign, dominating the space at nearly two-and-a-half metres in diameter. One side of the sign bore the Kiwi logo of the "Buy New Zealand Made" campaign, and the other side read "ČSSR," the acronym of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (figs. 76–77). A five-metre-high wall of nearly 500 stacked cardboard butter boxes, printed with the

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[379] Stevenson's archived research material includes images of stands at the Leipziger Frühjahrsmesse (Leipzig Spring Fair) of 1958, 1970 and 1978, from which he borrowed some aspects of the design of his _Trade Stand Desk_ and rotating sign. MSS, Trekka Research, Cold War and Dairy Industry box 2, Leipziger Frühjahrsmesse photographs, 1958–78.

1968 design for New Zealand's dairy export packaging, completely blocked the view of the chancel (fig. 80).[380] Opposite the large butter box wall and partially obscuring the entrance to the church was a second, smaller wall of boxes, forming a backdrop to a piece of furniture that was clearly handmade but distinctively modernist in design (fig. 81). Halfway between a display table and a shelving unit, it was fashioned from several sheets of fibreboard which cantilevered out horizontally from a large central logo of the letters "ČNZ" (i.e., "Čzech New Zealand" as a play on the project's funding body Creative New Zealand) made from white polystyrene. Other items were positioned around the nave of the church: a bizarre 1949 hydraulic computer called the MONIAC on loan from Wellington's Reserve Bank Museum, another low stack of butter boxes bearing two 1970s televisions which were both playing a twenty-minute AV loop of electoral advertising from New Zealand's 1975 election, and a three-dimensional bar graph titled *Statistics Tower*, also made from cardboard boxes painted bright pink and green, which illustrated the predominance of agricultural products in New Zealand's export market of the 1960s (figs. 82–83).[381]

At no point was Stevenson's installation sympathetic to its site. The modernist design of the displayed objects jarred awkwardly with the church's elegant neoclassicism. The central functional and aesthetic focus of the church, the chancel, was rudely obscured by the monolithic wall of butter boxes, which also extended nearly a metre out of alignment with the church's symmetrical plan. The position of the Trekka, with its rear facing towards the entrance and its tailgate propped brazenly open, also seemed vaguely inappropriate. The lurid pink and green boxes of *Statistics Tower* were stacked immediately in front of, and apparently completely oblivious to, the painting in one of the recessed chapels. *This is the Trekka*'s drastic aesthetic discrepancy with its architectural site was further underlined by the clunky, handmade quality of its objects and signage. Predominantly constructed from cardboard boxes and polystyrene, everything was clearly handmade to a high "professional" finish. Even the Trekka itself had clearly been laboriously restored by hand to its state of gleaming, near-factory finish. The vehicle's restoration was done by Stevenson's

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[380] MSS, Trekka Research, Cold War and Dairy Industry box 2, "New Designs for Dairy Produce Bulk Packs," *New Zealand Dairy Exporter* XLIII, no. 12, June 1968, p. 23.
[381] This was the MONIAC's first appearance in Stevenson's work. As I discuss in chapter four, the computer was later given a starring role when he recreated it as *The Fountain of Prosperity*, 2006.

family members and residents of his home town of Inglewood. Stevenson's father Alan recalled that many tradespeople in Inglewood helped out with the project:

> we're just a small town of about 3000, but a lovely little community and everybody works together. So you could just go up to the engineering company just up the road and say, what about sandblasting and painting the chassis? And they'd say, OK, send it up. And that happened all along the way. So it's really been an Inglewood project.[382]

Carefully handmade and lovingly restored, the installation had the feeling of a low-budget industrial exhibit, generated by an exhibitor with the aspiration but not the means to achieve mass produced machine-finished products. Installed in La Maddalena, the work seemed to have been beamed in from another dimension.

Mondzain's concept of the *oikonomia* is a Christian reconfiguration of the Platonic distinction between the real and the ideal. However, unlike Plato's, it is a pragmatic system for finding workable equivalences between one's goal and the resources at one's disposal. That there is a gulf between actuality and aspiration is acknowledged and accommodated by this very forgiving system. However, as Mondzain makes clear, in the Christian worldview it is the aspiration—the goal of redemption and salvation for humanity—that gives form and meaning to the events of human history. Despite their human imperfection, Christians are expected to do their best to mimic or approximate the divine perfection that was modelled by Christ. It is this underlying motivation for human action that endows it with historical significance, because it brings humanity closer to its ultimate goal: the divine truth that was partially revealed in the person of Christ and will be fully revealed with his apocalyptic return. In Stevenson's *This is the Trekka*, this gulf between the material world and the immaterial deity was echoed by the gulf between the local product and its inaccessible international model: the British Land Rover. The here-and-now is an imperfect representation, a surrogate or stand-in, for an inaccessible ideal. New Zealand's regime of import substitution made local industry into a distorted reflection of

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[382] Alan Stevenson, quoted in Niall, 2003. The Trekka restoration team was: Todd Niall, Eric Allerby, Chris Corney, Bernard Duli, Don Colbert, Alan Stevenson and the Stevenson family, Small Brothers, Inglewood Engineering, Inglewood Upholstery, McGregor Electrical Services Inglewood, Clarry O'Byrne, Noel Hodge, Herman Noack Jr, Richard Wormley, Arturas Gronau and Fritz Schmidt-Bleek.

international practices. The Trekka was a low-budget approximation of the prohibitively priced Land Rover, and its mode of production mimicked the Fordist assembly line, despite lacking the economies of scale that render this process efficient.

Mondzain describes how, by means of the relationships established in the *oikonomia*, events and objects in the visible world can be understood as a distorted reflection or imperfect manifestation of the divine plan. They are clues to the overarching cosmic order which a blind and fallen humanity cannot otherwise apprehend. *This is the Trekka* thematised the action of finding (or approximating) equivalence. The work paid attention to how one thing could stand in for, represent, or be traded for, another thing. In New Zealand's automotive market, the Trekka stood in for the Land Rover. Similarly, the walls of Warholian butter boxes in Stevenson's installation also stood in for other objects. The five-metre high stack of boxes Stevenson constructed in front of La Maddalena's chancel consisted of two overlapping walls: the larger, rear wall of 324 boxes represented the approximate volume of foreign-exchanged butter required to import a Land Rover at the time the Trekka was in production. The smaller wall of 169 boxes represented the volume of butter required to purchase the then-most expensive international artwork acquired by a New Zealand public art gallery, which was British artist Barbara Hepworth's *Torso II (Torcello)*, 1958, acquired by Auckland City Art Gallery in 1963 (fig. 76).[383] This is an insane kind of accountancy where the cost of imports is measured in 56-pound units of export-quality butter. The walls of butter boxes evoked fortress New Zealand's impenetrable walls of import tariffs and trade regulations, and also the "butter mountain" which it was feared would result from overproduction without a ready export market. They also formed a kind of three-dimensional graph. They demonstrated the cost of imports like the Hepworth sculpture and the Land Rover to New Zealand's agricultural economy, and thereby also the savings that could be made by investing in local industry, or supporting local artists as opposed to purchasing expensive international art. Stevenson's butter box walls therefore illustrated some of the absurdities of the import substitution scheme (will local artists be paid for their work in butter?), and

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[383] The cost of acquiring Hepworth's sculpture was a matter of considerable controversy at the time. See *Quarterly of the Auckland City Art Gallery*, 1971.

also the bizarre equivalences that are generated when a local system is regarded as a surrogate for an absent ideal.

Stevenson's works of the early 2000s—*Genealogy, Call Me Immendorff* and *This is the Trekka*—operate as origin stories of sorts. Each recounts an aspect of the New Zealand histories that played out during Stevenson's childhood and early adulthood: the time that he was occupying the "parallel universe" of an exclusive religious community. The historical trajectory traced by these three projects describes how Cold War logic gave way to the increasingly widespread influence of neoliberal economic theory, and the international rise of the radical right. The join-the-dots quality of Stevenson's installations—particularly *Call Me Immendorff* and *This is the Trekka*—encourages the paranoiac recognition of parallels and coincidences. Historical events are presented in a way that makes them seem like clues to a nebulously sketched epic terrain, or echoes of a larger and perhaps cosmic order.

In *Call Me Immendorff,* forces beyond the comprehension or control of human agents seem to have directed history. Immendorff's transformation from leftist activist to *Neue Wilden* art star seemed to happen almost without him being aware of it, and New Zealand's 1984 Lange government introduced neoliberal economic policies that were entirely at odds with their socialist values. Stevenson's work took the movements of the market and the newspaper's reports as expressions of broader forces of influence: forces such as the population's aggregate emotional state or "animal spirits," which is too omnipresent to be perceived or comprehended directly. With *This is the Trekka*, Stevenson examined the nature of the relationship between local events and external influences. He framed this relationship in terms of a system of import substitution, and I have argued that it also closely resembles Mondzain's description of the premodern Christian *oikonomia*. *This is the Trekka*'s emphatic incongruity with its elegant Venetian context indicated the gulf between aspiration and actuality that New Zealand's regime of import substitution was supposed to bridge. Proposing equivalences between absurdly different things, Stevenson's installation ultimately indicated the distance between the import and its substitute. In the *oikonomia*, as in these works, we are provided with an enigmatic fragment of the whole picture and must join the dots in order to glimpse an underpinning order which nevertheless remains—for the most part—resolutely inaccessible.

Stevenson's installations of the early 2000s indicated a turning point in his practice. To borrow Foster's words again, they were more institutive than destructive, and they examined history with a "will to connect." The narratives that emerged, nebulously, from the dots Stevenson invited his viewers to connect were epic. However, the connections formed were as much invention as discovery: equally retroactive and revisionist. As I will elaborate in chapter four, what Tessa Laird called the "certain unquantifiable value" of craft is essential to Stevenson's process.[384] *Genealogy's* careful forgeries, the laboriously hand-made copies of newspaper articles in *Call Me Immendorff*, and the lovingly hand-restored Trekka: all of these objects emphatically indicated their own artifice. They evidenced an approach to history that was a project of fabrication as much as it was an effort to perceive.

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[384] Laird, 2000, p. 45.

Chapter four: Repetition

"It's not about finger-pointing, it's about seduction."[385]

The December 1980 issue of *Art in America* included a selection of responses, written by various art industry luminaries, to the blockbuster Picasso retrospective then on show at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Among these published comments was a remarkable statement:

> How can you radically renew something that had an extraordinary power in its own time, but has since lived off the myth that that power quite naturally generated as it passed into art history? That is to say, how can you take all that artistic power, strip it of the veneer of art-historical acceptance which so distorts its meaning, and make it stand in the present time? I wanted to bring the art absolutely up to date, to retrieve it from art history and give it life. . . . I tried to trespass beyond that invisible barrier that no one is allowed to cross; I wanted to dwell within the act of the painting's creation, get involved with the making of the work, put my hand within it and by that act encourage the individual viewer to challenge it, deal with it and thus see it in its dynamic raw state as it was being made, not as a piece of history.[386]

The speaker was Tony Shafrazi, the charismatic Iranian-born Armenian who has been running a commercial gallery in New York since the late 1970s. Shafrazi was referring to an infamous moment in his former life as an artist and anti-war activist. In 1974, he walked into MoMA and spray-painted the nonsensical phrase "KILL LIES ALL" across Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937. Shafrazi had planned to quote the phrase "Lies, all lies" from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. However, he had only written "lies all" when he ran out of space on the painting, so he spontaneously prefixed his message with the word "kill." At the time, the action was framed as a protest against the Vietnam War. However, Shafrazi's above justification for his strange act of

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[385] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013. Stevenson noted that this observation about his work was made by a member of the German art collectors' group Twodo.

[386] Tony Shafrazi, in Jacobus *et al*., 1980, p. 15.

creative destruction presents it as a protest against a way of perceiving history as much as a straightforward anti-war demonstration. His passionately incoherent verbalisation—in the end, more similar to the chaotic prose of *Finnegans Wake* than the direct quote would have been—seems to have been primarily targeted at the museum's institutionalisation of culture, and the ossification of protest into an artefact of (art) history. Shafrazi, whose radicality was nourished by the countercultural politics of the time, pitted art's critical dynamism against dogmatic institutional conservatism.

Shafrazi is a recurrent character in Stevenson's work of the 2000s. His *Guernica* action, for example, was the subject of Stevenson's drawing *Untitled (Guernica)*, 2002 (fig. 84). The drawing accurately replicates a photograph of MoMA's conservators frantically working to remove the graffiti from the surface of the painting, or in Stevenson's phrase, "de-revolutionising" it.[387] Particularly in light of Stevenson's interest in the rise of neoconservatism into the 1980s, this moment—in which Shafrazi's protest was erased and the institution's authority was rapidly re-established—reads like a depiction of the death of the counterculture. However, Stevenson's political affiliation is unclear. *Untitled (Guernica)* has the same mournful, distant quality as his drawings of the 1990s. It seems more a melancholy observation of the failure of the countercultural uprising than a call to arms or an effort to re-establish what Shafrazi saw as art's critical politics.

This chapter analyses key installations Stevenson produced in 2005–2007. *The Smiles are Not Smiles*, 2005, *The Fountain of Prosperity*, 2006, and *Persepolis 2530*, 2007, all centre on accurate sculptural replicas of historical artefacts. As I demonstrated in chapter three, with earlier works Stevenson re-presented historical material as a form of evidence or a means of revelation. The newspaper clippings in *Call Me Immendorff*, 2000–2002, related an obscure local story as a cipher for a larger historical transition, and the car presented in *This is the Trekka*, 2003, stood as a distorted echo of an inaccessible original, the product of distant influences entering a local system. These multi-part installations seemed to invite viewers to "join the dots," describing an epic terrain and connecting economic events to cosmological

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[387] Stevenson, 2008b, p. 45. Shafrazi was also a central protagonist in Stevenson's installation *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?*, 2002.

speculation. The works I discuss in this chapter are focused much more precisely, in that they target a central object. In this chapter I analyse Stevenson's approach to representation, by which I mean his methods and strategies for making these sculptural replicas, and also the effect of these strategies. Stevenson's approach to representation reveals that he does not subscribe to the idea that art is a tool of critical exposure with didactic and pedagogical goals. The politics of Stevenson's work, I argue, centre on his refusal of the redemptive politics of critique.[388] Perhaps paradoxically, his position developed from two earlier moments of critique: Stevenson's own religious critique, the seeds of which were evident in his paintings of the 1980s, and the postmodern critique of representation.

Stevenson's religious experiences made him sceptical of claims of radicalism. In his early life, he saw how the grassroots anti-institutional religious movement of Pentecostalism had ossified over time into a set of dogmatic practices and an established formal language. It is worth noting that Pentecostal spirituality was surprisingly closely aligned with the hippie culture of the late 1960s and 1970s: the "Jesus People" movement, for example, drew heavily on the innovations of charismatic Christianity.[389] In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that Stevenson's work doesn't aim to be politically redemptive: while it does relate historical narratives, it doesn't offer itself as a voice for the disenfranchised or an agent of justice, as do the other "archival" artworks that I described as "redemptive revisionism." Stevenson's projects address instances of art's involvement with money and power rather than seeking to perpetuate the idea that it can effectively speak truth to power, as the 1960s counterculture encouraged Tony Shafrazi to believe. For example, in the early 1990s Stevenson's drawings of Michael Heizer's artworks reframed these pioneering earth works. Heizer has been celebrated for his art's engagement with the real world outside the rarified gallery system, but according to Stevenson's tongue-in-cheek drawings he was actually affiliated with the tobacco industry. Or, at least, his macho posturing aligned him with the commercial image of the Marlboro Man, and his expensive large-scale projects in the Nevada desert were beholden to private benefactors. In any case, both Heizer's persona and his work were

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[388] This position, as I will elaborate, contrasts with Hal Foster's in his essay "Post-Critical?", and also with Sven Lütticken's effort to establish a secular, political and artistic iconoclasm. See Foster, 2015 and Lütticken, 2009.
[389] Eskridge, 2013.

rife with compromising affiliations, and hardly typified the heroic independence that his press would have you believe.

As we will see, Shafrazi's career also took him into circles of wealth and power far removed from his early leftist convictions. In 1975 he was employed as an advisor for the new Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA), a project spearheaded by the wife of the Shah of Iran, the Shahbanou Farah Diba. The former activist's abrupt capitulation to royal legitimation helped him forge his new identity as a commercial gallerist: first in Tehran, as Stevenson related in his project *The Smiles are Not Smiles*, 2005, and later in New York. In his New York gallery, with his own brief career as a graffiti artist behind him, Shafrazi still specialises in the sale of work by "street" artists like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Stevenson's observations of the compromises and ironies in cases like Heizer's and Shafrazi's are melancholy, but he never seeks to recuperate the critical politics that these figures claimed to stand for. Stevenson's refusal of this redemptive role developed from the intersection, during the 1980s, of his own critique of Pentecostalism with the postmodern critique of representation. I have claimed that Stevenson's art could only be considered religious if it was in the critical sense outlined in Thomas Crow's 2017 book *No Idols*.[390] This is because it rejects Pentecostalism's insistence that it is possible to bypass representation and experience an unmediated, bodily connection to the divine. Stevenson's stance on this matter exemplifies Crow's idea of a unconventional and properly religious "critical piety" which stands in opposition to conventional belief. It does not reject religion outright, but rather addresses its flaws and inconsistencies. However, in *No Idols*, Crow expanded this idea of "critical piety" into a means to recuperate the category of religious art for a contemporary context. He offered the theological critiques present in the works of artists like Robert Smithson, Mark Rothko and Colin McCahon as exemplary of a broad critical politics that challenges established convention, in exactly the same way that Tony Shafrazi's *Guernica* action sought to challenge the authority held by MoMA. Crow's concept of "critical piety," in short, became an example of the redemptive politics of critique that Stevenson's art refuses.

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[390] Crow, 2017.

Stevenson's position also, as I have repeatedly emphasised, draws from the postmodern and poststructuralist critique of representation. Staging what was effectively a self-destructive critique of critique, postmodern theorists asserted that our representations actually produce the reality that they seem to expose. Critique aims to reveal an underlying reality, it exposes the flaws, inconsistencies or injustices in our existing picture of the world and thereby seeks to replace this world-picture with a more accurate version. Postmodernism, however, asserted that there is no truth behind the artifice. It was this assertion that, at some point in the late 1980s, interacted provocatively with Stevenson's uneasiness about his experiences of Pentecostalism, and the effects of this interaction continue to echo and reverberate through his practice.

The three projects I discuss in this chapter were made using the quintessentially postmodern strategies of repetition, copying and quotation. However, as I will elaborate, these works are revelatory in a way that is unlike critique's exposure of an underlying truth and differs from postmodernism's insistence that reality is constructed, that there is no truth concealed behind the artifice. The mode of representation in Stevenson's works is one that "zooms in" on the telling detail rather than attempting to achieve an overview, and it is a mode that stages revelation through affective embodiment rather than didactic address. Rather than adhering to postmodernism's outright dismissal of an underlying metaphysics, Stevenson's position is one of profound, and strategic, epistemological uncertainty: *we simply don't know* what, if anything, is behind the artifice of our representations of the world. In this chapter, beginning with *The Fountain of Prosperity* and then addressing Stevenson's two major projects on the subject of the Iranian Revolution, *The Smiles are Not Smiles* and *Persepolis 2530*, I zoom in on objects, as Stevenson also did when he made these works. It was as if he thought that if he zoomed in enough, and properly, perhaps the truth would reveal itself in all its fiendish complexity. As we will see, Stevenson's use of repetition and the logic of the double signifies the inherent artifice of artistic means of expression, but it also provides a methodology for this process of zooming in. Stevenson's art refuses the redemptive politics of critique, but this doesn't mean it can't be revelatory.

When it was exhibited in Stevenson's survey exhibition at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in 2011, _The Fountain of Prosperity_, 2006, elicited an initial impression of near-total opacity and mystification (fig. 85). Firstly, the sculpture was only accessible to those prepared to travel a labyrinthine path: from the exhibition's entrance, viewers were required to ascend to the mezzanine level galleries, descend again to a blocked-off area of the ground floor using the Museum's goods lift, and sidle past an opened wall cavity before finally arriving in the room in which _Fountain_ was installed. Taking advantage of the imminent demolition of the MCA's level one gallery spaces in refurbishments planned for 2012, Stevenson had stripped several gallery wall linings to reveal the institutional innards of electrical wiring and silver-clad air-conditioning ducts (figs. 86–88). Opening new pathways through and between the existing gallery spaces, the artist thus orchestrated a sense of discovery and disorientation in the approach to the work, an exploratory movement "behind the scenes," which culminated in the obscurity of the sculpture itself.[391]

Installed in the centre of an otherwise empty and darkened gallery, _Fountain_ was lit only by its own fluorescent lights, positioned at the top of the sculpture. Standing over two metres in height, the work is a functional replica of a hydraulic computer designed and built by the New Zealand economist Bill Phillips in 1949.[392] Like Phillips's original, which is widely known as the MONIAC (Monetary National Income Analogue Computer), Stevenson's replica is a bizarre object. The face of the machine is a complicated mass of tanks, pipes, pulleys and pumps, which in its installation in Sydney visually echoed the exposed innards of the MCA's ducting system. Glowing weirdly in the darkness of the gallery, _Fountain_'s elaborate complexity and sheer strangeness confounded rather than invited comprehension. Arcane and impassive, like a tool of obscure and outdated functionality abandoned in some institutional basement, it registered more as something accidentally stumbled upon than as something oriented towards a viewer.

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[391] For an account of the experience of navigating Stevenson's exhibition, see Gardner, 2011.
[392] A. W. H. (Bill) Phillips is primarily known as the author of the influential Phillips Curve, which models the relationship between inflation and unemployment.

Fountain does not rely on viewers to co-produce it with a gaze that comprehends, and thereby fulfills and completes the work. On this point I adamantly disagree with Jan Verwoert, who has asserted that the speculative interpretive labour performed by the viewer is integral to Stevenson's work.[393] A sculpture like *Fountain* operates in the mode of manifestation. The work is first and foremost a compelling sculptural presence, and this quality was enhanced by the theatrical circumstances of its installation at the MCA. While *Fountain*'s bodily appearance makes it exemplary in this respect, all of Stevenson's works share the curious quality of being both reticent and revelatory. They seem to stand as evidence of something, while also demonstrating the impossibility of adequately representing this thing. The architectural staging of *Fountain* at the MCA—the labyrinthine pathway incorporating areas normally off-limits to visitors, such as the goods lift—served to build a sense of revelation or disclosure. However, the sculpture itself was not only bewildering in its visual complexity, it was oddly mute. Stevenson has described *Fountain* as "preoccupied."[394] Far from inviting interpretation, it had the air of a person engrossed in a task. It did not seem to care if you looked at it or not.

This quality of the work could be described as iconic. Christian icons don't seek to persuade their viewers of the existence of God, or to represent God. They are not didactic or explanatory, they do not attempt to resolve the mystery of their supernatural referent. Instead, an icon offers its physical form as an opening onto or stand-in for a supernatural power that is categorically impossible to represent or even to comprehend. Stevenson's *Fountain* shared this quality. However, it also referred explicitly and in detail to a specific historical narrative. It is only when they are understood in the context of these narratives that works like *Fountain* become more than a cryptic sculptural presence and can be recognised as a proposition about the nature of historical time.

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[393] Verwoert wrote: "Stevenson's policy of handling information is first of all designed to render a *gap* tangible: the gap that exists between what is given to be seen and read, and the act and modalities of looking and reading. . . . the point is to behold the gap and understand . . . that a converter would need to be plugged in, if interpretation is to proceed. And the converter, in this case, is *you*." Verwoert, 2013, p. 59, emphasis in original.

[394] Michael Stevenson, unpublished notes from a lecture presented at the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, 30 November 2016.

The MONIAC and the Central Bank of Guatemala

The machine that was the model for *The Fountain of Prosperity*, unlike the sculpture, was entirely oriented towards pedagogical display. The MONIAC is a dynamic representation of a national economy (fig. 82). Economist Bill Phillips designed and built his prototype machine while he was a student, in an effort to understand the "flow" diagrams commonly used to illustrate Keynesian economic theory. Fabricating the diagrams as a dynamic three-dimensional model using hydraulic technology, Phillips used the flow of water to illustrate the circulation of money through an economy. The MONIAC simulates monetary circulation by pumping water through a complicated system of tanks and pipes.[395] With nine adjustable sluices that regulate the relationship between factors such as the interest rate and investment, the computer can be programmed to display the consequences of particular economic events. The practice of economic modelling was still in its infancy when Phillips built his machine, but most economic models—both then and now—take the form of a series of mathematical equations.[396] Standing over two metres tall, with its labyrinthine innards on display, the MONIAC is a visceral anomaly in the history of this otherwise dry field. It is a rare example of a three-dimensional object that was conceived to provide a national economy with a tangible form. Phillips regarded his machine primarily as a pedagogical model—its physicality made it useful for conducting classroom demonstrations—and most of the approximately fifteen MONIACs constructed were sold to universities as teaching tools.[397] Augmenting the machine's already macabre appearance, Phillips used to dye the water in it red so as make its calculations more visible to his students. While the MONIAC enjoyed a brief period of popularity in the 1950s, it quickly fell into obscurity after its analogue system was surpassed by developments in electronic computing.

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[395] As Tim Ng and Matthew Wright explain: "Separate water tanks represent households, business, government, exporting and importing sectors of the economy. Coloured water pumped around the system measures income, spending and GDP. The system is programmable and capable of solving nine simultaneous equations in response to any change of the parameters." Ng and Wright, 2007, p. 47.
[396] Morgan and Boumans, 2004, p. 371. Also see Boumans, 2005, pp. 22–23 on the origins of the practice of economic modelling.
[397] The MONIAC purchased by the University of Melbourne in 1953, for example, is currently on display in the foyer of the University's Giblin Eunson business and economics library.

In 1950, the economist Abba Lerner acquired the rights to sell the MONIAC in America. It was amongst Lerner's papers in the archives of the University of California at Berkeley that Stevenson discovered a detail which he considered:

> enticing beyond anything else: a passing reference to the fact that, sometime in the early 1950s, a machine had been ordered, not by an academic department, but by a central bank. This institution was the Central Bank of Guatemala.[398]

Lerner had sold a MONIAC to the Central Bank of Guatemala in 1952, during a very significant period in Guatemala's political history. The machine became an unlikely witness to the period commonly known as the "ten years of spring," when from 1944 to 1954 Guatemala experienced one of its few periods of representative government in the twentieth century. A popular uprising in 1944 against authoritarian dictator Jorge Ubico allowed the democratic election of first Juan José Arévalo in 1945, and then Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán in 1951. The socialist Arévalo and Arbenz administrations both invested in the infrastracture they thought necessary for Guatemala's domestic economic growth. The Central Bank, for example, was established in the first year of Arévalo's government in 1945, and the MONIAC was purchased by its founding president, Dr Manuel Noriega Morales. In 1950, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Guatemalan government jointly sponsored an international "Economic Survey Mission," which was tasked with surveying "Guatemala's potentialities for development."[399] The goal, in short, was to reverse Guatemala's "underdevelopment"—which, as historian Richard Immerman has pointed out, "resulted from hundreds of years of domination and exploitation by the countries responsible for the term's usage."[400]

The Arévalo and Arbenz governments devoted particular attention to reforming Guatemala's archaic labour and agrarian systems.[401] At that time, the legislation

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[398] Stevenson, 2006. Stevenson had found an entry in Abba Lerner's diary: "Arrived Guatemala. Set up Moniac" dated 23 March 1953.

[399] Robert Garner, Vice President of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, quoted in World Bank, 1951, p. xi.

[400] Immerman, 1982, p. 20.

[401] Schlesinger and Kinzer record that rural labour in Guatemala in 1945 was "only barely distinguishable from involuntary servitude." Schlesinger and Kinzer, 1999, p. 38. See also Grandin, 2004, p. 38.

pertaining to labour and land ownership primarily benefited a small landowning elite and a few foreign corporations that utterly dominated the Guatemalan economy. The Boston-based United Fruit Company was easily the most substantial of these enterprises. The largest landowner and employer in Guatemala for some decades, and known locally as *el pulpo* (the octopus), it had been running an immensely profitable banana export business in Central America since 1885.[402] Agrarian reforms, begun by Arévalo and enacted by Arbenz, constituted a direct challenge to United Fruit's profitable stranglehold. In 1950, around two percent of landowners owned seventy percent of Guatemala's arable land, while the majority of the population endured grinding poverty.[403] Arbenz's 1952 "Decree 900" allowed the government to expropriate and redistribute uncultivated land from the largest landowners.[404] For the directors of United Fruit and their lobbyists in Cold War Washington, this was a step too far. They interpreted the Guatemalan attempt to wrest economic control of their country from the North Americans as a communist uprising. In the words of United Fruit's Director of Public Relations Edmund Whitman:

> Our very right to be in business has been challenged by an enemy without honor, without justice, without mercy. I refer to the international Communist conspiracy in Guatemala, and elsewhere in Latin America.[405]

In June 1954, a CIA-orchestrated coup deposed President Arbenz in favour of a military dictator. This Cold War aggression against the socialist Guatemalan government also served, perhaps not coincidentally, to protect the commercial interests of United Fruit.[406] As Guatemala dissolved into civil war—a war that lasted

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[402] The company was originally incorporated under the name the Boston Fruit Company in 1885, and now operates as three separate corporations, Del Monte, Chiquita and Dole. See Schlesinger and Kinzer, 1999, and Ransom, 1999, for accounts of United Fruit's exploitative practices in Central America.

[403] Schlesinger and Kinzer, 1999, p. 50.

[404] See Schlesinger and Kinzer, 1999, pp. 54–55 and 75–76 for details. Essentially, Decree 900 empowered the government to expropriate uncultivated portions of very large plantations in order to provide small parcels of land to landless peasants. Compensation was based on the land's value for tax purposes.

[405] Whitman, 1955, p. 1.

[406] Commentators are divided over the extent to which the coup was conducted in the defence of United Fruit's commercial interests. Schlesinger and Kinzer make the case that UFC lobbyists and publicity strategies influenced government decision-making, Richard Immerman feels that the coup was "predictable" given US government priorities during the Cold War. John Lewis Gaddis has argued that the coup responded to an accurate evaluation of the strength and influence of Guatemala's communist party, the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo. Grandin saw the coup and subsequent civil war as part of

thirty-six years and claimed the lives of over two hundred thousand citizens, many of whom simply "disappeared"—the MONIAC also vanished from view.[407]

The MONIAC as a dynamic economic model

Like all economic models, the MONIAC was created in an effort to visualise a system that can't otherwise be perceived. As economic historian Marcel Boumans notes: "The world represented in the models is a world of economic aggregates that cannot be observed without the aid of models."[408] Phillips recognised that the machine had particular pedagogical value because it rendered literal and visible the commonplace metaphor of the economy as a system of circulation, like the circulatory systems of the body.

The MONIAC also embodied fantasies of economic control. By making economic causation visible, it also invited the impression that it could act as a kind of calculator, able to predict the outcome of economic policy shifts. It isn't surprising then, that the machine particularly appealed to Abba Lerner.[409] Economist David Colander has suggested that the popular view of interventionist Keynesian economic governance is in fact more attributable to Lerner.[410] As his 1941 article "The Economic Steering Wheel" made clear, Lerner regarded the economy as a machine which could be controlled by government regulation.[411] Colander narrates that Lerner transformed what Phillips saw as a pedagogical model into an optimal control policy model in which "monetary and fiscal policy could be guided by rules. Policy makers simply

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a long-term US strategy to crush "real or potential revolutionary threats" from leftist movements in Latin America. Schlesinger and Kinzer, 1999; Immerman, 1982, p. 118; Gaddis, 1998; Grandin, 2004, p. xiv.

[407] Stephen Kinzer quotes this figure from the 1999 report by the Historical Clarification Committee headed by Christian Tomuschat. Schlesinger and Kinzer, 1999, p. 265.

[408] Boumans, 2005, p. 18.

[409] Stevenson has noted that after acquiring the rights to sell the MONIAC in 1950, "Lerner peddled his machine way beyond its obsolescence date. . . . he brought this cumbersome machine along with him wherever his itinerant academic career led. There is an account of Lerner with a leaky machine at an American Economic Association meeting in a New York hotel lobby in the 1970s." Stevenson, 2006. The account Stevenson refers to is David Colander's: "As I walked into the hotel lobby on my way to a session, one of the MONIAC's tubes sprang a leak, and coloured liquid spilled onto the hotel lobby floor." Colander, 2011, p. 63.

[410] Colander, 1984. As Colander subsequently argued, Keynes regarded the macroeconomy as "beyond formal modeling . . . policy would have to be guided by a combination of insights from a variety of models blended with intuition and institutional knowledge." Colander, 2011, p. 69.

[411] Lerner, 1941. The article also appears in revised form as the first chapter of Lerner, 1951.

turned the monetary and fiscal steering wheels and the economy followed."[412] The MONIAC encouraged a perception of the economy as a mechanical system that could be controlled by a skilled driver.[413] Econometrician Ross Williams, who studied under Phillips at the London School of Economics, explains that a deft touch was required to keep the machine's tanks from overflowing. Recklessness would result in inadvertently modelling an economic catastrophe:

> If you let the thing rip, if you stimulated the economy too much, then the water would overflow everywhere. The trick was . . . to try and control it. In other words, if inflation was getting out of control, then somehow you had to operate on interest rates, or government fiscal policy . . . you had to alter the relationships elsewhere in order to dampen down the economy.[414]

As a dynamic visualisation of the mathematical interdependence of factors in a national economy, the MONIAC suggested that particular economic outcomes could be achieved through the skilled regulation of these relationships. This proposition, which economist Albert Hirshman described as a "progeny of Keynesianism," was also the foundational premise of development economics. This field that, like the MONIAC, emerged in 1949, aimed to alleviate global poverty through the application of Western economic strategies in "underdeveloped" economies.[415] As Hirshman relates, after World War II:

> the conviction, among an influential group of development economists, that they had identified and understood what one of them called the 'mechanics of

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[412] Colander, 1984, p. 70.

[413] Nicholas Barr records that "even the last generation of machines could be temperamental, and eventually Phillips tired of going to the rescue of colleagues whose classroom was flooded with water and filled with giggling students." Barr, 1988, p. 319. Stevenson's *The Fountain of Prosperity* suffers from the same propensity. As he wryly noted: "There's only so many museum spaces you can flood before you don't get asked [to exhibit] any more." Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013. See Morgan and Boumans, 2004, pp. 392–3 and Colander, 2011, for discussions of the MONIAC as a catastrophic model.

[414] Ross Williams, interview with the author, Melbourne, 2 November 2015.

[415] Wolfgang Sachs has identified the 1949 inauguration speech of US President Harry Truman as the field's foundational moment. Truman described countries of the Southern Hemisphere as "underdeveloped areas" and proclaimed, in Sachs's words, "worldwide dimensions to the mission the [United States's] founding fathers had bequeathed to them: to be the 'beacon on the hill' . . . with a call to every nation to follow in their footsteps." Sachs, 2003, p. 2 and p. 1.

economic development' contributed a great deal to the launching of a determined effort to get those 'mechanics' going.[416]

This mechanical view, according to which a skilled operator could "drive" an economy towards growth by careful regulation, tended to elide the differences between different types of models. As Colander relates, rather than being understood as guides or tools to be used in conjunction with other information, "The model of the economy that an economist was working on moved from being 'a' model to 'the' model, and that model was directly applied to policy."[417] In other words, economic models were treated as if they were accurate maps of economic processes driven by calculable laws.

The Fountain of Prosperity and representation

Stevenson recognised the Guatemalan MONIAC as a totem-like tool of Western-style economic growth, a calculator that seemed, at the time, to promise economic control. The tragic irony, of course, is that Western-style economic growth is predicated on the exploitation of countries like Guatemala. Stevenson's 2007 exhibition *Answers to Some Questions About Bananas* featured *The Fountain of Prosperity* alongside a 1956 promotional film produced by the United Fruit Company titled *The Living Circle*. In this short film, made to promote "the living circle of trade" between North and Central America on US television, the narrator authoritatively intoned: "The good earth of the tropics and the eager markets of the north are an unbeatable combination."[418] An animated diagram showed agricultural products circulating into the United States while paper currency flowed southward into Central America (figs. 89–91). The animated circulations of the economic alliance visualised by the film echoed the circulatory interdependence of the economic relationships displayed in the MONIAC. Stevenson's deeply sardonic title for his sculpture—*The Fountain of Prosperity*—also acquired renewed meaning in the context of the film's promotional doublespeak. While the Central Bank may have optimistically viewed the MONIAC

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[416] Hirshman, 1989, p. 359.
[417] Colander, 2011, p. 70.
[418] Sutherland, 1956. As an article in long-running advertising industry magazine *The Billboard* noted in 1957, the two commercial "information films" produced by John Sutherland for United Fruit (*Bananas? Si Señor!* and *The Living Circle*, both 1956) were given considerable air time, screening on television 451 times in less than ten months. *The Billboard*, 1957.

as a tool to tap such a fountain, Guatemala ultimately served as a wellspring of wealth for parasitic North American corporations like United Fruit.

The MONIAC was probably incapable of determining a course of economic policy that would deliver Guatemala from the clutches of the United Fruit Company. Because it was a physical object rather than a sequence of equations, it was also subject in a quite literal sense to the system it purported to model. Stevenson's replica of the MONIAC that was a casualty of Guatemala's civil war was presented in a state of ruin. *The Fountain of Prosperity* had clearly fallen into serious disrepair: it was rusty and decrepit, its perspex tanks stained (fig. 92). I regard these visible signs of physical vulnerability and victimhood as indicative of Stevenson's thinking about representation. While the MONIAC was thought to be able to offer a map, or overview, of the dynamic processes at work in a national economy, the traces of violent neglect on the body of *The Fountain of Prosperity* reposition the object as a kind of forensic evidence. As Stevenson commented to artist Wes Hill in 2009, he aims through his works to convey the feeling that "*something happened here*."[419] The ruination of *Fountain* reframed the representational capacity of the MONIAC, showing how it did not describe, model or map events, it was subject to them. The work embodied a shift from an approach to representation that is certain about the accuracy of maps and overviews, and is confident about the possibility of accurately calculating the outcome of certain actions, to an approach that combs through the wreckage of the past, looking for traces or clues that might indicate what happened. Accompanying this shift from the MONIAC's prospective confidence to *Fountain* considered as a piece of evidence—mute, but revelatory—is the dramatic loss of a sense of historical agency.

I submit that Stevenson built *Fountain* in order to understand and demonstrate the difference between one mode of representation and another. Bill Phillips created the MONIAC, as I have noted, in order to materialise and therefore understand the "flow" diagrams of Keynesian economics. A practical thinker, he needed to work out the diagrams in three dimensions before he could fully grasp how they operated. Stevenson's process of constructing a working copy of the MONIAC was similar, and

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[419] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Hill, 2009, p. 471.

similarly labour-intensive. The many detailed technical drawings and working documents in his studio archive demonstrate the level of practical and theoretical knowledge required for the task. For example, a document titled "MONIAC Notes: Issues to confirm at the Science Museum, London," is a list of thirty-two questions such as: "How big is the surplus balances tank? . . . How do the adjusts on the five slides work (the black adjustable sluices move, but how)? . . . What is the final pulley count (what use are those extras)? . . . How do the federal reserve and international monetary funds work?"[420] Stevenson's mode of "zooming in" on the object itself, and performing an analysis of the machine sufficiently detailed to enable him to build one himself, could be described as forensic.

What his forensic analysis revealed was a pattern of circulation: the military-backed transnational corporate exploitation of an independent nation-state in a parasitic "living circle of trade." It also revealed a tangible, material echo of this relationship in the form of the object that was supposed to provide the means of escape from it. *Fountain* embodied the collapse of a world view centring on the representation or overview that Lerner optimistically believed the MONIAC could provide. However, Stevenson's immersive process of "zooming in" could be seen as another means of achieving insight.

On repetition

The logic of the double—the duplicate, stand-in, proxy, or alter-ego—is central to Stevenson's practice. He made hand-drawn copies of photographs in the 1990s, and in the 2000s he began producing sculptural replicas of artefacts which derive from an "archival impulse" to respond to found historical documents and artefacts. Stevenson's is an insistent practice of the replication of existing material. What he produces is always and explicitly secondary, it always refers to something that came before.

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[420] MSS, MONIAC box 2, "MONIAC Notes: Issues to confirm at the Science Museum, London," *c*.2006.

Stevenson's strategy of remaking historical artefacts can be located within a widespread cultural interest in repetition emergent during the 2000s.[421] In 2011, veteran music journalist Simon Reynolds morosely declared the 2000s the "Re" decade: one in which pop music offered only "*re*vivals, *re*issues, *re*makes, *re*-enactments."[422] Within the visual arts, curator Nicholas Bourriaud described "an art of postproduction" beginning in the 1990s, in which "more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products."[423] In recent years, this tendency towards recycling has been exemplified by often high-profile re-enactments of historical performance artworks, and restaged landmark exhibitions such as *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*.[424] Art historians have also described the use of repetition as a strategy for making art. In their book *Anachronic Renaissance*, 2010, for example, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood describe a "substitutional" model of art-making as an alternative to the historicist mooring in time presupposed by an authored (or "performative") model.[425]

According to the "performative" model first delineated by Vasari, an artwork is wholly the product of a human agent, who generates something that did not exist before. This emphasis on an individual artist's novel conception serves to anchor artworks in a chronology. Nagel and Wood offer the "substitutional" model operating in premodern Europe as a contrast. In this model artworks were considered to be adequate substitutions for earlier works, which themselves substituted for even earlier works, in a chain of copies that stretches back to an artefact of divine or mythic origin.[426] Authorship in this scheme is not anchored to a particular individual, and artworks have a transhistorical identity. As physical instantiations of an absent

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[421] For analyses of this phenomenon, see Lütticken, 2004 and 2005; Schneider, 2011, and the essays in *When Attitudes Become Form*, 2013.

[422] Reynolds, 2011, p. xi, emphasis in original.

[423] Bourriaud, 2002, p. 7.

[424] Other examples include the artworks *The Battle of Orgreave*, 2001, by Jeremy Deller and *The Third Memory*, 2000, by Pierre Huyghe; the performance series *Marina Abramović: Seven Easy Pieces*, 2005, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the exhibitions *Robert Morris: Bodyspacemotionthings*, 2009, Tate Modern, London; *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*, 2010, Museum of Modern Art, New York and *Other Primary Structures*, 2014, Jewish Museum, New York.

[425] Nagel and Wood, 2010.

[426] See Belting, 1994, pp. 153–54 for a discussion of this religious system's debt to Plato's cosmic sequence of images. Belting writes that according to Platonic doctrine every image, even one made by human hands, is a (more or less degraded) likeness of a true, ideal prototype. Christian iconophilia stems from this assertion that formal similitude is an indication of a genealogical relationship between a sacred prototype and its profane depiction.

original, substitutional artworks make "the prior . . . present" in the most real, tangible sense.[427] For Nagel and Wood:

> The substitutional model was not a primitive or superstitious creed, but a model of production that grasps, in many ways more successfully than the authorial model, the strange and multiple temporality of the artwork.[428]

The past and present mingle in Nagel and Wood's substitutional model, in which re-production allows newly created works to literally embody—stand in for—an earlier object.[429] As they demonstrate, this mode of art-making has its roots in the production of Christian icons, and I have already noted that the cryptic sculptural presence of works like Stevenson's *The Fountain of Prosperity* is similar to an iconic mode of address.

The most obvious point of reference, however, for the interest in various forms of repetition that took shape in the 2000s is postmodernism. The quotation of existing material as a substitute for the invention of something new is a quintessentially postmodern practice, and the broad cultural interest in recycling and re-production that became evident in the 2000s—including the widespread interest in much older, and even premodern forms of repetition—can be considered one of postmodernism's after-effects. Stevenson's use of the strategy certainly derives from his exposure to postmodern thinking in the 1980s. We can recall, for example, his art school teacher the "new image" painter Dick Frizzell, and Frizzell's injunction regarding the importance of source material. As Stevenson noted:

> He gave me an insight into how to go about the act of painting. Dick was very big on *source material*—you had to have a big stack of photographs in your studio, lots of books out of the library, bric-á-brac, postcards.[430]

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[427] Nagel and Wood, 2010, p. 11.
[428] Nagel and Wood, 2010, p. 16.
[429] As they note, their substitutional model is similar in principle to Aby Warburg's concept of *nachleben*, or the afterlife or survival of images. For Warburg, Renaissance paintings re-instantiated ancient gestures in a way similar to a substitutional artwork's re-embodiment of a past work. Nagel and Wood, 2010, p. 10.
[430] Michael Stevenson, quoted in O'Brien, 1996, p. 135.

Stevenson's paintings of church halls and religious paraphernalia of the 1980s were based on photographs and material uncovered during extensive research trips around New Zealand's small towns. Research—the identification of "source material"—has been a central strategy of his practice ever since. Stevenson uses quotations for the vast majority, if not all, of the titles of his works. As his 2000 installation *Genealogy* made clear, artistic education is both a kind of trauma and a condition of possibility for practice. We have no option, when expressing ourselves, but to use the language and the technical skills that we have been taught.

The genealogy of Stevenson's quotational practice can be traced back to Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, which in her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel," written 1966, she adapted from Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the concept of the carnivalesque. Roland Barthes addressed very similar ideas in his famous "The Death of the Author," 1967.[431] These theorists proposed that a discursive web of intertextual connections should be substituted for what we think of as the bounded, novel or original statement. Every text, statement or artwork is produced in a network of implicit and explicit reference to other existing works and discourses. Authorial expression is inescapably embedded in a web of allusion and quotation. If the origin of the text is a plurality of other texts, we can only select, rearrange and quote existing statements. The doubling and repetition that is central to Stevenson's practice, therefore, serves to foreground the fact that the artistic means of expression are inherently compromised. Through a practice of insistent repetition—by speaking only in quotations—Stevenson's works point to the inadequacy of their own compromised language of expression, and the difficulty of thinking beyond what is already known.

The political implications of this position of inescapable secondariness that I am describing are substantial. This fatally compromised language allows no uncompromised position from which to stage a protest—or at least, only a farcical one, like Jörg Immendorff's, whose Marxist posturing enhanced his marketability among the *nouveau riches*, and whose cocaine habit was easily supported by the overheated art market of the 1980s. Stevenson's works focus on historical efforts to achieve self-determination that are staged *using the terms of the dominant power*. For

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[431] Kristeva, 1986, and Barthes, 1977.

example, *This is the Trekka*, 2003, described how New Zealand's bid for economic independence took the form of a mimicry of the British Land Rover which was built using a system based on Fordist mass production. *The Fountain of Prosperity*, similarly, addressed Guatemala's effort to achieve self-determination using the tools of Western economics. These works could be considered descriptions of historical acts of protest using a fatally compromised language.

However, Stevenson's use of repetition is not simply a reinstated postmodern critique of originality. I have already described how his works from the mid-2000s moved away from his earlier "join the dots" installation strategy where the work invites completion by the viewer's act of interpretation. I have also described how the sculptural presence of works like *The Fountain of Prosperity* lends them an air of preoccupation that is the opposite of an orientation towards a viewer. *Fountain* does not offer, as Barthes did, the birth of the reader as a consoling substitute for the death of the author. The birth of the reader, postmodernism's egalitarian embrace of plurality and multiplicity, has become a cul-de-sac of empty heterogeneity and horizonless presentism, and Stevenson's practice takes another route.

While they are explicitly limited to a mode of quotation and repetition, I have stated that Stevensons' works nevertheless offer a kind of revelation of something beyond their historical subjects. For Stevenson, the means of achieving this revelation—which is also itself compromised, subjective, impure—is through immersion in the process of remaking.

The literal reproduction of existing artworks, before the work of artists like Sturtevant and Sherrie Levine, was a strategy of artists working in the European tradition prior to, and throughout, modernism. What Sven Lütticken called "the romantic-modernist cult of originality" has masked an energetic tradition of re-production.[432] Copying the works of past masters became central to artistic pedagogy in European academies and artists' studios during the Renaissance. Precise emulation was a way for an aspiring artist to internalise the methodology of an established artist, and thus acquire the creative vocabulary necessary to create something new. The European academies

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[432] Lütticken, 2004, p. 115.

were founded on the principle of repetition as a means to form and perpetuate canonical artistic norms across generations of practitioners. The standard narrative of modern European art history is the story of artists' refusal of this institutionalisation of creative authorship, which during the nineteenth century was increasingly seen as moribund and hostile to innovation. However, recent art historical scholarship has shown that even those artists most associated with spontaneous individual expression—such as Vincent van Gogh, in Cornelia Homburg's *The Copy Turns Original*—recognised the literal reproduction of existing works as a useful creative practice.[433] Neal Benezra's research into Clyfford Still's practice has similarly foregrounded the previously unacknowledged significance of the many replicas Still produced of his own paintings. Dean Sobel, Director of the Clyfford Still Museum, notes that the mere existence of these replicas:

> throws much of popular culture's understanding of Abstract Expressionism off balance, suggesting that the paintings . . . were not the outpourings of unbridled and fleeting creative impulses but rather the result of often slow, methodical deliberations that could (and would) be recreated in marvelous variations . . . Replication is at the basis of Abstract Expressionism as a whole.[434]

For both Still and van Gogh, it seems, the principle of internalisation through manual repetition was a means to achieve creative expression, and this principle seems to have derived from the traditional approach of the European art academies. While, as I have noted, Stevenson's quotational strategies are quintessentially postmodern, his process of carefully, manually reconstructing historical artefacts achieves a kind of immersion in the original which also echoes that traditional European pedagogical process.[435]

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[433] Homburg, 1996.

[434] Sobel, 2015, pp. 7–8. See also Neal Benezra's essay in the same catalogue, Benezra, 2015.

[435] In a 2016 artist's talk in Melbourne, Gerard Byrne commented that repetition is "the most basic act in the Western artistic tradition." He noted that his use of repetition as a method and strategy enables a form of knowledge about his subjects: "you come to know the thing you are representing, but not in the sense of acquiring scientific-type certainty, it's a kind of knowledge that is more generative and speculative." Gerard Byrne, artist's talk held in association with the exhibition *Gerard Byrne: A Late Evening in the Future*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 10 October 2016.

Borrowing a term from the twentieth-century literary scholar Erich Auerbach, I propose that Stevenson's works operate as "figures."[436] This is for two reasons. Firstly, Auerbach describes figures as having a dual nature: they are both embedded in history as real historical events or individuals, and they also have a significance which could be described as meta-historical, or beyond temporal specificity. The second reason is that Auerbach states that figures can only be identified retrospectively, and discovering them takes what he calls "a certain kind of interpretation."[437] As I will argue, Stevenson's immersion in the process of remaking historical artefacts enables this "kind of interpretation," which is a recognition of the revelatory capacity of these objects.

Auerbach's 1938 essay "*Figura*" traces the meaning of this Latin term from its earliest classical usage and through its adaptation in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. The term *figura*, which originally meant "three-dimensional shape," subsequently expanded to signify "a grammatical, rhetorical, logical, mathematical and then, later, even a musical and choreographic form."[438] This more abstract meaning, Auerbach continues, also enabled the use of the term to think of history as a narrative endowed with shape, meaning and coherence. The mode of historical interpretation that centres on the identification of historical figures is exemplified by biblical exegesis. For Christian scholars like Tertullian in the second century, sacred events or individuals in history were linked into a pattern of resemblances or echoes. Earlier events could be interpreted as "prefigurations" of later ones. For example, the people and events of the Old Testament have long been interpreted by Christians as "figures" of the New. Auerbach relates how in Tertullian's account, the Old Testament narrative of Joshua's emergence as the leader who succeeded Moses to bring the Israelites to the promised land prefigures Christ's emergence as the Messiah who would lead Christians to the Kingdom of God:

> Just as Joshua, and not Moses, led the people of Israel into the Promised Land
> of Palestine, so too did Christ's Grace—and not the Law of the Jews—lead the
> 'second people' into the Promised Land of eternal blessedness. . . . The naming

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[436] Auerbach, 2014.
[437] Auerbach, 2014, pp. 79–80.
[438] Auerbach, 2014, p. 68.

of Joshua-Jesus is a historically real prophecy or a prophetic form of something in the future.[439]

Figural interpretation recognises a connection between real individuals or historical events that are chronologically distant and causally unrelated. A figure is a historically real prophecy of its future fulfillment. The figure anticipates its fulfillment, while the fulfillment recalls its earlier figuration: "one signifies not only itself but also the other—and that one is also encompassed or fulfilled by the other."[440] The important point for Auerbach is the real historicity of both figure and fulfillment.[441] The cross-temporal connection that endows them with vertical significance is additional to their already existing horizontal meaning in a historical chronicle. Retaining something of *figura*'s original meaning as "three-dimensional shape," both figure and fulfillment are emphatically materially and historically real, and it is this grounding in tangible specificity that differentiates figuration from allegory. As Auerbach notes, allegory tends to designate abstract concepts such as "wisdom," "jealousy," "peace" or "the fatherland": "Never, however, do [allegories] capture the full concrete historicity of a particular event."[442]

Auerbach's *figura* is embedded in earthly, historical reality, but it also extends beyond horizontal chronology in its ability to reveal something of the eschatological shape or structure of history. It provides a glimpse of a God's-eye view of history, which sees past, present and future in simultaneous relation. The link between figure and fulfillment is thus incompatible with modern ideas about historical progress. As Auerbach recognised, modern progress points towards the future in "a never-ending horizontal sequence of future events."[443] Figural history, in contrast, regards figures as windows onto an already existing overarching temporal-historical structure. I recognise the dual nature of Stevenson's sculptural replicas—their embeddedness in

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[439] Auerbach, 2014, p. 81.
[440] Auerbach, 2014, p. 96.
[441] Auerbach, who was German and Jewish, wrote "*Figura*" while exiled in Istanbul during World War II. The essay is a denunciation of the anti-Semitic strand of Christianity that was then being taken to its genocidal conclusion in Germany. By tracing the etymological history of the Latin word *figura*, Auerbach argued for recognition of the real historicity of the Jewish Old Testament, against those who would erase the history of the Jews by claiming that the Old Testament is merely a spiritual prophecy or allegory of the New.
[442] Auerbach, 2014, p. 97.
[443] Auerbach, 2014, p. 100.

history, and the simultaneous suggestion that they offer a glimpse of some meta-historical structure underlying their historical moment—in Auerbach's description of the dual horizontal and vertical dimensions of figures.

In both Nagel and Wood's substitutional model and Auerbach's *figura* the connections between figure and fulfillment, or between the links in the substitutional chain, are made retroactively. Historical actors operate in ignorance of the significance of their work, which is recognised after the fact. As Auerbach notes, it is clear in Tertullian's writing that:

> Shadowy similarities in the structure of events or in the circumstances that accompany them are often enough to make the *figura* recognizable, but it took a commitment to a certain kind of interpretation to discover it.[444]

Auerbach's figures are recognisable because of some formal similarity between the figure and its fulfillment, which can be seen by those committed to "a certain kind of interpretation." Similarly, Stevenson's figures become recognisable because of the way the objects he reproduces formally echo or materialise some aspect of their overarching historical context. For example, in *The Fountain of Prosperity*, the hydraulic circulations of the MONIAC were shown to echo the exploitative "living circle of trade" between the US and Guatemala. *Fountain* revealed the MONIAC to be both a product of its time and place, and a window enabling a more distant view. The careful, manual process of reconstructing an object like the MONIAC is immersive, and this is the interpretive space in which Stevenson makes his work. He has described how things begin to "react with each other" when he's working on a project. Coincidences seem more than mere chance, they become significant, or even revelatory. In his words, things seem to "happen for a reason because you've forced them into this field, this time."[445]

What Auerbach called "a certain kind of interpretation," Hal Foster described as the paranoid tendency of archival artists' "will to connect."[446] Stevenson acknowledges

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[444] Auerbach, 2014, p. 79–80.
[445] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.
[446] Foster, 2004, p. 21.

that his recognition of formal coincidences between the flow of history and the artefacts he replicates is entirely subjective: it is the outcome of "forcing" things to interact or relate. Rather than an effort to achieve objectivity or an overview, the revelatory aspect of works like *Fountain* draw on a different mode of insight. Paradoxically enough, given the relationship between Stevenson's practice of repetition and postmodern scepticism, this mode of insight is that of religious faith.

The ability of Pentecostals to recognise portentous signs of the imminent apocalypse within current events or daily life depends on a "certain kind of interpretation" that could be described as paranoid. Stevenson has described how, during the endlessly extended period prior to the eschaton, "these end times events will momentarily happen . . . they *will* happen, and they *are* happening, and you can see in current affairs or news that these things *are* happening."[447] The recognition of such signs operates in this religious context as a confirmation of faith. As Stevenson pointed out in his works of the 1990s, believers see what they hope to see, experience conforms to expectation. As evidence irresistably begins to offer itself, looking at things in a certain way becomes self-confirming. Stevenson's process of re-producing artefacts as figures of history re-stages the breathless moment when faith is apparently confirmed, and when worldly events—seen from a particular perspective—suddenly reveal a legible pattern. As I will demonstrate in my analysis of the installation *The Smiles are Not Smiles*, 2005, the experience of his works also re-stages this sensation.

The Smiles are Not Smiles, 2005: revolutionary Tehran

Tony Shafrazi reappeared as a protagonist in Stevenson's *The Smiles are Not Smiles*, 2005. This installation pinpointed a particularly pregnant moment in the dramatic events of the Iranian Revolution of 1978. Stevenson's later *Persepolis 2530*, 2007, also addressed the period of Iranian politics immediately preceding the revolution. In these two works, Stevenson identified objects that were at once embedded in their temporal moment and also seemed somehow to reach beyond it. They were very much of their time, while simultaneously revealing something of the position and

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[447] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.

significance of their moment in the broader pattern and flow of historical events. As in Erich Auerbach's *figura*, they had both vertical and horizontal significance.

In the mid-1970s, after his arrest for graffiting Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937, in New York's Museum of Modern Art, Shafrazi was employed as an advisor for the new Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA). The new museum was an initiative of the Shahbanou Farah Diba, and her cousin Kamran Diba was both the architect of the museum and its first director. He contracted Shafrazi to help build the Museum's collection of contemporary American art. "He was a good boy with an Iranian background," Diba remembered. "We decided to help him."[448] New York collector Barbara Jakobson was less charitable: "This artist manqué suddenly reappeared, wearing a vicuña coat."[449] Shafrazi was not the only one whose fortunes took an upward turn as a result of the Shahbanou's interests. Tehran's art scene was then flourishing under her royal patronage, and in 1978 Shafrazi established a commercial gallery there to take advantage of what seemed a contemporary art market in the ascendant. His timing was poor, to say the least. Kamran Diba recalled, in words that Stevenson borrowed for the title of his work, that as the extent of the Shah's political troubles became apparent: "It was like a storm. The smiles are not smiles. The sun does not have a glow."[450]

Stevenson's *The Smiles are Not Smiles* imagines the scene in Shafrazi's Tehran gallery in late 1978, when the city was shut down by strikes, demonstrations and riots. Shafrazi's inaugural—and only—exhibition was scheduled to open on 31 October. *Gold Bricks*, 1978, by the Armenian artist Zadik Zadikian consisted of one thousand bricks, individually gilded with Zadikian's signature gold leaf and stacked in what the artist described as an "Iranian pattern."[451] The previous month, the Iranian army had opened fire on demonstrators, killing and wounding many, and triggering an escalation of protest action that culminated in early November with what *Newsweek* called the "most widespread rioting Teheran had seen in twenty-five years."[452] In an interview with Shafrazi, journalist Lisa Zeitz recorded that:

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[448] Kamran Diba, quoted in Haden-Guest, 1996, p. 65.
[449] Barbara Jakobson, quoted in Haden-Guest, 1996, p. 65.
[450] Kamran Diba, quoted in Haden-Guest, 1996, p. 66.
[451] MSS, Smiles/Dialectics Research box, "Biography: Zadik Zadikian," *c*.2000.
[452] Butler, Jenkins and Nelson, 1978, p. 15.

On the night of the opening, tanks invaded the streets, martial law was declared and the Iranian Revolution started. The first show was also the last. Shafrazi lost everything in Iran—including Zadikian's bricks—and moved back to New York shortly afterwards.[453]

Zeitz's summary isn't even terribly exaggerated. Very little remains of Zadikian's exhibition: an invitation card (which as Alun Rowlands has pointed out, unwittingly announced the date of the revolution)[454] and a one-sentence review by an unnamed viewer: "It glowed like a shattered chain in the Persian sunlight, having no beginning and no end."[455] Stevenson's installation imagined this scene as a stage set (figs. 93–95). A partially collapsed wall of bricks, each completely gilded in gold leaf, stood on a tiled floor in front of an immaculate white gallery wall. Light streamed through ornate glass double doors, striking the gilded surfaces of the bricks, which radiated golden light. When viewed through these doors, a pile of debris representing the trashed contents of a small commercial art gallery *c*.1978 was partially visible behind the stacked bricks: a tangled sheaf of dot matrix printer paper, slides in plastic storage sleeves, more gilded bricks, exhibition invites, ringbinders, a khaki telephone with a rotary dial, a bookkeeping calculator, charred pieces of timber. However, the floor tiling only extended a metre or two past the edges of the stacked bricks, and the wall was a freestanding stage flat. Anything other than the briefest glance revealed the artifice of the scene.[456]

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[453] Lisa Zeitz, "The Tony Shafrazi Story," *Artnet Magazine*, 10 September 2009. http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/zeitz/tony-shafrazi9-10-09.asp.

[454] Rowlands, 2006, p. 68.

[455] Quoted in MSS, Smiles/Dialectics Research box, "Biography: Zadik Zadikian," *c*.2000. Stevenson recalls that while he was researching the lost work, he met with Zadikian in Los Angeles and looked through a file of material on the original installation, which included a 35mm transparency of the work. While this image partially informed Stevenson's version, when I interviewed him in 2013 he maintained that his work was more directly based on the quote: "I have no idea what the source is, and by now it's like I just made it up, which is even better." Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.

[456] *The Smiles are Not Smiles* was first exhibited in 2005 at Vilma Gold, London, and then as part of Stevenson's exhibition *Art of the Eighties and Seventies*, 2005–2006, Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach. The work was shown again at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney, for Stevenson's 2011 survey exhibition. For this exhibition, it was modified to fit the MCA's gallery spaces. Where viewers had previously entered the installation through the double doors, at the MCA the doors were sealed and viewers entered the room from the side via the Museum's goods lift (figs. 96–97).

Between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s, Iran's oil revenues increased eightyfold.[457] As Thomas Crow has narrated, in the US:

> The recession of the early 1970s, with its succession of oil-price shocks (as Arab producers recouped their losses on the war-inflated dollar), forced art dealers to pull back from the support they had given to new media and unsalable forms of art.[458]

Shafrazi was one of a number from New York's art scene who followed the money to Iran. In his words: "Watergate, the end of the Vietnam War, no more money in the US: the Shah was a dream come true for gallerists."[459] The Shahbanou's interest in Western art, facilitated by the material support provided by her husband, benefited many. Andy Warhol was commissioned to make portraits of the Shah, the Shahbanou, and the Shah's twin sister Princess Ashraf.[460] Dennis Oppenheim's proposals for a series of land art projects in the Iranian desert were shown in the TMCA's opening suite of exhibitions in 1977.[461] The TMCA collection included work by Francis Bacon, Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock, and the Shahbanou's annual Shiraz Arts Festival hosted artists like Iannis Xenakis, John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Merce Cunningham.[462] A commercial art fair sponsored by the Shahbanou and billed as "The Greatest Art Event of the Twentieth Century" was scheduled for November 1978 and advertised in *Artforum*.[463]

While the Shah was less enthusiastic about experimental art than his wife, her interest in progressive culture chimed with his determination to modernise Iran.[464] As *The New York Times* enthused only days prior to the May 1968 riots in Paris: "Shah of

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[457] Katouzian, 2009, p. 280.

[458] Crow, 1996, p. 180.

[459] Tony Shafrazi, quoted in Lisa Zeitz, "The Tony Shafrazi Story," *Artnet Magazine*, 10 September 2009. http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/zeitz/tony-shafrazi9-10-09.asp.

[460] Andy Warhol travelled to Iran in 1976 after being commissioned to make a portrait of the Shahbanou. His diaries document his frequent visits to New York's Iranian embassy throughout 1977 and 1978. Warhol, 1992, pp. 75–76, p. 111 and pp. 123–24.

[461] See Restany, 1978, for a review of the museum and its opening exhibitions.

[462] See Gluck, 2007, for an account of the Shiraz Arts Festival.

[463] The advertisement appeared in *Artforum* 17, no. 8, April 1978.

[464] The former Shahbanou recalled in 1990 that the Shah's "blessings and material support from the government permitted me to realize many projects and activities in organizations for which I was [a] patron. Personally, he was more involved with Iranian art and preferred classical art and music to modern." Farah Diba, quoted in Stein, 2013, p. 81.

Iran, in Power Twenty-Five Years, Is Proving to Be a Successful Revolutionary."[465]
In 1963 the Shah had launched his "White Revolution." This six-point reform
programme was designed to rapidly achieve his social and economic vision for Iran: a
vision that, as Iranian scholar Homa Katouzian has observed, was essentially an effort
to make his country resemble the United States as quickly as possible.[466] The
monarchy's aspirations towards secular capitalist modernity, and its (often literal)
acquisition of US-style culture rankled many of the Shah's fiercest opponents, the
Mullahs among them, who rejected this Westernised vision of their country's future.
The phenomenon that secularist writer and activist Jalal Al-e Ahmad called
"Westoxication," meaning the intoxication and poisoning of a local culture by
Western economic and cultural hegemony, was a prominent force at work in the
Shah's Iran.[467] The widely held perception that the Shah was a puppet for US interests
was a major contributing factor to grassroots political unrest.[468] The Iranian
Revolution was not simply a religious backlash against the secular Shah. It was also a
rejection of the Westoxicated Shah's official revolution, in which the administration's
modernising impulse and its arts patronage came to seem like window-dressing for a
repressive regime.[469]

Given the Shahbanou's enthusiasm for bringing Western contemporary art to Iran, it
is unsurprising that for his inaugural exhibition Shafrazi showed work by an artist of
Middle Eastern origin who was strongly indebted to New York minimalism. Both
Zadikian and Shafrazi had been enthusiastic participants in New York's highly
politicised art scene. Zadikian, who had arrived in New York in 1973, established his
signature style around this time: the application of gold leaf to internal walls and to
stacked, mass-produced building materials. Shafrazi described it as "maximal

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[465] The headline appeared on 28 April 1968. Dorman, 1987, p. 121.
[466] Katouzian, 2009, p. 263.
[467] Al-e Ahmad, 1983. Al-e Ahmad's title, *Gharbzadigī*, has also been translated as "Occidentosis."
See also Hanson, 1983.
[468] Interestingly, Katouzian claims that the Shah was not "the stooge of Western imperialism virtually
all his subjects believed him to be." His claim is based on the private diaries of the Shah's colleague
and confidant Amir Asadollah Alam, which were posthumously published in 1991. Katouzian, 2009, p.
263.
[469] The left-wing US film journal *Cinéaste* was very clear on the latter point, describing the Tehran
International Film Festival as an "expensive publicity effort" with "the aim of covering up the brutal
repression of artists, poets, film-makers, playwrights, critics and others in Iran." *Cinéaste*, 1976.

minimalism."[470] Zadikian's *Gold Bricks*, 1978, explicitly evoked Carl Andre's minimalist brick sculptures, which by the early 1970s were an established signifier of politically and aesthetically radical art.[471] They also obliquely recalled some of the more famous Situationist International slogans that had encouraged unrest in Paris in 1968: "Under the cobblestones, the beach!", or, "The most beautiful sculpture is the sandstone cobble . . . the cobble you throw at the police."[472]

This connection is supported by Zadikian's own proclivity towards the antagonistic-artistic throwing of bricks—not at the police, but through windows. He did so on two occasions. The first time that Zadikian threw a brick through a window in the name of art was for a 1974 exhibition with Gordon Matta-Clark, Jerry Hovagimyan and Richard Serra at New York's James Yu Gallery. He first boarded up the gallery window with plywood and then, in his words: "caught everyone by surprise by throwing a cobblestone from the outside shattering the window to bits; taking the art from dark to light and the inside to outside."[473] Two decades later in 1995, the second of Zadikian's bricks shattered the front window of Tony Shafrazi's commercial gallery in SoHo. In the early hours of the morning, Zadikian had thrown a quantity of gold paint at the front façade of Shafrazi's premises before inscribing the phrase "TONY IS BOZE" [whore] across the window in tar. Eugenia Bone reported:

> Shafrazi, who has known Zadikian for decades, declined to press charges. He cleaned up one window but left the other temporarily untouched. At 3.45pm the next day, Zadikian, upset that Shafrazi had 'destroyed half' of his artwork, returned . . . [and] chucked a gold-leafed brick inscribed KILL ALL LIES through the single cleaned window.[474]

In addition to replicating his symbolic 1974 performance at James Yu Gallery, Zadikian's hostile 1995 act aimed to remind Shafrazi of the gallerist's own *Guernica*

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[470] Tony Shafrazi, quoted in Lisa Zeitz, "The Tony Shafrazi Story," *Artnet Magazine*, 10 September 2009. http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/zeitz/tony-shafrazi9-10-09.asp.
[471] On Andre's politics and the politics of his art, see Crow, 1996, pp. 142–3 and pp. 151–3, and the 1970 interview "Carl Andre, Artworker: Interview with Jeanne Siegel," reproduced in Meyer, 2005, pp. 250–53.
[472] Quoted in Plant, 1992, p. 104.
[473] MSS, Smiles/Dialectics box, "Biography: Zadik Zadikian," *c*.2000.
[474] Bone, 1995, p. 22.

action. Bone went on to note that Zadikian was angered by Shafrazi's betrayal of his earlier political principles, and "He was also miffed over a number of presumed slights, including the disappearance of a sculpture he had placed in Shafrazi's care during the Iranian revolution."[475] Zadikian's "maximal" take on New York minimalism in *Gold Bricks* was clearly—for the artist at least—related to a countercultural politics of rebellion. This association was lost, however, in its Iranian context. In Tehran, where Andy Warhol was the monarchy's portrait painter of choice, *Gold Bricks* was practically official state art.

The moment of transfiguration

The moment captured in Stevenson's *The Smiles are Not Smiles*, as Shafrazi's commercial endeavour collapsed, the Shah's authority evaporated, and Tehran erupted into chaos, was a moment lacking direction. The conceit of the work was that this—the moment in which the single, anonymous viewer of Zadikian's *Gold Bricks* saw the work and described it in a sentence that reads like a religious epiphany: "The piece glowed like a shattered chain in the Persian sunlight, having no beginning and no end"—was the point at which the Shah's regime collapsed.[476] The political journalist Ryszard Kapuściński, who having witnessed many revolutions was familiar with their anatomy, described the transition as follows:

> the most important moment, the moment that will determine the fate of the country, the Shah, and the revolution, is the moment when one policeman walks from his post toward one man on the edge of the crowd, raises his voice, and orders the man to go home. . . . The policeman shouts, but the man doesn't run. . . . Nobody runs though the policeman has gone on shouting; at last he stops. There is a moment of silence. . . . The man has stopped being afraid—and this is precisely the beginning of the revolution. Here it starts.[477]

As in all revolutions, the period beginning in late October 1978 in Tehran was one of utter confusion when law, government and authority were displaced and suspended.

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[475] Bone, 1995, p. 22.
[476] Quoted in MSS, Smiles/Dialectics Research box, "Biography: Zadik Zadikian," *c.* 2000.
[477] Kapuściński, 2006, p. 109.

Power had been lost and had not yet been gained, linearity and causal sequence was broken, it was a directionless moment. Stevenson's *Smiles* reconstructed the view of the anonymous witness of Zadikian's work, which is to say that it replicated the fleeting glimpse in which the installation was transfigured by its circumstances—by the revolution—into something other than the naive and conventional "radicality" of the artist's intention. Stevenson's installation was a tableau entirely oriented towards this single privileged perspective. In the original exhibitions of *Smiles* at Vilma Gold, London and at the Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Stevenson set up the work so that viewers approached it through a set of double glass doors standing in for those at the entrance to Shafrazi's gallery. A bright light shining through these doors illuminated the scene within. Stevenson's viewer would be immediately struck, as was the original viewer in Tehran, by the sight of the stacked gold bricks radiating light amidst the debris of the looted gallery (fig. 93).

That the work staged only this particular moment, this particular view, and no other was made clear by the fact that the scene was incomplete. When viewed through the double doors, the unfinished edges of the tiled floor and the timber struts holding up the white wall were not visible: the scene looked coherent. From any other angle, it was clearly a stage set. As with the choreographed approach to *The Fountain of Prosperity* at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art in 2011, the explicit theatricality of Stevenson's set-up built an expectation of revelation or disclosure. Entering the installation, it was as if viewers were able to first re-experience the original view of *Gold Bricks* in Tehran, and then to move "behind the scenes" of that view. Stevenson has also used the language of staging to describe the work. The artist's notes in his studio archive describe the material he assembled to represent the trashed contents of Shafrazi's gallery—the telephone, the slides, the charred timber— as "mise-en-scène."[478]

The collection of objects that Stevenson referred to as his "mise-en-scène" were period-specific (figs. 94 and 97). The office equipment, slides and printer paper could all be visibly dated to the late 1970s. They operated in the same way as the period props that endow a historical drama—a stage play, or a film—with believability: they

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[478] MSS, Smiles/Dialectics Research box, Michael Stevenson, untitled notes, *c*.2005.

invited viewers to knowingly suspend their disbelief. The language of artifice and staging in Stevenson's installation, in other words, had two effects. The first was to place Zadikian's sculpture in its historical context, indicating the back-story of Stevenson's work and inviting viewers to approach the stack of golden bricks as a recreation of a real historical artefact. The second was to clearly bracket off the installation as a recreation: an artifice or fantasy about the past that, no matter how accurate it is, can be clearly distinguished from the original. I suggest that this dual perspective, which serves to fictionalise historical fact, allows us to recognise Stevenson's work as a historical figure in Auerbach's sense. It is both embedded in history and lifted out of that history by virtue of its ability to commentate, as it were, on events.

Zadikian's *Gold Bricks* was an artwork that was absolutely of its time and place. Tracing the international influence of New York minimalism, it also could be seen as a manifestation of the Shahbanou's influence on the art scene in Tehran. While the work carried with it an echo of the anti-establishment politics of the Western counterculture, in which bricks were regarded as a subversive affront to artistic convention or even as potential missiles, it also equally signified the Shah's gilded vision of a newly modernised Iran, to be reformed and rebuilt brick by brick. In its golden abundance the work perhaps also alluded to the vast oil revenues amassed in Iran's state coffers during the 1970s, which the Shah wielded in his effort to transform his country into a modern US-style state, and the golden lure of which enticed many artists into accepting the patronage of his regime. In many ways, *Gold Bricks* seemed to stand as a condensed and tangible manifestation of the contradictory forces at play in Tehran in late 1978.

However, in the moment captured by Stevenson's installation the work was transfigured into something that exceeded the confines of its temporal particularity. Co-authored by the revolution, Zadikian's work radiated light, like Christ on the mountain.[479] It was witnessed by the anonymous viewer in this transfigured state. Stevenson's re-enactment of this moment of transfiguration, including the mise-en-scène that declared it to be a re-enactment, retroactively identified the original as a

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[479] Luke 9:28–32 (King James Version).

figure, an opening, a gap in causation rendered as physical form, evidence of a moment that escaped human intentionality and a moment of absolute disruption and change when the future was entirely unknown. As in the strange temporality of the "signs and wonders" experienced by Pentecostals as evidence of the end-times, Stevenson's *Smiles* presented the transfiguration of Zadikian's work as an eruption into the present of some other time, or some other force.

Persepolis 2530, 2007: the party

Stevenson's *Persepolis 2530*, 2007, made two years after *The Smiles are Not Smiles*, focused on a moment that—again, in hindsight—has been regarded by historians as a tipping point in Iran's slide towards revolution. Stevenson's installation, which was first exhibited in Art Unlimited at Art Basel 38, 2007, centres on a full-size reconstruction of the skeletal remains of a tent. Over ten metres in diameter, the original on which this version is based was designed as luxury guest accommodation for a party hosted by the Shah at Persepolis, Iran, over several days in October 1971.

This was probably the most lavish party of the twentieth century. Cost estimates range from sixteen to one hundred million US dollars.[480] The occasion was the 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great. The festivities, to which heads of state and dignitaries from all over the world were invited, were clearly intended to position the Shah as both heir to an ancient lineage of Persian monarchy and as a serious contender in the sphere of contemporary political power. A "tent city" was erected on a 160-acre site adjacent to the ruined city of Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of Cyrus's Achaemenid Empire, in the Iranian desert. The surrounding area was fully landscaped, snakes, scorpions and other potentially dangerous wildlife were laboriously removed, acres of pine trees were planted, and spacious avenues and fountains modelled on those at Versailles were installed. The French influence on the event's design and planning was notable. Paris-based interior designers Maison Jansen produced fifty-four air-conditioned guest apartments, and extravagant reception and banqueting areas all based on the design of traditional Persian tents. In each of the guest tents:

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[480] Dorman, 1987, p. 118.

the floors were ordained with priceless Persian carpets and the marble bathrooms, installed by Paris-based bathroom store Le Bain de Diane, were equipped with the finest French toiletries . . . All the linen and towels were supplied by Porthault of Paris. No expense was spared.[481]

Maxim's of Paris catered the event. A small army of chefs flew in from France to prepare such delicacies as poached quail's eggs stuffed with caviar, and a champagne sorbet made with 1911 Moët. The guests were entertained by a high-tech evening *son et lumière* spectacle in the ancient ruins of Persepolis, and the following day by a one and a half-hour military parade featuring 3,500 soldiers from the Iranian army, dressed in period costume representing the armies of Persian civilisations of the past two and a half millennia. Bookending Persian history with the monarchy of Cyrus the Great and his own government, the Shah's parade was a display of military power that also attempted to conjure the illusion of continuous Iranian monarchy.

Like the Paris-designed guest tents, with their staging of European luxury in a framework lifted out of Persian history, the historical theatrics of the parade and the high-tech musical entertainment aimed to cement an impression of the monarchy as a cutting-edge successor to a grand and ancient heritage. In fact, the Shah was only the second ruler in the Pahlavi dynasty, which had begun when his father performed a coup d'état in the 1920s, and which would conclude with his own overthrow in early 1979. The celebrations at Persepolis were designed to declare to Iran and the world not only the legitimacy of the Shah's monarchy but also the success of his project of nationalist modernisation, the White Revolution. However, for many Iranians the party was an intolerable display of extravagance, as well as confirmation of the Shah's deferential orientation towards the West and his disconnection from his own people. In his dissertation on the celebrations, Robert Steele quotes a disgruntled "young Iranian," who complained:

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[481] Steele, 2014, p. 44. For details of the celebration, see also Abbott, 2006, pp. 253–66.

We, the people, knew nothing of it. We paid for it. It was in our name but we could not get within a mile of it. Literally. The road was blocked by soldiers— real soldiers, not walk-on operetta parts.[482]

A final absurdity in the Shah's historical fantasy took belated effect in 1976. During preparations for the celebrations at Persepolis, the Minister of Court Amir Asadollah Alam, who played a key role in designing the event, had tabled a suggestion to alter the Iranian calendar. Since Iran was celebrating the 2500th anniversary of its monarchy, Alam argued, the Iranian calendar should also take this moment as its starting point.[483] The Shah enacted the suggestion in 1976: by royal decree he moved Iran to the year 2535 overnight. The existing Iranian calendar had been an Islamic chronology beginning with the Prophet Mohammed's departure from Mecca to Medina, making, as Nasrin Rahimieh has observed, "Iran's history coterminious with the beginnings of Islam."[484] The Shah's new imperial calendar dislodged this Islamic heritage in a willful act of time travel. While the decadence of the celebrations at Persepolis "gave ammunition to the Shah's enemies," as Gholam Reza Afkhami has noted, "the decision [to alter the calendar] became a *cause célèbre*, playing an important part in the fall of the monarchy less than a decade later."[485]

The turning moment

The Shah's effort to rework Iranian history into a legitimating tradition of monarchic rule registered primarily as drastically out of touch with contemporary political reality, and was ultimately unconvincing to its local and international audiences.[486] Stevenson's *Persepolis 2530* was similarly, in the artist's words, "a folly, a piece of theatre."[487] The work recreated one of the skeletal ruins of the luxury guest tents which remain standing—still—in the desert at Persepolis: modern ruins adjacent to

[482] Quoted in Steele, 2014, p. 49.
[483] Gholam Reza Afkhami relates that the idea originated with a member of Alam's staff in 1967 and was at that time dismissed as impolitic by Prime Minister Amir-Abbas Hoveyda. With the excitement of the Persepolis celebrations, however, the change of calendar that would play "an important part in the fall of the monarchy" was approved "without," Afkhami notes, "much reflection." Afkhami, 2009, p. 411.
[484] Rahimieh, 2015, p. 25.
[485] Afkhami, 2009, p. 412 and p. 411.
[486] See for example *The New York Times* editorial for 12 October 1971, quoted in Dorman, 1987, pp. 119.
[487] Stevenson, 2013, p. 15.

the ancient stone ones. Stevenson's structure was hung with tatters of rotting, weathered canvas and the remnants of air-conditioning ducts (figs. 98–101). As he had with *The Fountain of Prosperity* and *The Smiles are Not Smiles*, Stevenson retroactively identified the tent frame he reconstructed in *Persepolis 2530* as a figure of history, and it was during the process of the work's planning and construction that this identification took place.

In *Celebration at Persepolis*, a 2008 artist's book he produced as an accompaniment to his installation, Stevenson published a conversation that he had with Rüdiger Ihle, a structural engineer and a neighbour in his studio building. Looking over Stevenson's maquette of the tent frame, Ihle considered the structural stability of the as-yet unbuilt larger sculpture. He alerted Stevenson to the danger of a "turning moment," which:

> involves the failure of the structure as a whole. This failure mechanism results in the total collapse of the structure. Such collapses involve a circular movement or revolution. In this case it is actually a spiral turning downward in three dimensions.[488]

Ihle explained that the tent's circular, symmetrical design made the roof trusses particularly vulnerable to a revolutionary movement, the direction of which would be determined by "inherent leanings, slight defections" or imperfections in the trusses themselves.[489] He warned that if triggered by a "turning moment," this inherent structural weakness could result in the sculpture's complete and sudden collapse. The allegorical subtext of Stevenson's conversation with Ihle is, of course, the collapse of the Iranian monarchy itself in a similarly sudden and dramatic revolutionary "turning moment." The potential structural collapse Ihle perceived in Stevenson's then unmade replica identified a material prophecy of revolution in the very architecture that accommodated the Shah's triumphant celebrations, the very structure that was intended to exhibit his indisputable sovereignty. Like the gold-leafed bricks in *The Smiles are Not Smiles*, the tent frame in *Persepolis 2530* identified its model as a figure of a transitional moment: a tipping point or turning point, a moment when the

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[488] Rüdiger Ihle, quoted in Stevenson, 2008a, p. 13.
[489] Rüdiger Ihle, quoted in Stevenson, 2008a, p. 14.

authority of one regime dissolved and another was about to form, a moment when the future was about to reveal itself.

The Smiles are Not Smiles and *Persepolis 2530* focus on a revolutionary moment of transition from one political regime to another. While they take revolutionary politics as their subject, the political position that the works actually articulate is more sceptical than insurrectionary. Stevenson's skeletal tent frame was, as he said, a folly. Like the "sham ruins" that were once constructed to decorate the gardens of the European aristocracy, it was an ornamental ruin, a piece of sculpture that mimics architecture's aesthetics but not its functionality. The sham ruins created as oversized garden ornaments in the eighteenth century were also, like the Shah's faux-historical military parade at Persepolis, intended to foster an ambience of antiquity. A folly in the shape of a small, charmingly dilapidated gothic castle, such as the "Ragged Castle" built around 1750 by Thomas Wright in South Gloucestershire, England, performs age, time and historicity. In marked contrast to the lavish original built at Persepolis in 1971, Stevenson's replica tent was forlorn and emaciated. Like Wright's Ragged Castle—or any number of other examples of similar follies—its ruination was theatrical. A number of period details contributed to this effect. Stevenson evoked the debris left behind after the party at Persepolis, for example, by including small drifts of sand around the base of the sculpture, into which false eyelashes and pine needles were mingled—these latter dropped, ostensibly, by the guests, and by the decorative pine plantations that had surrounded the "tent city." The bones of a dead bird were also half hidden by the remnants of the tent canvas, which was partially collapsed onto the ground. With this gothic touch, *Persepolis 2530* became identifiable as an artwork in the tradition of the vanitas. Stevenson's spectacle of ruination morbidly inverted the Shah's spectacle of triumph into an assertion of the weakness, insubstantiality and transitory nature of human life, and—by extension—the hubris of human claims to power and authoritative lineage.

Persepolis 2530 and the tenacity of patronage

Hardly a call to arms, when *Persepolis 2530* was installed at Art Basel it was as a melancholy reflection on human frailty and the relentless passage of time. However, the fair was the setting for a coincidental encounter between Stevenson's work and

several other relics of the former monarchy. As it turned out, Tony Shafrazi Gallery was also exhibiting at Art Basel that year, and coincidentally chose to show the three portraits Andy Warhol had made of the Shah, Shahbanou and the Shah's twin sister Princess Ashraf in 1977 and 1978. Also coincidentally attending the fair in 2007 were several members of the former Iranian royal family, including Kamran Diba, the Shahbanou's cousin who was the architect and first director of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. As *The Art Newspaper* reported, between Stevenson's exhibit and the Warhol portraits, the former royals had "a roller-coaster ride through their family history while visiting the fair this year."[490]

This coincidence was highly significant to Stevenson. He has described it as "a moment of critical feedback."[491] In the subsequent expanded exhibition of *Persepolis 2530* at Bristol's Arnolfini in 2008, he arranged to show the tent sculpture alongside one of Warhol's original screenprinted portraits of the Shah, in reference to the encounter that had taken place at Art Basel the previous year. For Stevenson, the appearance of the royals at the fair was more than a strange feedback loop where the subject of his work became its audience. It was confirmation of what he describes as "the tenacity of patronage."[492] Explaining what he means by this will also draw out the particular politics of Stevenson's use of the language of spectacle and display in both *The Smiles are Not Smiles* and *Persepolis 2530*.

The Iranian monarchy's patronage of Western contemporary artists served to soften its public image. In the eyes of its critics at least, the art acted as window-dressing to a repressive regime. As Donna Stein noted in her 1990 interview with the former Shahbanou, she is best known as "the patron of twenty-four educational, health and cultural organizations and [for her] instrumental [role] in humanizing the Pahlavi dynasty."[493] Diba's role as a cultural patron was central to her ability to "humanise" her husband's regime. Stevenson has noted several times that Andy Warhol effectively acted the part of the "court painter" to the Peacock Throne.[494] Historically, court artists were employed in a role akin to public relations personnel. They

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[490] "Iran Remembered," *The Art Newspaper: Art Basel Daily Edition*, 14 June 2007, reproduced in *Celebration at Persepolis*, 2008, p. 32.
[491] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.
[492] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.
[493] Stein, 2013, p. 75.
[494] Stevenson, 2008b, p. 37 and p. 55.

demonstrated the refinement and nobility of their patron: in art historian Martin
Warnke's words, "the artist was involved in the visible projection of the princely aura,
and had privileged access to the ruler's presence."[495]

Warnke observes that in the royal courts of early modern Europe, artists were
presented with a unique opportunity to rapidly climb the ranks of their society. Within
the court system, unlike the guilds, "thanks to princely favour the artist could rise to
higher dignities and even join the prince's immediate entourage."[496] The benefits of
the relationship were mutual, and art still has the capacity to endow the rich with an
air of nobility. In their sociological study of the culture of art collecting at Art Basel,
Schultheis *et al.*, note that among many collectors at the fair it is an accepted fact that
an indefinable quality of cultural refinement separates the "genuine collector" from
the vulgar speculator. In their summary, in the presence of collectors from "an upper-
class, if not even aristocratic background" it is possible, apparently:

> to feel the staying power and the broad vision in regard to art, its history and its
> manifestations. The legitimate inheritance of taste in art, often handed down
> over several generations like a material patrimony, here lends the contact with
> art an inimitable lightness; it is spontaneous, effortless, the expression of deeply
> internalized aesthetic dispositions, which have become second nature to its
> inheritors.[497]

In the field of contemporary art patronage, just like in the royal courts of history, art
plays a role that could be described as redemptive. I have claimed that Stevenson is
sceptical of art's ability to stage an effective political protest, or to effect political
salvation, and this is the reason why. If art has the capacity to redeem anyone, it is the
wealthy: an "aesthetic disposition" functions to convert privilege into an aura of
nobility, underwriting the "legitimate inheritance" of aristocratic power.[498]

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[495] Warnke, 1993, p. xv.
[496] Warnke, 1993, p. 120.
[497] Schultheis, *et al.*, 2015, p. 113.
[498] Schultheis *et al.* are clear about the connection between the modern practice of art collecting and
aristocratic traditions of patronage. They describe how for the "rising social class" of the French
bourgeoisie between 1830–48: "modern art provides an arsenal of symbolic weapons, in which,
following the centuries-long established aristocratic mode of legitimating worldly privileges by
demonstrating extraordinary qualities in the form of generous wastefulness, it finds the means to

For Stevenson, the Warhol portrait of the Shah that he incorporated into his installation of *Persepolis 2530* at the Arnolfini, was "an example of the close relationship between the buying and selling of art and political power."[499] The appearance of the former royals at Art Basel in 2007, art shopping amongst Europe's wealthy, had similarly demonstrated to him how the circumstances of Tehran's former elite—the members of the Shah's court—had not been dramatically altered by the revolution. Privilege, ironically enough, served to soften the effect of the revolutionary uprising, which resulted in displacement rather than any reduction in their standard of living. Stevenson's perspective could certainly be described as a form of class consciousness. However, it is a class consciousness generated by observing the effects of revolution, and essentially the failure of the revolution to hit its target, rather than revolutionary consciousness in the Marxist sense.

The language of spectacle and display in *Persepolis 2530*, then, should certainly not be considered in terms of the "society of the spectacle" described by Guy Debord, or even the game of the spectacular anti-spectacle that Jack Bankowsky described as "art fair art." For Debord, the spectacle was a show designed to seduce the broader population into compliance, and a representation that had taken the place of the real: "Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation."[500] Distracting the masses with bread and circuses, he thought, softened their propensity to revolt and made them available for exploitation. Debord encouraged his readers to see the authentic real concealed behind the spectacle and be stirred into political action. For Bankowsky, "art fair art" engages the spectacle of the art market and uses it for its own ends. He described how artists like Tino Sehgal respond to the commercial imperative of fairs like Art Basel with a Warholian "post-Pop performative impulse," which self-reflexively enacts its own participation in the fair's systems.[501]

Persepolis 2530's language of spectacle, in contrast, should be considered in terms of the performance of nobility I have described. The dance of etiquette that operated in

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distinguish itself as an elite, but at the same time to distance itself from the elite of the traditional *Ancien Régime*." Schultheis, *et al.*, 2015, p. 100.

[499] Arnolfini, 2008.

[500] Debord, 2012, p. 32.

[501] Bankowsky, 2005, p. 230.

the historical royal courts and that also operates among collectors of contemporary art enables its participants to recognise and rank each other, distinguishing the "genuine collectors" from the vulgar speculators. In the presentation of *Persepolis 2530* at Arnolfini, where Stevenson juxtaposed his tent sculpture with the Warhol portrait, the vanitas-like quality of the sculpture evoked sympathy for the Shah, of all people. The portrait that Stevenson used was—unusually for Warhol—a black and white monochrome (fig. 102). He described it as "ghostly pale. It was really like a ghost."[502] Having inherited arbitrary power, the Shah became a sacrificial victim, not just of the Iranian revolutionaries but also of the international audience of his performance at Persepolis. Having failed to perform convincingly, he was crushed in the machinery of an unforgiving system. Stevenson described how the portrait was installed in a gallery space separate from the tent sculpture: "It was physically quite disconnected . . . so in a way it was a bit like the Shafrazi stand [at the fair], but in this impoverished, emaciated version. It was just ghostly, and he had this terrible look in his eyes, like he just didn't want to look at you."[503]

On affective embodiment and critique

Stevenson is sceptical about art's ability to effect substantial political change. This scepticism comes in part from his awareness, as expressed in his 2008 installation of *Persepolis 2530*, of art's long-standing and intimate relationship with privilege. It also relates to the particular mode of representation in his work, which is not compatible with critique's gesture of exposure. This mode of representation, which I have described as a kind of "affective embodiment," endows sculptures like *The Fountain of Prosperity* with their cryptic sculptural presence and it comes from a faith-based way of thinking. In his recent essay "Post-Critical?," Hal Foster expressed his frustration at the continued hostility towards critique in contemporary culture since the US "culture wars" of the 1980s and 1990s.[504] His defence of critique was staged as a confrontation with the work of Bruno Latour and Jacques Rancière, who he identified as his key opponents, and it centred on terms associated with belief and the revelation of truth such as fetishism and iconoclasm. Foster clearly articulates what I

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[502] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.
[503] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.
[504] Foster, 2015.

have called the "redemptive politics of critique," a political stance that Stevenson's art refuses.

Foster's defence of critique is trapped in a mode of thinking where fetishism and antifetishism are locked in intractable opposition. He argues that the "debilitating relativism" currently afflicting contemporary culture is the product of the combined forces of conservative commentators, corporate sponsorship of museums and the market-centric valuation of art.[505] This can only be stopped by the resurrection of "antifetishistic critique," which is:

> motivated primarily by a resistance to any operation whereby human constructs (God, the Internet, an artwork) are projected above us and granted an agency of their own, from which position and with which power they are more likely to overbear us than to enlighten us.[506]

For Foster, the operation of the public sphere rests on an engaged citizenry who are prepared to resist the management of public opinion by exposing this management as such. Such an engaged citizenry is produced through its representation in critical writing and artworks. My issue with Foster's position has less to do with his challenge to cultural relativism than it has with his identification of critique as the only way to formulate this challenge.[507]

Noting that Bruno Latour and Jacques Rancière have both have raised objections to critique, Foster accurately summarises that for both, "critique is . . . compromised by

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[505] Foster, 2015, p. 115.

[506] Foster, 2015, p. 121.

[507] My argument with Foster could equally be had with certain aspects of Sven Lütticken's *Idols of the Market*. In this book, Lütticken also claims that an iconoclastic-critical position is politically necessary under current conditions, which he sees as dominated by the spectacle of warring secular and religious fundamentalisms. He aims to "re-appropriate monotheistic iconoclasm in order to create cracks in the seamless surface of the fundamentalist spectacle" (p. 17) and he calls for the resurrection of a secular, artistic iconoclasm to these ends. Unlike Foster, Lütticken aims to dispel the idea that belief is naive or credulous. However, he still seems unable or unwilling to move beyond what I have described as the redemptive politics of critique, which he strongly associates with iconoclasm. Like Foster, Lütticken identifies Latour as a key opponent. However, by the end of his book his argument has circled around to a position that seems surprisingly similar to Latour's. Lütticken's description of the capacity of artworks to act as critical interventions into the visible strangely resembles Latour's self-aware iconophilia, which recognises that divinities are fabricated, "impure but fascinating human-made mediators." Lütticken, 2009; Latour, 2002, p. 14, and see also Lütticken, 2013a.

its arrogant posture of demystification."[508] The opposition between fetishism and antifetishism could also be described as one between belief and critique, or iconophilia and iconoclasm. It also seems, in Foster's thinking, to be an opposition between a position of credulity and incredulity, or willing subjectification as opposed to active resistance. This is because he has not understood Latour's analysis of this apparent opposition. For Latour, fetishism and antifetishism are not opposed in any meaningful sense. He relates that when an iconoclast exposes the truth underlying a fetish or idol—when that fetish or idol is smashed, and is shown to be nothing but inert material, not a god at all—the problem then arises of "to whom he should restore the power that was mistakenly attributed to the fetishes."[509] Whether this power is attributed to the human individual who made the fetish and thereby exercised dominance over the credulous people who believed in it, or whether this power is attributed to a social system of beliefs, collectively held, it still exists after the fetish was smashed. In either case, as Latour points out:

> The human actor has merely exchanged one form of transcendence for another.
> We can see this quite well in Emile Durkheim, in whose hands that which is
> social seems hardly less opaque than the offending religion it explains.[510]

Despite the critical gesture of exposure performed by the iconoclast, the "power behind the scenes" is never explained away, it is merely given a different name. Latour's point is that fetishism and antifetishism are not opposed: they are both positions based in belief, but they simply believe in different things. The fetishist believes in the power manifested by the fetish, whereas the antifetishist believes in the power of the truth uncovered by his or her gesture of critique. Neither, in practice, is able to achieve liberation from this power. For Latour there is no escaping fetishism because it is simply not possible to fully expose the true nature of the world in which we exist, and this is where his thinking accords with Stevenson's. As I have demonstrated, Stevenson's works are revelatory in a way that is not only unlike critique's revelation of an underlying truth but also differs from postmodernism's insistence that reality is constructed, that there is no truth concealed behind the

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[508] Foster, 2015, p. 117.
[509] Latour, 2010, p. 10.
[510] Latour, 2010, p. 10.

artifice. Stevenson's position is one of profound epistemological uncertainty: we simply don't know what is behind the artifice of our representations of the world. Like Latour, he regards this position of uncertainty as immensely generative. The revelatory aspects of Stevenson's works emerge precisely from the obfuscations and mediations that the gesture of critique attempts to clear away.

Latour, who as a practicing Catholic and pioneer in the field of science studies presumably has a good working knowledge of his topic, has reframed the fetishist or iconophilic position. For him, the attitude of the believer does not require accuracy, it requires functionality. Belief is a way of approaching things—icons, fetishes—which can either work, or not work. In his words, "either they elicit the spirit they utter and they are true, or they don't and they are worse than false: they are simply irrelevant, parasitical."[511] Religious icons, as I have said, do not seek to persuade their viewers of the existence of God, or to represent God. They are not didactic or explanatory, they do not attempt to resolve the mystery of their supernatural referent. Instead, icons offer their physical form as an opening onto or stand-in for a supernatural power: they make this power present, and that presence is transformative. In Latour's terms, they do not "transport messages," they "transform messengers."[512] As he relates, when the Virgin Mary encountered the angel Gabriel she was utterly transformed, and her transformation made God present in the world in the form of Christ:

> The only way to understand stories, such as that of the Annunciation, is to repeat them, that is, to utter again a Word that produces in the listener the same effect, namely one that impregnates with the gift of renewed presence.[513]

This kind of repetition is not a mode of representation in the sense that it illustrates something that is absent. It is a strategy of making-present-again. The difference between science and religion, Latour says, is that science attempts to grasp what is distant and difficult to perceive whereas religion is focused on the close and present

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[511] Latour, 2010, p. 101.
[512] Latour, 2010, p. 108.
[513] Latour, 2010, p. 107.

and "it does not even try to *grasp* anything."[514] Rather than attempting to reveal or expose the supernatural or transcendent, religion tries to:

> represent the presence of that which is called, in a certain technical and ritual idiom, the 'Word incarnate,' which is to *say* again that it is here—alive—and not dead over there, far away. It does not try to designate something, but to speak from a new state that it generates by its ways of talking, its manner of speech.[515]

There is no escaping fetishism because it is not possible to bypass mediation. It is not possible to cut through the veil of illusion in order to expose the truth, as critique likes to think it is doing, because this action simply replaces one veil with another. When Foster dismissed Rancière's suggestion that art has the ability to create new "configurations of experience," it was because he saw this as "wishful thinking; it might even be a form of faith that calls for demystification."[516] The dismissal is in itself telling: the idea that faith necessitates demystification is precisely what Latour has attempted to refute. Critique, iconoclasm, demystification: they do not dispel faith or cause the deity to evaporate, they only displace or rename it. The position of belief that Latour describes is one that recognises its inability to know. It embraces its own fetishism on the grounds that it works to make enigmatically and affectively present what critique can never reveal.

The iconic quality of Stevenson's sculptural replicas, their cryptic sculptural presence, is a form of affective embodiment that stages this experience of belief. Rather than enacting the demystifying gesture of critique, his works stand as an enigmatic presence or trace of something that remains unquantified: as the artist has noted, he aims to convey the sense that "*something happened here*."[517] This doesn't mean that his work is blind to injustice, or unable to articulate its opposition to it. *The Fountain of Prosperity* is hardly an expression of tolerance for the violence of military-backed transnational corporate power, and *Persepolis 2530* certainly does not celebrate art's ability to provide cultural validation to wealth and privilege. It does, however, mean

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[514] Latour, 2010, p. 110, emphasis in original.
[515] Latour, 2010, p. 110, emphasis in original.
[516] Foster, 2015, p. 119.
[517] Michael Stevenson, quoted in Hill, 2009, p. 471.

that the mode of representation operating in Stevenson's practice is oriented towards a certain political role for art which, as I have shown, is not redemptive, but it is revelatory.

Chapter five: Infinity

"Wisdom has been accredited to those who claim that materiality represents the merely apparent, behind which lies that which is real."[518]

The proposition that the reality we perceive is not the extent of things, that what is visible and tangible to us is only part of what exists, is fundamental to Western philosophy and the Abrahamic religions. In this chapter, I will discuss a number of works that Stevenson produced between 2008 and 2012. Each approaches the question of the limit—and the possibility of an exterior—to the phenomenal world that we are able to apprehend either directly, or by using the prosthetic sensory tools of science and technology. The works I discuss draw from diverse disciplines to confront the boundaries of human comprehension. Stevenson's film *On How Things Behave*, 2010, is his most concise statement to date regarding our epistemological limitations. Framed in terms of the human inability to predict the future—our propensity to be surprised by what Nassim Nicholas Taleb called "black swan" events—the film described the folly of our tendency to presume knowledge of something categorically unknowable.[519] This chapter opens with a brief discussion of *On How Things Behave* because I regard it as a key to understanding the installation projects that will be my main focus.

The first of these, *Lender of Last Resort*, 2008, was made during the Global Financial Crisis, an event which offered the best recent evidence of such a failure of prediction. *Nueva Matemática* (an installation also incorporating Stevenson's earlier film, *Introducción a la Teoría de la Probabilidad*, 2008) and *A Life of Crudity, Vulgarity, and Blindness* were a binary pair of installations made and shown concurrently in different locations in 2012. These works all addressed the limits of the calculable. They touched, therefore, on the category of the sublime, which also concerns itself with limit experiences. The experience known as the sublime is one of awe and terror in the face of a power that assails and endangers us, and which exceeds depiction or

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[518] Miller, 2005, p. 1.
[519] Taleb, 2007.

description. It marks the limit of human agency and epistemological capacity. As I have demonstrated, Stevenson's practice developed out of postmodernism's critique of representation, and it is not coincidental that the category of the sublime re-emerged, after a period of hibernation, as a topic of interest to the two major theorists of postmodernism in the 1980s. Jean-François Lyotard's "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 1984, argued for the ongoing value of avant-garde transcendentalism which, following Barnett Newman, he located in the artist's heroic-mystical act of original creation.[520] Fredric Jameson's 1984 "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in contrast, used the sublime to characterise the overwhelming dystopian power of globalised capital and the loss of a sense of human agency under late capitalist conditions.[521]

As we will see, Stevenson's approach to the limit experiences characteristic of the sublime differs in important ways from these two accounts, as well as from the techno-sublime evoked, for example, in the liquid flows and rapid-fire transformations of Hito Steyerl's digital video works. His projects offer an impure glimpse of something categorically distinct from the globalised systems addressed by Steyerl and Jameson which, being global, are finite despite their vastness. Stevenson's deep-rooted scepticism also clearly prevents him from subscribing to Lyotard's view of the mystical ground zero of art-making, where, like the God of Genesis, the artist creates their work out of formlessness and the void, thereby giving form to the ineffable "now." Stevenson's strategies of quotation and repetition are scathing of such heroic originality. In his work, the transcendental is associated, paradoxically, with the degraded status of representation after the advent of postmodernism. The postmodern critique of representation troubled the presumption that "true" reality exists as a timeless essence underlying its manifestation in culture, and that representational practices should be seen as a privileged conduit of that essence. Collapsing the distinction between signifier and signified, poststructuralist theorists asserted that representation produces reality rather than transmitting its accurate portrait. As I have already outlined, the affective revelation offered by Stevenson's sculptural replicas emerges from within an artistic language that is emphatically limited to processes of copying. These are not only quintessentially postmodern

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[520] Lyotard, 2010.
[521] Jameson, 1984.

practices, they are also the most basic and reduced mode of artistic representation. Stevenson's works seem to stage the revelation of an underlying and determining structure that limits human agency. However, they do so using an artistic mode that foregrounds its own lack of transparency and its own inability to bypass the mediations that obfuscate a direct correspondence between signifier and signified.

What they so enigmatically reveal is, I repeat, not the dominance of the global economic system or the power of digitally networked media. It is, quite simply, something that cannot be known. In conversation, Stevenson consistently refuses to be drawn into specifics on this topic, instead preserving its cryptic character by describing it as "this other thing."[522] Natural and economic forces appear in Stevenson's works, not as sublime in themselves, but as analogies for a "beyond" that categorically exceeds our knowledge and limits our agency. His approach is in this respect akin to the natural sublime of the seventeenth century, in which nature was taken as an analogy for the unimaginable power of God. The most significant effect of Stevenson's orientation towards this unnamable "other thing"—which as we will see, can not simply be identified as the Christian God—is that it reinstates absolute otherness into a worldview grown suffocating in its immersive horizonless heterogeneity. It opens, in effect, a profoundly unknowable future: an apocalyptic horizon just as unavoidable and radically unpredictable as Pentecostalism's, but lacking the faith that Pentecostals have in their own salvation. There is no benevolent promise of redemption or salvation in Stevenson's model of historical time.

On How Things Behave, 2010, and the apocalyptic time *t*

Stevenson's film *On How Things Behave*, 2010, addressed the folly of attempting to predict an uncertain future, and it was full of descriptions of both natural and economic forces that stymied human efforts to determine their own fate. The film took the form of five short stories, which a narrator recounted over a sequence of enigmatic images of circular shapes: images showing sunspots on the sun's surface,

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[522] There are many examples of the evasive phrase "this other thing," which recurred throughout my interviews with Stevenson. He described his interest in the story of Jörg Immendorff's Auckland residency to me, for example, in the following terms: "It was just such an amazing story to be able to tell this other story. It's this whole thing of these things that exist together, like a micro-history that can unpack this other thing." Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.

footage of stacked Russian matyroshka dolls, and slow panning shots of a degraded mural painting with a repeated circular motif (figs. 103–105).[523] It opened with a fable which was based, in fact, on a true story, although this was not revealed in the film itself. The fable concerned the relationship between Man and The Sea, which was one of apparently contractual reciprocity. Manfred Gnädinger was a German artist and hermit known simply as "Man," who came to live on the rocky coast of Camelle, north-west Spain, in the 1960s. For four decades he lived in a shack beside the sea, growing his own food and creating artworks—including the mural with the circular motif that appeared in Stevenson's film—from materials he could salvage. The film's narrator explained that in return for his stewardship, "The Sea let Man the rising tide, and its renewal, in perpetuity." Man's poverty was periodically alleviated by the abundance ("paint cans and other offerings") that drifted in on the tide. In late 2002 however, he was the sole human casualty of an oil spill caused by the wrecked tanker *MV Prestige*, which saturated the coast on which he lived. Man was unprepared for the "black swan" event of the black tide that spelled his death. As the narrator related, in his dying moments Man cursed at The Sea:

> 'In all my days I have never seen a black tide. How can you account for this? Why did you not think to forewarn me?'
> Feeling insulted, The Sea broke her silence for the first time. A voice rose up from her depths and spoke: 'I am higher than you can understand and deeper. I have kept my own account from the beginning of time.'

The benevolent regularity of the tides had allowed Man to conceive of his relationship with The Sea in terms of a binding contract built on mutual benefit. What he regarded as her betrayal of this agreement, however, was nothing of the kind. It merely demonstrated the foolishness of his belief that he could enter into contractual agreement with an entity so vastly in excess of his comprehension. Through this seemingly primordial scenario of Man's relationship with nature, Stevenson outlined

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[523] In addition to the two narratives I discuss here, the film included a fragment from Jorge Luis Borges's 1944 story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," a passage recounting Isaac Newton's financial ruination in the first international financial crash, the South Sea Bubble of 1720, and a first-person account by a former merchant banker of the "euphoric" market in 1980s New Zealand taken from *Class of '87*, a television documentary about the 1987 stockmarket crash. See Borges, 2000; Chancellor, 1999, p. 69 and p. 88; and Riddiford, 1992.

the only universal truth of which we can be assured: the human propensity to be surprised by the turn of events.

Confident in the mutual understanding he thought he had achieved in his co-habitation with The Sea, Man was happily oblivious to the imminence of the black tide. In Stevenson's fable the temporal horizon figured by the oil spill revealed the extent of Man's hubris and ignorance. Another story in the film also addressed a temporal horizon, which was also apocalyptic in the sense that it promised to reveal things hidden from present knowledge. This was the temporal horizon US philosopher Nelson Goodman used in his analysis of the problem of induction.

Goodman addressed the problem of induction, originally recognised by David Hume in the seventeenth century, in his 1954 book *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*.[524] In inductive reasoning, a new claim is inferred from a series of observations. For example, the observation that the sun has risen every morning for as long as anyone can remember leads to the claim that the sun will also rise tomorrow morning. Inductive logic, in short, anticipates that what we don't know will resemble what we do know, that the future will proceed along similar lines to the past. This premise—that repeated observations can result in the declaration of a natural law—underpins the experimental scientific method. As the narrator of *On How Things Behave* observes, the regularity of the sunrise produces:

> A compelling daily narrative, a plotline that recounts back into prehistory. And yet, with all this evidence, we are still in no better position to forecast with certainty tomorrow's sunrise. . . . In the future, the future may not be like the past. With absolute certainty, one can never say more.

The problem of induction is that there is no logical reason why future events should resemble past ones. Goodman reframed the problem, illustrating his point using a paradox about the colour of emeralds. As Stevenson's narrator recounted, based on the evidence currently to hand, Goodman offered the hypothesis that all emeralds are green. Then he offered the competing claim that all emeralds are in fact grue. The

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[524] Goodman, 1954.

nonsense adjective "grue" is unusual because it is time-dependent. Grue emeralds that are examined before a particular future time t will appear green, but if they are examined after time t they will be found to be blue. Prior to time t, therefore, each visual confirmation that emeralds are green equally supports the hypothesis that they are in fact grue. In either case, the truth will not be known until the advent of time t. In Stevenson's film, Goodman's predicate "grue" acts to introduce radical uncertainty to our perception of the world and expectations of the future. The future time t, however, stands as an apocalyptic horizon and revelatory moment. It forms a limit to our present state of ignorance, which is to say that when the sublime experience of our epistemological limitations is framed in temporal terms, it becomes eschatological.

Lender of Last Resort, 2008

The installations that will be my central focus in this chapter each addressed, in various ways, the limits of the calculable. They provided, as did works like *The Smiles are Not Smiles*, 2005, *The Fountain of Prosperity*, 2006, and *Persepolis 2530*, 2007, an enigmatic glimpse of some force or structure that seems to underlie human historical events. *Lender of Last Resort* was made in 2008, during the early stages of the Global Financial Crisis. Taking economic crisis as its subject, the work explored the limits of human knowledge and our subordination to a future that can't be predicted. Because *Lender of Last Resort* focused on the limits of the financial systems that are the heart of neoliberal economics, it can also be brought to bear on Fredric Jameson's perception of the cultural/economic nexus of postmodernism and finance capitalism. Jameson famously characterised postmodern culture as a reflection of our disorientation in the face of "the whole new decentred global network of the third stage of capital itself."[525] In this, he was motivated by a political imperative to map the dystopian sublime of global capital, and its immersive, "deterritorialized" systems of exploitation, and thereby discover a position from which to challenge it.[526] In contrast, in *Lender of Last Resort* as in other works, Stevenson's strategy was to "zoom in" on the telling detail rather than attempt an overview. Rather than Jameson's endless, disorienting network of shifting values,

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[525] Jameson, 1984, p. 80.
[526] Jameson, 1998, pp. 153–4.

Stevenson's work described a bounded system which is only able to function because of the limits that are its condition of possibility.

Stevenson produced two versions of *Lender of Last Resort* within the space of seven months. When Northern Rock collapsed in 2007, he was working on the project's first iteration at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, the Netherlands, and when Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy in September 2008 he was in the final stages of preparing the second version for London's Frieze Art Fair. At the Kröller-Müller Museum, the installation consisted of a tableau of objects and furniture borrowed from the Dutch central bank (De Nederlandsche Bank, or DNB) (figs. 106–107). As we will see, this museological loan referred to a financial loan that was crucial to the historical foundation of the museum. At Frieze, Stevenson restaged the project using a tableau of objects borrowed from London pawnbrokers for the duration of the fair (fig. 108). Instead of making a replica of a historical artefact as he had done in earlier works, for *Lender of Last Resort* Stevenson replicated a historical transaction—a loan—thereby emphasising the temporal duration of both the loan contract and the art exhibition.

Given that both versions of *Lender of Last Resort* were comprised of borrowed objects, the temporal duration of the loan contract was co-extensive with the duration of the work's public exhibition, and in fact its physical existence. This duration, the period of time between the loan and its repayment, was the project's central subject. As I will demonstrate, loan contracts operate according to the eschatological logic of Nelson Goodman's apocalyptic "time *t*." The loan contract is also the most basic instrument of finance capitalism, and it underpins the whole architecture of contemporary finance. *Lender of Last Resort*'s references to banking and finance clearly set it in relation to the carnage in the global financial markets in 2008 (which was also regarded by many commentators as apocalyptic in nature). The work's specific focus on the institution of loan also spoke directly to the financial markets that are the heart of neoliberal economics. As in all of Stevenson's major projects from 2000 onwards, this focus was presented in the form of a historical narrative.

Financial crisis and the Kröller-Müller Museum

At the Kröller-Müller Museum, Stevenson presented a tableau of borrowed objects which referred—as I have said—to an earlier monetary loan, but also to another financial crash: the Dutch banking crisis of 1924. The tableau was structured around the ornate wooden desk that had belonged to Gerard Vissering, who was the DNB president during the 1924 crash. The desk, the carpet it stood on, and an arrangement of period artefacts on the surface of the desk including several sets of brass scales, a writing set and a collection of Chinese glass balls—all borrowed from the DNB— imagined a scene from Vissering's office. Underneath Vissering's desk, placed directly on the carpet, was a second arrangement of objects from the Kröller-Müller Museum collection. Unlike the professional banker's accoutrements above, the floor was crowded with domestic items that were once the personal belongings of the museum's founders, the art collector Helene Kröller-Müller and her husband the mining and shipping magnate Anton Kröller. A teapot, cup and saucer from a tea service, meat tongs, a decorative statuette of a deer, and a large brass door-knocker in the shape of a lion's head were placed alongside other objects typical of a wealthy European home of the early twentieth century. With Vissering's heavy brass scales and weights dominating the arrangement on the tabletop and the Kröller-Müllers' personal possessions below, the whole ensemble had the feeling of a fire sale, or a deceased estate at auction (figs. 106–107).

The two institutions represented in Stevenson's tableau were linked by a historical loan, made by the DNB acting in its capacity as lender of last resort. The phrase "lender of last resort" typically refers to a key function of a central bank: to provide, in the event of a market failure, emergency loans to financial institutions as a means of preventing the sort of contagious panic that leads to widespread economic crisis. In the crash of 1924, the DNB's intervention also had the unexpected outcome of giving birth to the Kröller-Müller Museum and the Hoge Veluwe National Park in which the museum stands. As Stevenson narrated to me, the Kröller-Müller Museum started life as a private collection, "But then there's a little gap that no one at the museum can

explain, then in the 1930s the collection becomes public."[527] Stevenson's installation examined his host institution's emergence out of these conditions of crisis.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the Kröller-Müllers' company, Wm. H. Müller & Co, was a mining and shipping empire on a scale previously unseen in the Netherlands. While Helene's passion was for art, Anton poured resources into the creation of the "Hoge Veluwe" estate, a vast game reserve which was his private hunting ground and a retreat where he could conduct business deals. In addition to the estate, the Kröller-Müllers' wealth financed one of the Netherlands' most significant private art collections and a series of architectural commissions.[528] The Kröller-Müllers were merchants, not aristocrats, and they were inspired by the cultural patronage of another family of merchants and bankers, the Medicis of fifteenth-century Florence. On a visit to Florence, Helene Kröller-Müller was particularly taken by the Palazzo Vecchio, the medieval fortress which was occupied and renovated by Duke Cosimo I de' Medici between 1540–49. In her words: "when I told [Anton] how with its crownwork and tower, it dominated the whole city of Florence, and how it could be seen from far and wide, and yet it was not built by kings, the idea suddenly struck him, spontaneous as a lucky find."[529] According to Hans van Dijk, the Kröller-Müllers regarded this monument to Medici power as a symbol of the possibilities inherent in cultural patronage.

The Kröller-Müllers' empire was built using advance financing. Both the estate and the art collection were officially owned by Wm. H. Müller & Co or its subsidiaries. Kröller's network of trusted business contacts and his substantial assets allowed him to do business using bank loans secured by private collateral. As Frieda van Essen explains:

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[527] Stevenson made clear that he was not interested in digging for skeletons in the Kröller-Müller's closet. He was intrigued by the way that a financial crisis intervened to disrupt the operation of an existing system: "you start with a private collection, you have financial crisis, you have nationalisation. And . . . I'm not really interested in the exact story, it doesn't matter to me. I'm interested in this grand process, which is an amazing process, an amazing process of the birth of the museum." Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Mexico City, 20 August 2012. The history of the Kröller-Müller Museum that I relate here is largely drawn from that published by the Hoge Veluwe National Park Foundation, Beukhof et al., 2005.
[528] In less than twenty years Helene Kröller-Müller put together a collection of more than 800 paintings, 275 sculptures, 5000 drawings, and nearly 500 decorative arts objects. The Kröller-Müller Museum's collection of works by van Gogh is only surpassed by that of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. Veldpape, 2005, p. 101 and Bak, 2005, p. 28.
[529] Helene Kröller-Müller, quoted in van Dijk, 2005, p. 128.

This remained his method even when larger sums of money were required to finance shipbuilding projects or to start up mines. And, as business had always been plain sailing up to then, he just assumed that everything would turn out well in the end. As a collateral for the large projects needing advance financing, Kröller would use his real estate and very extensive share-portfolio.[530]

Kröller's strategy was extremely successful for some decades. However, during the early 1920s the German economy, within which Wm. H. Müller & Co was heavily invested, collapsed. This triggered a credit crisis in the major Rotterdam banks, including the Rotterdamsche Bankvereeniging (Robaver) which had extended generous credit to Wm. H. Müller & Co.[531] The value of the firm plummeted, but it was the Robaver's biggest debtor. Kröller "was kindly yet firmly requested to pay off his debts."[532] Van Essen continues:

Anton Kröller no longer had any property to call his own: it had all been used as collateral and the value of his own company dropped into the red. On paper he was in fact bankrupt.[533]

In 1925, the Robaver bank was rescued by an emergency loan from Gerard Vissering at the DNB, acting as the lender of last resort (the loan was written, apparently, on the very desk and with the very pen in Stevenson's tableau).[534] Now effectively in debt to the central bank, the Kröller-Müllers needed to act to protect their private property—which they had put up as collateral for business loans—being partitioned and sold to satisfy their creditors. The couple evaded bankruptcy by an unusual method: they realised Helene Kröller-Müller's dream of establishing an art museum. The Kröller-Müllers made a proposal to the Dutch government, which came to fruition after

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[530] Van Essen, 2005, p. 194.
[531] Stevenson notes that Kröller was a senior executive at the Robaver, "so effectively he signed his own loans—which may sound corrupt or whatever, but of course from what we've seen over the last few years this is completely normal during a time of market expansion." Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Mexico City, 20 August 2012.
[532] Bak, 2005, p. 30.
[533] Van Essen, 2005, p. 194.
[534] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Mexico City, 20 August 2012.

"much complicated chicanery" in 1935.[535] It was decided that the Hoge Veluwe and the art collection would become part of the Dutch cultural heritage as a national park and a public museum. In return, the Kröller-Müllers' debts would be cleared. They exchanged their "priceless" assets—the art collection and the land of the Hoge Veluwe—for debt forgiveness from the state. The Kröller-Müller Museum was built on the Hoge Veluwe to house the collection, and the Kröller-Müllers lived the remainder of their lives on an estate which was now officially a national park. After the couple's deaths, the contents of their home, including those objects Stevenson used in his installation, also entered the Museum's collection.[536]

Stevenson purposefully selected domestic objects from the Kröller-Müller collection that were slightly damaged or somehow seemed, in his word, the most "pathetic."[537] The less-glamorous alter-ego of the Museum's famous art collection, this collection of personal and domestic items stands as a lasting residue of the conditions of crisis out of which the institution was born. While the "pathetic" nature of the objects in Stevenson's tableau may evoke sympathy for the Kröller-Müllers' plight, and the desperate circumstances into which they were unexpectedly thrown, this must be balanced against an acknowledgement of the way in which their status as cultural patrons insured them against total destitution. Clearly, some economic operators are subject to the law of the market while others are not. The Kröller-Müllers' miraculous apotheosis proved that they were the latter: others rendered bankrupt by the banking crisis who were not fortunate enough to possess a priceless art collection were not redeemed by the public purse and able to simply exit the market. Like the Medicis in fifteenth-century Florence, art patronage provided the Kröller-Müllers with an unmeasurable surplus of credit: in the final reckoning, this surplus could be traded for

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[535] Bak, 2005, p. 34. Details of the complex series of transactions that brought the Kröller-Müllers' proposal to fruition can be found in Beukhof *et al*., 2005, particularly p. 12, p. 32, pp. 174–5 and p. 182. Essentially, Helene Kröller-Müller, who had for several years wanted to establish a museum for her art collection, persuaded Henri Marchant, the Dutch Minister for Education, Arts and Sciences, that the Hoge Veluwe estate and the art collection should be preserved as a public reserve for nature and culture. After various negotiations, government ministers found a way to fund the project that did not require Parliamentary permission.

[536] Stevenson has related how, while working on his project, he was struck by the thousands of domestic items in the Kröller-Müller Museum's collection: "The weirdest things, like the knives and forks off their table were in this collection. So clearly [what had happened] was very extreme." Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.

[537] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 18 November 2013.

an exemption from normal accountability.[538] The fact that art's special value is not easily measured in a market system is well known.[539] Stevenson's point here, however, is not to dwell on art's incompatibility with markets. It is to indicate that the "special value" of art has more to do with the active perpetuation of this myth by those invested in it, than it does with some innate or uniquely unmeasurable value. As in his exhibition of *Persepolis 2530* at Arnolfini, which also took place in 2008, *Lender of Last Resort* pointed to art's special ability to redeem the wealthy.

The market, and its limits

My primary interest here is not the Kröller-Müllers' survival instincts, or the role that contemporary art continues to play in supporting and perpetuating wealth inequality. It is the way that Stevenson addressed unpredictability in *Lender of Last Resort*. The work at the Kröller-Müller Museum took the form of a tableau of objects that were the residue of crisis. The unthinkable happened, for the Kröller-Müllers, and their empire evaporated. The horizon of an unpredictable future—what I have called the apocalyptic time *t*—is also evident in two other aspects of the work. These are the figure of the lender of last resort, a role performed by Gerard Vissering in Stevenson's tableau, and also the temporal horizon of the repayment of a loan. In order to understand this, it will be necessary to examine the operations of the financial markets under neoliberalism. Stevenson discovered, in this field, an orientation towards a categorically unknowable future. This eschatological aspect of the market contradicts neoliberal political dogma, and also Jameson's theory about the dystopian sublime of global capital.

While the term "neoliberal" is often used loosely as a pejorative, the editors of the *Handbook of Neoliberalism* define it as a school of thought promoting "the extension of competitive markets into all areas of life, including the economy, politics, and

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[538] Tim Parks has written a lively account of the Medicis' relationship to the Church during a period when religious dogma insisted that the pursuit of material wealth would cost a person their place in heaven, but when the Church simultaneously benefited considerably from the patronage of wealthy families. Parks notes how both parties exploited "the ambiguous territory of art" as a blind spot allowing for "some useful interchange between metaphysics and money." Parks, 2005, pp. 120–28.
[539] The literature exploring art's incompatibility with a market-based system of valuation is substantial. See for example Velthuis, 2005; Diederichsen, 2008; Honig, 2011; Keat, 2000.

society."[540] According to neoliberal thought, the deregulated market is not only natural, it is also the most efficient and transparent means of resource distribution. Advocating for a competitive meritocracy in place of a public welfare system, proponents of neoliberalism argue that markets ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth than government allocation. The self-regulating supply/demand curve will automatically reward the entrepreneurial and deserving (and punish the lazy or inept) with profits commensurate to their success, or so the argument goes.

Capitalist rhetoric maps the Darwinian model of competitive natural selection onto human profit-seeking behaviour. Neoliberalism goes further: the view that Thomas Frank described as "market populism" equates market forces with the collective political will.[541] In theologian Adam Kotsko's words:

> [According to neoliberal thinking,] The market is the purest democracy, because market outcomes are the spontaneous synthesis of all participants' free decisions. The more deeply society is shaped by market forces, the freer it will be. And therefore the more legitimate the outcomes will be, because they will be what we all collectively chose.[542]

As both Kotsko and Frank attest, according to neoliberal political theory, the market dispenses with the need for a governing authority because it perfectly reflects the collective will. Markets, in neoliberal thinking, are regarded as a perfect representation of the aggregate needs of the individuals who participate in them: a 1:1 map that responds in real time to the fluctuating requirements of the population. The system expands to encompass and manage all aspects of our lives, and it is self-regulating, an example of natural justice in action. Supply and demand tend towards harmonious balance as if, in Adam Smith's immortal words, "led by an invisible hand."[543] However, where Smith attributed equilibrium in a market economy to the operations of divine providence (as David Graeber has observed, his "invisible hand" was quite literally the hand of God), there is supposedly no such external force in a

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[540] Springer, Birch and MacLeavey, 2016, p. 2.
[541] Frank, 2000.
[542] Adam Kotsko, "The Devil and Neoliberalism," lecture presented at the Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy, Melbourne, 3 August 2016.
[543] Smith, 2000, vol. 4, p. 593.

neoliberal system.[544] The neoliberal market has internalised and naturalised the benevolence of God's providential adjustments, making what was profoundly ontologically other into a systemic attribute.[545]

The role performed by the lender of last resort is controversial in orthodox neoliberalism precisely because it acts against the dictates of the market. As David Harvey notes, the IMF and World Bank offer debt relief to financial institutions that should "in principle be responsible for their own mistakes."[546] Financial institutions saved by emergency credit are not held accountable for their own actions as free economic agents. In September 2008 however, the US Treasury's decision *not* to save the Lehman Brothers investment bank, allowing it to founder into bankruptcy, threatened to tip the US economy into full-scale recession.[547] As economists Charles Kindleberger and Robert Aliber have observed, the lender of last resort is an extra-market figure whose ability or willingness to provide a safety net must be doubted in order to be effective. A successful performance by the lender of last resort is "a neat trick":

> always come to the rescue, in order to prevent needless deflation, but always leave it uncertain whether rescue will arrive in time or at all, so as to instill caution in other speculators, banks, cities or countries.[548]

They continue by noting that the "economic implosion" caused by Lehman Brothers' collapse could have been avoided if the US Treasury had taken a different course of action. The lender of last resort is a managing authority who takes action when the market fails. By necessity, this lender stands outside the system it regulates, ready to

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[544] Graeber, 2012, p. 44.

[545] This observation counters a tendency among commentators to regard the neoliberal market as itself a kind of deity. Harvey Cox, for example, traced parallels between the jealousy of the Old Testament Yahweh and the political authority of the market: "whose reign must now be universally accepted and who allows for no rivals." Cox, 1999, p. 19. See also Andrews, 2009 and Nelson, 2001.

[546] Harvey, 2005, p. 73.

[547] Between February and September 2008, the US Treasury provided financial assistance to JPMorgan Chase, Bear Stearns, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, allowing each institution to remain a viable concern. As Charles Kindleberger and Robert Aliber relate: "It appeared as if the US government had in effect adopted a 'too big to fail' policy—these institutions would continue in business, although there would be a dramatic change in ownership." The Treasury's decision not to perform the same service for Lehman Brothers had dramatic results: "a day after Lehman closed its doors, there was a run on AIG, then the largest insurance company in the world, and the 'too big to fail' policy was resurrected." Kindleberger and Aliber, 2011, p. 24.

[548] Kindleberger and Aliber, 2011, p. 25.

jump-start it with emergency credit. As Kindleberger and Aliber make clear, it is the unpredictability of the lender of last resort's action that enables its efficacy, and it is this unpredictability which separates it from the market. If the credit available from the lender of last resort could be predicted, it would become simply another agent in the market. A built-in safety net, its existence would encourage investors to be reckless.

The moment of the US Treasury's inaction in September 2008 was marked in the second version of Stevenson's *Lender of Last Resort* at the Frieze Art Fair. He managed to acquire paper from the press that publishes the *Financial Times*: in fact, paper from the ends of the very same rolls that were used to print the *Times* on the day that Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy was announced. The distinctive pale pink paper stock of the *Times* was used to make fragile dust jackets for the artist's book that accompanied Stevenson's installation (fig. 109).[549] Like the arrangement of domestic items from the Kröller-Müller Museum's collection in the work's previous iteration, these dust jackets stood as a tangible residue of financial crisis. They marked the occurrence of the unthinkable—the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers—just as the domestic objects in the Museum collection marked the collapse of the Kröller-Müller empire. They also pinpointed the unpredictability of the lender of last resort. The lender of last resort must stand outside the market, it must function independently to market operations if it is to function at all, and its unpredictability is the means of this independence. The lender of last resort is the condition of possibility for the market's continued operation, and it is a source of uncertainty. Both of these are also true of the temporal horizon of the repayment of a loan.

"The broadest definition of finance," according to economic anthropologist Bill Maurer, "would include all aspects of the management of money or other assets and, in particular, the management of debt and equity as a means of raising capital: making money with money."[550] Such debt and equity schemes have an ancient heritage and are certainly not the invention of modern financial institutions.[551] As Stevenson also

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[549] Stevenson and Verwoert, 2008.
[550] Maurer, 2012, p. 185.
[551] See for example Graeber, 2012, and Goetzmann and Rouwenhorst, 2005. In the latter, see in particular Marc Van De Mieroop's essay, in which he identifies written loan contracts from Mesopotamia that are more than 3,000 years old. Van De Mieroop, 2005.

recognised when he assembled the second iteration of *Lender of Last Resort* using objects borrowed from London pawnbrokers, Maurer identifies the pawnbroker's trade as one such scheme. While financial instruments based on the manipulation of debt are not new, neoliberalism has triggered explosive growth in the global financial economy. As economist Thomas Palley writes, in a neoliberal context where the market is viewed as "the pre-eminent institution of social organization and coordination," what he describes as financialization, or financial neoliberalism, holds up financial markets as "the ideal market."[552] This is because financial markets enable an unparalleled expansion of the market system. With speculative trading in the financial markets, a single asset can generate multiple opportunities for additional profit, and open multiple additional markets. A debt, such as a mortgage contract, can be traded as an asset. This enables not only the lender but also multiple tiers of second- or third-degree speculators to repackage, trade, and profit from the mortgagee's promised repayments.

Financial neoliberalism substitutes risk-taking for unidirectional causation. Elena Esposito has observed that the financial markets operate according to a reflexive temporality which depends on the expectations held by economic operators. The market moves unpredictably, but its movements are a result of operators' expectations of how and in which way it will move. Their expectations of the future may not be accurate, but they are causal. For example, a widespread expectation that the price of a commodity will rise will inform the actions of market participants, which will in turn trigger other—sometimes unexpected—changes in the market. She notes: "As market observers say, 'the present is determined by the future and *vice versa*.' Nobody can steer the movements of the market or control the future."[553] In the financial markets, people's expectations of the future serve to create present conditions. Present conditions, in turn, create new visions of the future, and cause new futures to open up. This circularity, this dance of expectation, capitalises on uncertainty in the face of a *necessarily* unknowable future.

Lender of Last Resort's central subject was the institution of loan. Both iterations of the work were assembled using borrowed objects, making the period of time between

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[552] Palley, 2013, p. 2.
[553] Esposito, 2011, p. 82.

the loan and its repayment co-extensive with the physical existence of the installation. The version of *Lender of Last Resort* that Stevenson made for the Kröller-Müller Museum also explicitly referred to the emergency financial loan from Gerard Vissering at the Dutch Central Bank which unexpectedly generated the conditions for the foundation of the Museum. The loan contract is also the financial instrument that underpins the contemporary financial markets and their peculiar temporality. It is the materialisation of a promise which serves to capitalise on a structural uncertainty about the future. As Maurer relates, nobody lends without the expectation of a return, but in order for the financial economy to circulate, debts need to be outstanding. There is no opportunity to capitalise on a debt that has been repaid: it is the period between loan and repayment that is profitable. What Maurer describes as the "final reckoning" of the repayment of a loan is both "the precondition for and the animating fiction of Western finance." The settlement of debts "would render capital sterile, no longer yielding a return."[554]

Describing this "final reckoning," Maurer used religious rhetoric associated with Judgement Day, and this association is also built into Stevenson's work. Both versions of *Lender of Last Resort* centred prominently on sets of scales and weights, which in the Judeo-Christian tradition have long symbolised both justice and the "weighing in the balances" of the final execution of divine judgement. This final reckoning and settlement of accounts, in which the credits and debts of each individual soul will be measured and the sinful thereby distinguished from the saved, is supposed to happen at the end of history. The Kröller-Müller version of *Lender of Last Resort*, as I have noted, conveyed the feeling of a deceased estate at auction. The domestic possessions of Helene and Anton Kröller-Müller were laid out underneath the banker's table as if they too were being weighed and measured in a determination of their ultimate value. The temporal horizon of the repayment of loan on which *Lender of Last Resort* focused was, therefore, quite explicitly framed in apocalyptic terms. It looked forward to the revelatory moment of time *t*, which Nelson Goodman introduced as the horizon of our ignorance, in the same way that the financial markets approach the horizon of the future.

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[554] Maurer, 2012, p. 187.

While neoliberal political orthodoxy holds that there is no "beyond" to the market, that it is a 1:1 map of the population's needs and also the means to meet them, the financial markets that are the privileged centre of neoliberal economics are oriented entirely towards a "beyond" that they cannot control or predict. Both postmodernism and neoliberal politics sought to strip away the mechanisms of control from above, whether these mechanisms were the racist and patriarchal "grand narratives" of culture or the economic management performed by the controlling state. With this gesture of liberation, both claimed to have unmasked the simple truth of the way the world works. Instead of absolute difference or natural hierarchies, there is only a densely interconnected network of relative differences: in the floating and fluctuating value of currencies and commodities, for example, or in the endlessly plural multiplications and recombinations of cultural differences and shifting perspectives. As Fredric Jameson observed, there is no fixed point of orientation in this flux, it is immersive and disorienting.

Building on his 1984 essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in 1998 Jameson published an updated analysis titled "Culture and Finance Capital."[555] In this essay, Jameson used terms associated with representation and abstraction to characterise the historical shift from the "real" industrial economy to the current period of finance capitalism. He described how the financial markets have become, in his opinion, both autonomous and dematerialised. This is a process of "deterritorialization" in which "the capital of an entire centre or region abandons production altogether in order to seek maximization in those non-productive spaces, which, as we have seen, are those of speculation, the money market, and finance capital in general."[556] Finance capitalism, for Jameson, is an abstraction of the former "real" economy of industry and labour, and it has floated free of its former referent. Moreover, he continues, this floating signifier has "suffused" and "colonized" the reality we inhabit to such a degree that there is now no referent left to anchor the abstraction.[557] We are living in an abstract reality-free universe which "has no outside in terms of which it could be found lacking."[558]

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[555] Jameson, 1998.
[556] Jameson, 1998, p. 153.
[557] Jameson, 1998, p. 161.
[558] Jameson, 1998, p. 161.

But in practice, as we have seen, the financial markets are oriented precisely towards something that exists outside their scope. They gamble with the uncertainty established by a categorically unknowable future. Neoliberal finance attempts to scaffold the future with contracts and promises, it attempts to hedge against risks and form financial instruments into a safety net that will mitigate against various eventualities. It is fascinated by this apocalyptic horizon, it flirts and gambles with risk and uncertainty, it is eschatological at its core. But it cannot predict the future. And this inability to accurately predict the future—the necessity of speculation—is a condition of possibility for the whole system.

Introducción a la Teoría de la Probabilidad, 2008

As should be becoming clear, I regard the contemporary relevance of Stevenson's practice as based in its orientation towards absolute otherness, absolute difference, and the fact that this is a departure from the model of historical time inaugurated by postmodernism. Contemporaneity, when understood as a bloated present into which multiple pasts and futures are incorporated in a continual play of relative difference, is a product of the postmodern rupture. In contrast, the model of historical time at work in Stevenson's art is eschatological. His long-term interest in the limits of human agency and the limits of human knowledge—or in other words, our inability to predict our own fate—is an expression of this orientation towards an apocalyptic horizon. The second half of this chapter will focus on a suite of works in which this theme is figured as a series of doors and openings, and as the effort to calculate probability when we lack the necessary overview.

In 2012, Stevenson presented two geographically distant installations as a complementary pair. *Nueva Matemática* [New mathematics], 2012, at Mexico City's Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo incorporated Stevenson's earlier film *Introducción a la Teoría de la Probabilidad* [Introduction to the theory of probability], 2008, into a larger sculptural installation. This exhibition was quickly followed by *A Life of Crudity, Vulgarity, and Blindness*, 2012, at Portikus in Frankfurt am Main. The central protagonist of all three works was José de Jesús Martínez, universally known as Chuchú. A Renaissance man in 1970s Panama, Chuchú was an award-winning playwright and poet, a pilot, a professor of mathematics and

philosophy, as well as a part-time bodyguard and aide to General Omar Torrijos, Panama's populist left wing military dictator.

Introducción pairs a complex narrative, delivered via Spanish voiceover and English subtitles, with a sequence of relatively simple images. The film alternates between footage of black and white microfilm images of the pages of a book—the titular textbook on mathematical probability, which Chuchú wrote in 1979—squeakily fed across the screen, and colour footage of a man's hands sorting and dealing playing cards (figs. 110–11). The latter is shot in close up from directly above the tabletop, creating a shallow visual space devoid of contextual clues.

The calm, measured voice of *Introducción*'s female narrator recounts events from the complex period following the signing of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties in Panama. The treaties, signed in 1977, were an agreement between General Torrijos and US President Jimmy Carter to initiate the handover of the area of land around the Panama Canal—known as the Canal Zone—from US to Panamanian control. The Canal Zone, which bisects Panama, had been a US territory since construction of the canal began in 1903 and was home to several US military bases. By the 1970s, many Panamanians felt that the existence of the zone was an affront to Panamanian sovereignty and an example of US neocolonialism. While the Torrijos-Carter Treaties promised that the Canal Zone would be under full Panamanian control in 1999, Torrijos worried they could still be overturned. Ronald Reagan, who was expected to be the Republican candidate for the next US election, was a vehement opponent of the treaties.

As Stevenson's film narrates, Torrijos's next move was unexpected. He offered asylum to the deposed Shah of Iran, who was then exiled from his country, deathly ill with cancer, and in Henry Kissinger's memorable phrase, travelling the world "like a Flying Dutchman who cannot find a port of call."[559] Fleeing a certain death sentence from the new Iranian administration, the Shah was desperate for admission to the US, and to the medical facilities available there. Despite the fact that the Shah had been an ally of his country for decades, Carter knew that allowing him onto US soil could provoke retaliation against US citizens in Iran. He was right. Less than two weeks

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[559] Henry Kissinger, quoted in Alvandi, 2014, p. 173.

after Carter reluctantly admitted the Shah for short-term medical treatment in October 1979, the US embassy in Tehran was stormed by radical supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini, sparking the protracted hostage crisis that would, later, gift the 1980 election to Reagan. To Torrijos in 1979, however, it seemed that he might be in a position to help resolve the hostage crisis—assisting Carter's re-election, and thereby also strengthening Panama's hold on the Canal Zone. By taking the Shah, Torrijos was pulling a chair up to the high-stakes table of international politics. In the words of William Shawcross, whose account Stevenson quotes, Torrijos was "nothing if not a gambler."[560] By placing Panama at the centre of diplomatic negotiations, he hoped to leverage his tiny country into a position of power. So, for three months between December 1979 and March 1980, the former Iranian royal family resided on Contadora, a resort island fifty miles off the coast of Panama City.[561]

In *Introducción*, Stevenson mapped exercises from Chuchú's mathematics textbook *Introducción a la Teoría de la Probabilidad*, which was published in the same year as these events, onto its author's reflections about the political situation he witnessed.[562] Following Chuchú, he framed the situation on Contadora as a high stakes poker game in which the Shah was a card. The film's script chops between narrative and probability exercises: "In a game of poker between two players with a deck of fifty-two cards: how many winning hands are still possible when the first player has already the Ace of Clubs? And how many losing hands are there still possible?" Probability became an alternate lens to consider historical determinism: was it possible to predict the outcome of Torrijos's gamble, his willingness to join the game, to play the card that was the Shah?

Calculations of mathematical probability take place within an area called the sample space, or sometimes "the universe." In the diagrams from Chuchú's textbook

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[560] Shawcross, 1989, p. 298.

[561] Coincidentally, given Stevenson's earlier research into the operations of the United Fruit Company in Guatemala for his *The Fountain of Prosperity*, 2006, the owner of the house in which the Shah was accommodated was Gabriel Lewis: "a shrewd businessman who has made many fortunes. One of the largest was from providing the United Fruit Company with boxes to pack their bananas in." Shawcross, 1989, p. 312. Also coincidentally: Patricia Hearst, who guest-starred in Stevenson's *The Donald Judd Incident* series of 1995–98, was honeymooning on Contadora at the time of the Shah's stay. She had recently been released from prison and had married her former bodyguard. Chuchú, apparently, found her fascinating.

[562] Martínez, 1979 and 1987.

reproduced in Stevenson's film, this area is labelled "El Conjunto Universal o Universo" (The Universal Set or Universe). This perfect game space has a probability of 100 percent: it is the sum of all possibilities. Individual outcomes are represented as subsets of this space. The probability of drawing a red card from a well-shuffled deck, for example, would occupy exactly half the area and would therefore be represented as the number 0.5 or 50 percent. In probability theory, the likelihood of an outcome can only be calculated against the background of the sample space. As mathematician and philosopher Mary Tiles observes, the universe is a necessary prerequisite for any such reckoning:

> The study of structure requires as a backdrop a superstructure, or a space—a universe projected as the abstract recipient of all possible structures within which structures of specified kinds are realized and studied.[563]

Probability's sample space approximates a God's eye view, from which outcomes (or fates) can be perceived and predicted. In Stevenson's film, the footage of playing cards being shuffled and dealt is shot in close up, from directly above a blue tabletop. This surface is coloured the precise shade of dusty mid-blue that seems to have been ubiquitous in television studios during the 1970s. It often appeared, for example, as the backdrop to weather reports on the television news, and formed the background of the famous three-by-three grid in the opening title sequence of *The Brady Bunch*.[564] Stevenson's use of this particular shade of blue aesthetically positions his film in the decade in which its action occurred. The subtle reference to a "blue screen" television studio backdrop also recalls the figure-ground relationship in the sample space of Chuchú's probability diagrams, where the "backdrop" is standing in for the universe itself. In a television studio, of course, the blue screen provides a way for the show's producers to introduce context that is invisible to the performing actor.

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[563] Tiles, 1989, p. 220.

[564] See for example: veteran meteorologist Michael Fish in "BBC Weather 31 January 1979," YouTube video, 2:49, posted 17 June 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvX-jOlIFds; "The Brady Bunch (Intro) S2 1970," YouTube video, 1:09, posted 24 June 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQq5BT1n24o; and journalist Simon Walker interviewing New Zealand Prime Minister Robert Muldoon in David Baldock, *Tonight,* Television One, NZ On Screen video, 13:47, screened May 1976, https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/tonight-muldoon-interview-1976. Coincidentally, press photographs of the official ratification of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties at the New Panama Coliseum on 16 June 1978 show the dignitaries assembled in front of curtains in a very similar shade of blue.

The negotiations that took place on Contadora in 1979 ostensibly concerned Iran's demand for the extradition of the Shah. However, the fate of the hostages in Tehran's US embassy, Panamanian territorial sovereignty, the US presidential elections, and—as it turned out—Torrijos's life also hung in the balance. While the Torrijos-Carter Treaties were ratified and Panama successfully regained control of the Canal Zone as planned, shortly after Reagan's inauguration as US President in 1981, Torrijos died in a plane crash. The allegation that the crash was an assassination effected with CIA involvement has been made several times but never proved.[565] There are several reasons why Reagan might have preferred a different Panamanian leader. Torrijos was willing (some might say recklessly so) to consider military engagement if diplomatic negotiations failed. He was also engaged in challenging US power in Central America on several fronts. During the canal treaty negotiations, Torrijos allegedly made secret plans to sabotage the canal if the US did not respect the agreement.[566] Simultaneously, he was also secretly supporting the Sandinistas' revolutionary struggle against the Somoza administration in Nicaragua. The Somoza dynasty had been established during the US occupation of Nicaragua in the 1930s, and enjoyed US support until 1979. "The General," as the narrator of *Introducción* calmly related, "had the charisma of near despair. He was drawn to calamity."

Negotiations on Contadora took place and outcomes were decided in a murky, complicated and highly mobile terrain of possibilities. In politics, of course, actors are themselves immersed within the context in which action occurs. Unable to perceive the ground against which events can be understood, they lack the overview required to accurately predict the results of their actions. In Stevenson's film, political action

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[565] Former Panamanian chief of staff Colonel Roberto Diaz and investigative journalist Seymour Hersh have both alleged that Torrijos's successor, Manuel Noriega, was responsible for the crash. Noriega was head of Panama's military intelligence under Torrijos, and had close ties to the CIA before and after Torrijos's death. See Scranton, 1991, p. 59 and Kempe, 1990, pp. 27–34. In contrast, R. M. Koster and Guillermo Sánchez have argued that despite widespread suspicion, Torrijos's death was an accident. See Koster and Sánchez, 1990, pp. 235–37.

[566] Graham Greene recounted a conversation he had with Torrijos: "We could hold Panama City for forty-eight hours . . . As for the Canal, it is easy to sabotage. Blow a hole in the Gatun Dam and the Canal will drain into the Atlantic. It would take only a few days to mend the dam, but it would take three years of rain to fill the Canal. During that time it would be guerrilla war." Omar Torrijos quoted in Greene, 1986, pp. 54–5. See also Kempe, 1990, pp. 87–8. Cyrus Vance, US Secretary of State 1977–80 wrote that from the mid-1960s "There was little question in my mind that sooner or later Panama would resort to major violence, even to the point of destroying the canal. . . . [which] could be closed by the simplest act of sabotage." Vance, 1983, p. 141.

seems little more than a blind gamble—acting in front of a blue screen—which it must always be, at least in part. However, there is one figure in *Introducción* who does have the overview that the film's historical characters lack. As the narrator relates: "There is the case of the village barber: all the men of his village shave, and he shaves those and only those who do not shave themselves. But . . . does the barber shave himself?"

The Barber's law

The character of the Barber personifies the limit towards which Stevenson's practice is oriented. He has the overview that the film's historical characters lack—the overview that is necessary to calculate probability, the overview that is unavailable to political actors—because he personifies the boundary of the knowable. The narrative of the village barber that Stevenson's film relates is a common gloss of a mathematical paradox discovered by Bertrand Russell during the early development of set theory.[567] "All the men of his village shave, and he shaves those and only those who do not shave themselves." The Barber is a paradoxical figure who both must, and cannot, shave himself in order for this statement to remain true. If he is bearded, he cannot be included within the village, because all the men of the village shave. Therefore he must be clean shaven: but he cannot shave himself or be shaven by another because "he shaves those and only those who do not shave themselves."[568] The Barber and his problematic beard, in other words, must be simultaneously included in and excluded from the village. He has an overview that the other characters in Stevenson's film lack because he himself defines the limits of the village. He is a liminal figure, and also a figure of law: a mathematically impossible sovereign who stands paradoxically both inside and outside a juridical territory defined by his universally enforced decree of haircuts for all.

Russell's paradox was formulated in response to the set theory developed by nineteenth-century mathematician Georg Cantor. Attempting to establish a formal mathematical language with which to describe infinity, Cantor discovered that he could approach his task using sets. His work in this area established the basic

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[567] See Sorensen, 2003, pp. 316–32 for an accessible account.
[568] Of course, an easy resolution of the barber paradox is that the barber is a woman.

language of probability theory, and provided a core foundation for contemporary mathematics. However, his goal was to define infinity using mathematics and, as Russell demonstrated, approaching the limits of the calculable leads to all sorts of problems and paradoxes. Russell's paradox takes effect at the outer limit that probability theory describes as the "sample space," "universe" or "universal set." This is the field within which probability is calculated, it forms the backdrop against which the likelihood of an event can be measured. The universal set is the set containing everything that exists. It includes all the objects in the world, as well as abstract objects like numbers. It also includes, necessarily, all other sets: the set of all teaspoons, for example, as well as the set of all odd numbers. It is the set of all sets. Russell wondered: does the universal set, then, also contain itself? Because:

> A set that contains everything must contain itself. Now consider a set that includes all and only those sets that do not include themselves as members. If this set contains itself as a member, then it does not contain itself as a member. But if it does not contain itself as a member, then it does include itself as a member.[569]

If it is possible for a set to contain itself, logically there must also be a set of all those that do *not* contain themselves. And this is where Russell's paradox comes into play. This second set, the logical corollory of the universal set, both *must, and cannot* include itself. The Barber *must, and cannot* shave himself. As a way of resolving Russell's paradox, mathematicians developed a new form of set theory which ruled out by fiat the possibility that a set can contain itself.[570] This new formulation spelled the death of the universal set that contains everything, including itself.

Susan Buck-Morss confirms: "It is a logical truism that something cannot be a member of its own set, that constituting power (*pouvoir constituens*) cannot be synonymous with constituted power (*pouvoir constituent*)."[571] Buck-Morss was here referring to the work of legal theorist Carl Schmitt. He differentiated between constituted power, which is the power exercised by the state and codified in state

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[569] Sorensen, 2003, p. 327.
[570] A new set of axioms known as Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, or ZF, was established by mathematicians Ernst Zermelo and Abraham Fraenkel between 1908 and 1922.
[571] Buck-Morss, 2007, p. 171.

laws, and the constituting power that precedes and legitimates such laws. Constituting power is the condition of possibility for any legal territory. It is the act that demarcates a legal territory as such. "In the beginning," as Schmitt relates, "was the fence."[572]

The Barber is a constituting power whose law delineates the limits of the village. Like the lender of last resort, his authority is a condition of possibility for the system he defines. The Barber functions in Stevenson's film as a figure of law, and as a personification of the limit that Torrijos struggled against. The association between haircuts and law enforcement that Stevenson offered in the person of the Barber is also, oddly enough, a recurrent motif in his work.[573] In his 2011 survey exhibition at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, Stevenson extended his concept of the Barber into a broad system of categorisation. In twin display cases, he presented a jumble of ephemera, drawings, models, books and preparatory material of all kinds dating back to the 1980s (fig. 112). To title and categorise this material—the detritus of his career—he borrowed the division proposed in one of the exercises in Chuchú's probability textbook, *Introducción a la Teoría de la Probabilidad*. The exercise was to calculate the probability of drawing a court card showing facial hair from a well-shuffled deck. Stevenson adopted two of the possible outcomes to title his twin vitrines: *Barbas y Bigotes*, 2011 (Beards and moustaches) and *Sin Barbas y Sin Bigotes*, 2011 (No beards and no moustaches) (figs. 113–14).

Stevenson's display could be read as a division of his body of work into the insiders and the outsiders, those subject to the Barber's law and those beyond it. Ian Fairweather and Manfred Gnädinger, of course, both had full-blown grizzled hermit beards. Tony Shafrazi, despite cultivating a bouffant mane in his later years, has always been clean-shaven. Donald Judd had a beard; Michael Heizer did not. Patricia Hearst, interestingly, was subjected to a haircut by the Symbionese Liberation Army

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[572] Jost Trier, quoted in Schmitt, 2003, p. 74.

[573] The association recalls the biblical story of Samson and Delilah, but there is also a long European tradition of shaving the heads of women as a form of ritual humiliation and public punishment. This practice was used as a punishment for adultery in medieval Europe, and was reintroduced during the twentieth century. Women from republican families had their heads forcibly shaved during the Spanish Civil War, and at least 20,000 French women who were thought to have consorted with German soldiers during World War II were publicly shorn after France's liberation by the Allies. See Beevor, 2009.

after her 1974 kidnap, and then made to wear a wig during the bank robbery for which she was imprisoned.[574] When Jörg Immendorff was in New Zealand he had a proper 1980s leatherman moustache and designer stubble, and Anton Kröller's moustache was rather like that of the Monopoly man. Before entering Panama's National Guard, Chuchú had a beard "which Carlos Cortes once described in a novel as a 'tropical mixture of Karl Marx and Abraham.'"[575] Shaving, of course, was a prerequisite for entering military service. The Shah of Iran provides perhaps the most interesting case. Like General Torrijos, he was consistently clean-shaven, despite apparently having lived his whole life beyond the reach of the law. While many regarded the Shah as a puppet of US interests, others like Roham Alvandi and Homa Katouzian have argued that he was "not the stooge of Western imperialism virtually all his subjects believed him to be."[576] Prior to the revolution the Shah's whim was law in Iran, afterwards, on Contadora, he was the very definition of "bare life": stateless, facing his own imminent death, and a pawn in a political game.[577]

The fatal limit personified by the Barber defines a legal territory, a system governed by rules, and it also indicates the point at which our ability to calculate and comprehend dissolves into paradox. When this limit is considered in temporal terms, it becomes an apocalyptic horizon. In Stevenson's installation *Nueva Matemática*, 2012, he reframed it again, this time as a physical threshold.

Nueva Matemática, 2012

In 2012, Stevenson was commissioned to make a new work for the suite of exhibitions celebrating the re-opening of Mexico City's freshly renovated Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo. He incorporated the film *Introducción* into an installation work in the Tamayo's lower-ground galleries. The installation, which Stevenson titled *Nueva Matemática*, connected the film to this Mexican setting. The

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[574] The SLA bank robbery in which Hearst participated was as much a publicity stunt as a fundraising effort. Hearst was made to wear a wig resembling her formerly long hair during the raid so she would be easily identified on camera. Hearst and Moscow, 1982, p. 144–5.

[575] Carlos Cortes quoted in Hague, 2002, p. 8.

[576] Katouzian, 2009, p. 263.

[577] Giorgio Agamben has also drawn heavily on Carl Schmitt's work, particularly in Agamben, 2005. His concept of "bare life" was articulated in the preceding volume of his "Homo Sacer" series, Agamben, 1998.

Shah, as *Introducción*'s narrator observed, accepted Torrijos's invitation of asylum only after he was refused entry to Mexico. *Nueva Matemática* reiterated the film's themes of asylum, imprisonment, ambition and blockage. It rephrased Torrijos's gamble (the gamble that Mexico refused to make) in metaphysical terms, as an effort to negotiate with the unknown, with fate.

Nueva Matemática was divided into two spaces. The film was playing in a small room partitioned off a larger gallery, which contained a series of freestanding doors held in monolithic, industrially welded steel frames, each standing over two metres high (figs. 115–16). Low lighting and dark-coloured walls created an eerie subterranean gloom out of which the heavy door frames loomed ominously. The doors themselves were prosaic: a mismatched collection of the sort of scuffed, abused furnishings that are ubiquitous in under-resourced public or educational institutions, blackened with the greasy residue of the thousands of hands that push and pull at them. The work responded to a strange detail of Chuchú's personal beliefs. As his friend the novelist Graham Greene has recounted, Chuchú had a lopsided theology. He didn't believe in the Christian God, but he did believe in the Devil: "Haven't you noticed," he asked Greene, "when you try to open a swing door, you always begin by pushing it the wrong way? That's the Devil."[578] Stevenson received independent confirmation of this when he visited Chuchú's former students and colleagues in the Universidad de Panamá's mathematics department, where he taught during the 1970s. Apparently the department's doors—located at the heart of the university's most rigorously rational discipline—had furnished daily proof to Chuchú of his unusual theological perspective.

Stevenson's doors, which were dug out of salvage yards across Mexico City, were explicitly connected to the potentially diabolical originals in Panama. They bore notices and signage duplicating those that Stevenson had seen on the maths department doors: one door labeled "Departamento de Matemática," for example, displayed a no-smoking sign and posters advertising various seminars and workshops that were held in the department in 2011.[579] As a series of physical obstacles that viewers were required to navigate in order to gain access to the film playing in the

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[578] Greene, 1986, p. 43.
[579] Stevenson collaborated with artist and designer Nuno da Luz to produce these posters.

installation's antechamber, the doors amplified *Introducción*'s themes of fateful gambling. The installation also invited the Tamayo's visitors to physically restage Chuchú's daily metaphysical struggle. Each door was connected to an electromagnetic system (standing in for the Devil) which randomly altered the direction of their swing, making them unpredictable and awkward to navigate. Given that the doors were freestanding, it was of course possible for viewers to simply walk around them rather than going through, but they were still unsettling. Like science-fiction gateways to another dimension—the wardrobe in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, Alice's rabbit hole to Wonderland, the space-time wormholes in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Stargate*, or myriad other examples—their very banality and evident functionlessness made them seem even more like supernatural portals.

Nueva Matemática adopted the Cold War logic of its subject matter: a local struggle became a proxy for a larger struggle against a powerful, and fugitive, adversary. Chuchú considered his negotiations with the maths department doors to be a proxy for his struggle with no less an antagonist than the source of all evil. Torrijos's struggle for Panama's Canal Zone—another high-stakes portal—was fought, similarly, within the terms set by the broader Cold War contest between the US and USSR. The General's success was seen by many as a symbolic blow to the regional hegemony and global territorial dominance of the US. Stevenson's title, *Nueva Matemática*, refers to another unlikely Cold War weapon. The "new math" that was introduced to the US school curriculum in the late 1950s, and which was also promoted through Central and South America in subsequent decades, was explicitly conceived as a long-term strategy to give Americans a competitive edge in both scientific and military pursuits.[580] In the age of the space race, the rote learning of arithmetical facts was deemed insufficient. Set theory, notoriously, was introduced into the classroom with the explicit intention of cultivating US technological supremacy. Like the struggle for the Canal Zone and the "new math," Stevenson's recalcitrant doors were also presented as proxies for another conflict. The doors' sci-fi otherworldliness and their reference to Chuchú's beliefs positioned them as a means of engaging with another, larger, power.

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[580] Phillips, 2014.

Doors have appeared repeatedly in Stevenson's practice. For example, his joint exhibition with Steven Brower, *Genealogy*, 2000, was structured around two doors that faced each other across a corridor (fig. 51). Each was a reconstruction of a particular door that had been significant in the two artists' early lives, and each provided access to the mirrored installations that constituted the duo's exhibition. Much earlier in Stevenson's career, doors with glowing "exit" signs had figured prominently in his paintings of the 1980s (figs. 12–13). These doors, as I demonstrated in chapter one, gave form to the eschatological focus of his religious beliefs. A snapshot that the artist took in the late 1980s while he was travelling around New Zealand and conducting research for these paintings also showed a doorway (fig. 117). The photograph was taken of the corrugated steel door of a shed or barn. On an unpainted section of the steel—roughly proportional to the proportions of a standard door—a religiously-minded vandal had painted "I AM THE DOOR." The quote is biblical: it refers to the passage in the book of John in which Jesus declares "I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved."[581] With this declaration, Christ asserted that the example of his life and teaching provided the single means of access to salvation. Stevenson recalls that part of the attraction of the original sign was that the words gave "this inanimate object a form of address," infusing the utterly mundane with divine agency.[582] He transcribed the phrase, replicating the typographic format of its appearance on the shed door, onto the door of his Palmerston North studio (fig. 118).

It is here that Stevenson's theological views and his approach to representation coalesce, and it is on the basis of this conjunction that his unique artistic perspective was founded. This image, where the studio door declares its own identity—"I am the door"—jokingly references the declaration made by the famous René Magritte painting *The Treachery of Images*, 1928–29: "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." Magritte's painting declares that there is a clear distinction between signifier and signified, the map should not be mistaken for the territory. Stevenson's studio door, however, speaks in the first person. It collapses the distinction between signifier and signified, but not in the postmodern sense where referentiality dissolves into an endless chain of signification without an ultimate destination. It offers itself, as Christ did, as an

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[581] John 10:9 (King James Version).
[582] Michael Stevenson, email correspondence with the author, 29 August 2014.

opening onto something else. Unlike Christ, however, Stevenson's doors do not follow their declaration of identity with a promise of salvation. As I have demonstrated, his theological perspective developed out of a critique of certain aspects of Pentecostalism from the late 1980s onwards. Bruno Latour has stated that fundamentalism is the insistence that mediations can be bypassed.[583] Pentecostalism's claim that it is possible to experience the Holy Spirit directly, during the ecstatic bodily experience of "spirit baptism," is precisely the kind of fundamentalist stance that Latour was referring to. Stevenson's focus on the tangible sigifiers and manifestations of the "other thing" towards which his whole practice is oriented insists, with Latour, that mediations can *not* be bypassed. His paintings of the 1980s depicted the religious props and paraphernalia that, in his mind, mediated and facilitated an approach towards the divine during the experience of worship. The experience was not direct, but depended on these banal objects and utilitarian architectural spaces.

The physical body of Christ was an image of God, the divine reduced to human proportions, made manifest and given flesh in order to guide humanity towards salvation. As Marie-José Mondzain described it: Christ's visibility and tangible form was an "economic enigma adapted to our weakness."[584] The Incarnation is echoed in the material body of the icon, where the object similarly becomes a proxy or stand-in for its mysterious referent, it provides an opening onto something other than itself. Stevenson's sculptures, as I have indicated, have an affective presence that employs something of this iconic approach to representation, and the doors in *Nueva Matemática* are no exception. They stand in for something that can't be represented directly. When he re-exhibited the installation at Auckland's Michael Lett Gallery in 2013, Stevenson was explicit: he re-titled it *Proof of the Devil*. As I noted at the start of this chapter, the supernatural "other thing" towards which Stevenson's practice is oriented can not simply be identified as the Christian God. I have said that it is simply unknowable, but there is certainly no indication in any of Stevenson's works that it should be considered benevolent. As in Chuchú's lopsided theology, it seems more likely to be diabolical.

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[583] Latour, 2005a, p. 41.
[584] Mondzain, 2005, p. 49.

<u>*A Life of Crudity, Vulgarity, and Blindness,* 2012</u>

Stevenson's installation at Frankfurt's Portikus remains one of his most poetic. For *A Life of Crudity, Vulgarity, and Blindness*, 2012, he turned the gallery into a building-sized camera obscura. The title of the work was a quote taken from a 1979 essay written by Chuchú, *Teoría del Vuelo* [Theory of Flight].[585] This text was translated and jointly republished by the Museo Tamayo and Portikus for Stevenson's two exhibitions, *Nueva Matemática* and *A Life of Crudity*, forming an explicit link between them. Both works took Chuchú as a central protagonist, and they operated formally as a binary pair. *Nueva Matemática*'s subterranean gloom and weighty materiality contrasted with *A Life of Crudity*'s focus on light and flight.[586] However, the language of the proxy or double, and the suggestion of an opening or horizon that can't be breached, remained consistent across both works.

As has been known for over two millennia, light passing through a small aperture into a dark room will create an inverted image on the wall opposite the opening.[587] Most camera obscuras, artistic or otherwise, exploit the relative brightness of daylight to project an exterior image into a darkened architectural space. Stevenson's installation at Portikus was unusual in that he used a camera obscura to connect two spaces within the same building. He had been wanting to construct such a system for several years, but the practical difficulties had always proved insurmountable.[588] Portikus's unusual architecture provided the perfect opportunity. A tall, slim building with a steeply pitched roof, Portikus stands on an island in Frankfurt's River Main that isn't much larger than the building itself. With no possibility of exceeding its tiny island footprint, the structure extends vertically, accommodating several floors and

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[585] Martínez, 2012.

[586] See Parlane, 2012, for an analysis of the two works.

[587] Laura Snyder credits Chinese philosopher Mo-Ti (470–390 BCE) with the earliest recorded description of a camera obscura in the fifth century BCE. Snyder, 2015, p. 125.

[588] For example, an early proposal for Stevenson's installation *The Smiles are Not Smiles*, 2005, at Vilma Gold, London, involved closing the gallery's exhibition space. The enclosed installation would be able to be "viewed remotely from a darkened entrance space via a camera obscura." However, as Stevenson explained to me, the proposal was unable to be realised because of the level of artificial lighting needed for the camera obscura to operate in the windowless gallery. Practical problems also prevented the realisation of a similar early proposal for Stevenson's *Nueva Matemática*, 2012, at Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City. MSS, Smiles/Dialectics box, untitled notes for Vilma Gold proposal, *c*.2005, and Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 10 December 2013.

culminating in a large storage attic with windows almost completely covering one side of the pitched roof (figs. 119–20). As Stevenson related to artist Nick Mangan:

> Standing in that attic, it's as if you're standing outside, that's how much luminosity there is, and that's why I was fascinated by it. I thought, if there's a space this light, you could actually connect this space to the space below, and turn the building into a camera, so the view would be the view of the space, not the view outside. It's an internal view, from one room into another room . . . If you were in the exhibition space, you could not tell where [the object in the image was located]. But if you were standing and looking at the image, the object was actually directly above you, so you were in relation to this thing but you couldn't tell, you really couldn't tell.[589]

Stevenson built a near-life size model of Chuchú's little Cessna 185 aeroplane in Portikus's attic, like a ship in a bottle (fig. 121). With this attic space closed to the public, the plane was only directly visible from a distance, standing on the far bank of the river and looking back in through the attic windows. However, Stevenson's camera obscura transported an image of the plane from the brightly daylit attic into Portikus's darkened exhibition hall two floors below, where it floated like a mirage. Reflected through existing windows and doors, a series of mirrors and lenses, and a purpose-built light-proof shaft grafted onto the exterior of the building, the plane's image travelled a total of eighteen metres to arrive as a ghostly apparition on a screen hanging in the exhibition hall (fig. 122). This fragile image disappeared every time someone opened the front door, reappearing when darkness was restored to the gallery. The entirely analogue image floating in the exhibition hall was generated by the structure of the building itself—architecture as camera—and the waxing and waning intensity of the sunlight flooding in through the attic windows. The exhibition was, necessarily, only open during daylight hours. As Frankfurt moved from autumn towards winter, the exhibition's opening hours synchronised with the gradually reducing hours of light. The changing daily time of sunset was helpfully listed on the exhibition's invitation card, and Stevenson also underlined the importance of sunlight

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[589] Michael Stevenson, unpublished interview with Nicholas Mangan, 1 October 2013, Melbourne. Sections of the interview are reproduced in Mangan, 2015, pp. 80–90.

to the functioning of the installation by including it in the work's list of materials.[590] The plane's transformation into an image made of light, and the flight of this image from its physical confinement in the attic, was poetically alluded to by Stevenson's use of Chuchú's text, *Teoría del Vuelo*. The text is a meditation on the sensation of flight in a small aircraft which Stevenson chose to reproduce as a feather-light booklet printed on airmail paper.

The camera obscura as an analogue for perception

Stevenson used the camera obscura as a means of articulating a state of epistemological limitation. I have demonstrated in this chapter that works such as *Lender of Last Resort*, 2008, and *On How Things Behave,* 2010, approached the question of a limit to the phenomenal world—or, more accurately, they approached the limit of our ability to perceive and comprehend it. I have borrowed Nelson Goodman's description of this limit or horizon, and referred to it as the apocalyptic time t. I have shown that this is a temporal limit that marks off the unknowable future as an absolute, rather than relative, difference. With *A Life of Crudity*, Stevenson expressed this binary of present ignorance and future knowledge spatially. The camera obscura divided the installation into a dark space and a light one, an accessible space and an inaccessible one. The symbolic binary of light and darkness, knowledge and non-knowledge, is ancient, as is the philosophical and religious effort to approach or apprehend a metaphysical reality that coexists alongside our physical one. I am not suggesting that this subject of Stevenson's work is novel. His use of light and dark to indicate relative epistemological states, like his use of the banker's scales as a reference to Judgement Day in *Lender of Last Resort*, is cognisant of the historical weight of this symbolism. However I am suggesting that his approach to the topic is novel, and that this approach was formed out of his experience of the intersection of Pentecostalism and postmodernism during the late 1980s.

The presence of the apocalyptic time t as a central principle of his works indicates the enduring presence of Pentecostal eschatology in Stevenson's thinking. For Pentecostals, the expectation of the return of Christ totally structures and dominates

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[590] The materials list reads: "Plexiglas, cardboard, wood, steel, mirror, buttermilk, sunlight."

the temporality of their lived experience. The doors in *Nueva Matemática*, as I have shown, echo the exit signs in Stevenson's paintings of the 1980s. They also echo the role of the objects in those religious still lifes, which was to stand as proxies for, and mediators of, absolute otherness. Stevenson's approach to representation borrowed from the postmodern critique of representation in order to insist, not that there is no ultimate truth or reality anchoring our mediated view of the world, but that mediations cannot be bypassed. This was the basis of his religious critique of Pentecostalism's claims of direct, transcendent communion with the deity.

Stevenson's use of the camera obscura in *A Life of Crudity* offered the device as an opening, like the doors in *Nueva Matemática*, but also as an analogue for human perception. The camera obscura has often been thought to enable a particular insight into the processes of human sight and understanding. Jonathan Crary has argued, for example, that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in western Europe the device's structural and optical principles "coalesced into a dominant paradigm" for explaining the mechanics of human vision and the means of comprehension.[591] For Crary, the fact that the structure of the camera obscura creates a cognitive separation between the image it produces and the mechanism that generates this image was key to the formation of this paradigm. The device seemed to diagram a perceptual apparatus that was distinct from, but could accurately observe an objectively existing reality. It offered a model of human sight that underwrote our self-perception as disinterested observers of an independently existing reality.

Sarah Kofman offered a different view of the camera obscura. She analysed the way that the device appeared as a metaphor in the writing of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. Rather than a model of vision as a kind of copy-machine for reproducing reality, the device figured in the work of these theorists as "an apparatus for occultation."[592] For example, in *The German Ideology*, Marx proposed to invert idealism, which he considered to be upside down, as the camera obscura's image is also upside down.[593] Idealism begins from abstract principles and then imposes these principles onto lived experience in the form of ideology. Marx's materialist critique aimed to correctly

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[591] Crary, 1992, p. 27.
[592] Kofman, 1998, p. 14.
[593] Marx and Engels, 1998, p. 68–69.

orientate this thinking, doing away with "mystification and speculation" by beginning with the concrete material circumstances of economic production and devising abstract principles from this basis.[594] Kofman showed that the camera obscura functions in Marx's text as a metaphor for the occultation of consciousness by ideology. In Marx's work, she says, the device "plunges consciousness into darkness, evil and error" by separating it from reality:[595]

> the camera obscura isolates consciousness, separates it from the real; enclosed, the latter constructs a sort of neoreality . . . The camera obscura of ideology simultaneously maintains a relationship to the real (which it reflects in an inverted form) and occults, obscures it.[596]

As Crary argued, scholars in the seventeenth century regarded the camera obscura as a model of human vision which demonstrated the accuracy of our perception of the world. For Marx in the nineteenth century, it had become a model of our vulnerability to the distorting effects of the veil of ideology, and the difficulty of perceiving reality directly. Kofman's own perspective seemed to align with the one she ascribed to Nietzsche. According to this view, "each man has his camera obscura, his perspectivist point of view."[597] Rather than standing in revelatory or obfuscating relation to an independently existing reality, the camera obscura became a metaphor for the veil of our own subjectivity: "No eye is without its point of view, and none is passive."[598] In opposition to the values of clarity and transparency, and against Marx's effort to critically unveil the truth of reality, Nietzsche used the camera obscura as a metaphor for our total imprisonment in our subjective perspective on the world. The "dark chamber" of the camera obscura which isolates the perceiving mind from the reality it observes was, for Nietzsche, impossible to escape. For Kofman, "The Nietzschean dark chamber, without a key, should put an end to all false clarities, all obscurantisms."[599]

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[594] Marx and Engels, 1998, p. 68.
[595] Kofman, 1998, p. 14.
[596] Kofman, 1998, p. 17.
[597] Kofman, 1998, p. 40.
[598] Kofman, 1998, p. 41.
[599] Kofman, 1998, p. 45–6.

The use of the camera obscura in *A Life of Crudity* continues this tradition of offering the device as an analogue for human perception, but Stevenson's approach differs again from those I have outlined. I propose that the cognitive separation between the camera obscura's image and the mechanism producing this image operates, in Stevenson's work, as an analogy for a world which we cannot perceive directly or fully comprehend. As it did in Marx's text, the machine served to occult or obscure as much as it did to reveal. However, rather than attempting, as Marx did, to use critique to lift the veil; and rather than resigning himself to a life lived in unremitting darkness, as Nietzsche did, Stevenson used the device as the means of a different kind of revelation. *A Life of Crudity* stages a movement from one kind of perception, or one approach to representation, to another. This is similar to the movement performed by *The Fountain of Prosperity*, 2006. *Fountain* took a device designed to offer an overview, and made it into an affective embodiment: where the MONIAC had been regarded as a dynamic map of the operations of a national economy, in Stevenson's hands it was re-presented as a kind of forensic evidence. *A Life of Crudity* used the camera obscura in a similar way. A device associated with the effort to achieve objective vision became, as we will see, a means of revelation through affective embodiment.

An opening onto infinity

The camera obscura that Stevenson created at Portikus was a large, elaborate analogue mechanism that was arduous and complicated to make, and what it actually produced was an image on a screen. Closed circuit television could have delivered a similar result for a fraction of the effort. However, the analogue nature of the camera obscura's image was essential to the work. As anyone who has witnessed a camera obscura in operation will know, the image it creates is live: it is not static, it moves, in real time. Stevenson has observed that it is more film than image, but a film with a frame rate of infinity.[600] The camera obscura is an aggregate of spatial elements which interact with the physical properties of light, and its image is the startling outcome of the coincidence of these largely invisible operations. The appearance of its image seems miraculous, disconnected from visible causation. The magical quality

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[600] Michael Stevenson, email correspondence with the author, 21 October 2012.

of the device still has the capacity to entrance viewers in the media-saturated twenty-first century. For an audience attuned to digital projectors playing looped movie files, as Luc Sante has observed, the fact that the camera obscura's image appears without any visible means of causation "appeals to the unlettered, gaping peasant in all of us."[601]

In *A Life of Crudity*, the camera obscura was an assemblage of natural and artificial elements working in concert to produce the image that appeared—as if by magic—in the viewer's field of vision. The image was the product of the daylight streaming into the attic space upstairs, which gave it, as Stevenson noted, a frame rate of infinity. Light, in *A Life of Crudity*, is another example of the appearance of the natural sublime in Stevenson's work. Like the character of The Sea in *On How Things Behave*, 2010, it stands in categorical opposition to human consciousness. As The Sea said to Man in his dying moments: "I am higher than you can understand and deeper. I have kept my own account from the beginning of time." The distinction between The Sea and Man, I submit, operates in the same way as the distinction between the infinite frame rate of the camera obscura's image and its finite, bounded proportions. This is the absolute, not relative, difference between something that is finite and something that is infinite.

In Stevenson's installation, the image of Chuchú's plane created by the camera obscura was accompanied by a vitrine of material: books, records and other ephemera (fig. 123). Like a sequence of footnotes, this material connected the installation to the specific historical events and individuals of 1970s Panama, as well as siting it in a particular intellectual context. Stevenson included copies of mathematician Georg Cantor's *Contributions to the Founding of the Theory of Transfinite Numbers* and also a translation of Jorge Luis Borges's *El Aleph*, a collection of short fiction in which the Argentinian writer explored his longstanding fascination with the concept of infinity and its related paradoxes.[602] Chuchú, the poet-mathematician, pilot and protagonist of Stevenson's installation, was, like Borges, also familiar with Cantor's work.

[601] Sante, 2004, p. 9.
[602] Cantor, 1954, and Borges, 1977.

As I have already described, in the late nineteenth century Cantor made a pioneering attempt to formally define infinity using mathematics. This project, which was at least in part motivated by his religious convictions, was an effort to use what was known in order to make deductions about the unknown. I have noted that one outcome of his work was the invention of the language of set theory which underpins calculations of mathematical probability. Cantor was also able to extrapolate from mathematically provable properties of finite numbers in order to demonstrate that there is not one but an endless succession of ever-larger infinities. For the mathematician, this amounted to something verging on a mathematical proof of the existence of God. While Bertrand Russell's demonstration of the mathematical impossibility of the Barber eventually put paid to the "universal set" that contains everything including itself, Cantor speculated about the existence of an unreachable, ultimate level of infinity that he referred to as the Absolute.[603] He felt that the language of mathematics was unusually suited to addressing concepts associated with divinity, and he adopted the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet—aleph—as mathematical notation for the infinities that he referred to as "transfinite numbers." Aleph-zero, or $\aleph_0$, denotes the smallest transfinite number; aleph-one, or $\aleph_1$, is the next largest, and so on.

The fact that both Jewish and Christian mystics have long used aleph as a symbol for the infinite unity of God—the one that contains everything—would certainly not have escaped Cantor's notice.[604] Neither did it escape the notice of Borges, whose 1945 story "The Aleph" was directly inspired by Cantor's heady mix of pioneering mathematics and theological speculation.[605] In an imaginative literalisation of this mystical-mathematical concept, Borges's story posited the existence of a point in space that contained no less than the entire universe, simultaneously. The Aleph, as it was called in the story, was located (in a typically Borgesian juxtaposition of the sublime and the ridiculously mundane) under the nineteenth step of the cellar staircase in a house on Buenos Aires's Calle Garay, a house owned by a man named

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[603] See Barrow, 2005, pp. 68–71 for an account of Cantor's discovery. For a recent discussion of Cantor's mathematical work in terms of its contribution to Christian theology, see Russell, 2011.

[604] For a discussion of Cantor's work in relation to the symbolic use of aleph in the Jewish Kabbalah, see Aczel, 2000.

[605] As Borges acknowledged to Selden Rodman, he borrowed the title of his story from Bertrand Russell's account of Cantor's transfinite numbers. Rodman, 1974, p. 19. Gene H. Bell-Villada also outlines the connection that Borges's story has with Kabbalistic and Cantorian number systems. Bell-Villada, 1999, p. 233–34.

Carlos Argentino Daneri who was not only an appallingly bad poet but also an intensely irritating person. Borges's Aleph was a revelatory opening onto another kind of space. As the narrator related, it was a window onto infinity, two or three centimetres in diameter. Looking into the Aleph, he felt dizzy and wept, "because my eyes had seen that secret, hypothetical object whose name has been usurped by men but which no man has ever truly looked upon: the inconceivable universe."[606]

In both Borges's fiction and Cantor's mathematics, the infinite—that which categorically exceeds human perception—is approached via the finite and comprehensible. Borges made the insufferable Carlos Argentino Daneri the gatekeeper of the Aleph, and Cantor's discovery of infinity was made by carefully studying the properties of finite numbers. The work of both the mathematician and the writer hinges on the conviction that our perception of the world does not scratch its surface, that there are hidden depths unimaginable to our limited cognition. Clues to what we cannot see, however, are immanent in the mundane visible world. Stevenson's *A Life of Crudity* also located the transcendent within the immanent. His camera obscura was, like Borges's Aleph, an opening onto something else. This "something else" was quite literally infinity: the infinite frame rate of light. However, unlike Borges's Aleph, Stevenson's camera obscura did not offer a view like that through a window. In *A Life of Crudity*, revelation was staged through affective embodiment rather than via an overview. As I have said, the work traced a movement from one mode of representation to another—from overview to embodiment—and in order to understand how this was so, we need to again refer to the political histories that ground and anchor Stevenson's work.

The movement from overview to uncertainty

Chuchú's plane was an important tool in Omar Torrijos's political activities during the 1970s. As I have noted, in addition to his diplomatic negotiations with the United States regarding the Canal Zone, Torrijos was also surreptitiously supporting the Sandinista uprising against the US-backed Somoza regime in Nicaragua. It seems that

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[606] Borges, 1998, p. 284. The copy of Borges's story that Stevenson included in the vitrine at Portikus was a French translation published in 1977. I have referred to the English translation by Andrew Hurley published in 1998.

Chuchú regularly flew guns and food in his little plane to the Sandinistas' guerrilla camps in the Nicaraguan mountains, and helped bring Nicaraguan political refugees back into Panama. According to Graham Greene, "Chuchú was a man of infinite resource when it came to smuggling arms or men."[607]

The research material presented in the vitrine at Portikus referred to this political history. It included items such as *Panama en la Encrucijada: Colonia o Nacion?* [Panama at the Crossroads: Colony or Nation?] by Jaime G. Gomes Marques, a record of songs written in tribute to Torrijos following "the dramatic death of the revolutionary leader," a recording of Torrijos himself speaking, and *Mi General Torrijos* [My General Torrijos], Chuchú's prize-winning 1987 account of his time with the General.[608] This well-thumbed and heavily book-marked material indicated Stevenson's own research process, but it also seemed to frame the installation as a kind of memorial to Torrijos.[609] Chuchú's plane, in this reading, appeared as the vehicle of a political agent operating somewhere on the margins of official legitimacy, engaged in surreptitious combat with a hegemonic power. The bodyguard's plane also became a stand-in for the one that was the means of the General's death (and possible assassination) by plane crash in 1981. The binaries of light and dark, knowledge and non-knowledge, established by the camera obscura and the divided structure of Stevenson's installation could be interpreted as an echo of Torrijos's ignorance of his own fate. The sense of transcendence that is inherent in the operation of the camera obscura—its conversion of the model of Chuchú's plane into an image made of light—would become a lyrical evocation of the tragedy of Torrijos's fatal (but successful) struggle for Panamanian self-determination.

Early in my research process, I was startled to discover that Stevenson himself had quite a different perspective, one which shifts the work away from this familiar political narrative of leftist revolutionary heroes struggling against the oppressive

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[607] Greene, 1986, p. 181.

[608] Marques, 1989; Aldrete, n.d.; Torrijos, 1985; Martínez, 1987.

[609] It is worth noting that Torrijos was a complex political figure, and is remembered fondly by many, but not all. Margaret Scranton describes Torrijos's domestic legacy as "mixed." While he is often characterised as a "feisty but pragmatic Latin soldier-diplomat" who "adamently opposed the oligarchy and embraced the poor, rural sectors, workers and students" he also "quashed traditional civilian political activity" and established a "pattern of corruption and abuse of civil rights." Scranton, 1991, p. 57. For details of the human rights abuses that took place in the early years of Torrijos's rule, see Hague, 2002, pp. 15–17.

forces of a hegemonic power. When I asked what it was in particular about Chuchú's plane that interested him, Stevenson's immediate response was to refer to the aircraft used by Christian missionaries: "My first experience with planes or light aircraft was about taking Bibles to people . . . That's why you *have* a plane, so you can do stuff like that."[610] Light aircraft, he continued, are:

> used for all sorts of missions, whether they be drugs, whether they be guns, whether they be Bibles, it doesn't really matter. Because all the people that do it are of a particular type. They're *zealous*.[611]

It became clear that Stevenson regarded the conversion imperative behind missionary outreach as a form of ideological violence—"It is like war"—and that light aircraft were intimately connected in his mind to the activities of ideological zealots.[612] Whether these were the modern-day religious crusades enacted by missionaries and evangelists, or missions conducted by political ideologues seemed relatively unimportant. What was important was the attitude that motivated the activity.

As I described in chapter one, Stevenson's early religious experiences put him in direct contact with this kind of mission imperative. As Frank Macchia explains:

> Pentecostals have always taken seriously the text that the gospel must be preached throughout the earth before the end comes (Matt. 24:14). The latter rain of the Spirit for Pentecostals has been mainly about missions, meaning that the church birthed at Pentecost was the 'church for others' that shared with Jesus the privilege of being 'sent.'[613]

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[610] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.

[611] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013. Stevenson noted that his thoughts on this topic were also informed by a conversation with the curator Juan Gaitán. Egyptologist Jan Assmann has also observed the original connection between zealotry, iconoclasm and violence. He described the episode in the book of Exodus when Moses ordered the massacre of the Israelites after he had found them worshipping the Golden Calf. In the biblical text, he notes: "The execution of this punishment is presented as a model of 'zeal': human zeal and divine jealousy are in Hebrew expressed by the same word *qin'ah*. *El qanna'* means the jealous God, *qana'im* is the denomination of the zealots. Moses and the Levites act as *qana'im* in making themselves tools of God's jealousy. This is what zealot means." Assmann, 2009, p. 23. See Exodus 32.

[612] Michael Stevenson, interview with the author, Berlin, 15 November 2013.

[613] Macchia, 2008, p. 290.

Stevenson's paintings of "gospel caravans" from the 1980s show caravans bearing disproportionately large loudspeakers on their roofs, and also sometimes written signage proclaiming the "good news" of Christ's imminent return (figs. 15–16). The mobile equivalent of the street-corner preacher, these vehicles embody the combination of radical dissent and evangelical outreach of a worldview that could easily be described as zealous. Ideologues—whether religious or non-religious—are motivated by unshakeable conviction. They presume to have the knowledge and overview that Stevenson's works have continually insisted is impossible to achieve. Torrijos's fatal struggle against the regional hegemony of the United States was conducted in defiance of this impossibility. As I have demonstrated, Stevenson's *Introducción a la Teoría de la Probabilidad*, 2008, framed Torrijos's decision to offer asylum to the Shah of Iran as a blind gamble—as acting in front of a blue screen. Rather than describing a political opposition between Torrijos's leftist convictions and the entrenchment of neoconservative power in the US during the 1970s and 1980s, the suite of artworks that Stevenson produced on this subject between 2008–12 describe the failure of a mode of representation. This was the overview presumed by the zealot. With these works he staged a movement away from zealotry and towards a more productive and generative uncertainty.

Teoría del Vuelo and the transcendent perception of the pilot

In a gesture that deftly combined his mathematical knowledge with his talent as a poet, Chuchú named his plane Aleph-1: the second rung on Cantor's ladder of infinities. It was a vehicle of Panamanian resistance to US hegemony, but also a vehicle of philosophical speculation. Chuchú's 1979 text *Teoría del Vuelo*, which was republished to accompany Stevensons exhibitions at the Museo Tamayo and Portikus, was a lyrical meditation on the sensation of flight. Like Stevenson's installations, it established a binary opposition with metaphysical resonance. Contrasting the process of takeoff with the feeling of airborne weightlessness, Chuchú's text echoed the binary of light and darkness in *A Life of Crudity* with an opposition between flight and a gravity-bound existence on the ground. During takeoff, he related, the plane is "large, ungainly, lethargic" and must be aggressively forced into movement. Lifting off from the runway, however:

The whole machine shudders, immediately coming awake without any transitional phase, shaking off its lethargy like a child fresh from sleep. Now, as it accelerates, it acquires a certain spirituality . . . But it never dematerializes, as if the spirituality that has still not fully possessed the aircraft were also an attribute of matter. The pilot shares in this new dimension of matter . . . there comes a point where he weighs nothing and all he has to do is direct the plane through the faintest pressure to its elevator, almost as if he were doing so by thought alone.[614]

In *Teoría del Vuelo*, Chuchú recounted how the exquisite delicacy of the pilot's adjustments to the airborne plane allow a momentary release from the dull insensitivity of life on the ground: "that hard ground that allows us to walk clumsily about and perceive only the crudest and roughest aspects of things."[615] In contrast, the pilot in flight is perception embodied: "It is his role to be open, to be the border and the frontier, to be awareness."[616] However, as Chuchú noted, even in flight the plane "never dematerializes," as its spirituality is "also an attribute of matter." In Stevenson's installation, the apparent dematerialisation of the model plane into light via the operation of the camera obscura ultimately served to draw attention to the physical infrastructure of the camera's apparatus. Both Chuchú and Stevenson suggested that a sense of transcendence (by which I mean an awareness of what normally eludes perception) is only possible via an engagement with one's physical surroundings.

The pilot's temporary escape from what Chuchú described as "a life of crudity, vulgarity, and blindness" does not derive from his or her elevated view of the world.[617] For Chuchú, the pilot's special perspective does not result from the scopic overview he or she is afforded. He claimed that the pilot's ability to "be awareness" comes, instead, from a detailed knowledge of the mechanics of the plane, which enables an acute sensitivity and intuitive responsiveness to any changes in the sound or quality of the engine. While airborne, the pilot's life itself depends on his or her knowledge of the relationship between temperature and oil pressure. The "new

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[614] Martínez, 2012, pp. 29–30.
[615] Martínez, 2012, p. 32.
[616] Martínez, 2012, p. 32.
[617] Martínez, 2012, p. 31.

dimension of matter" that the pilot experiences while airborne is attained through his or her focused bodily and sensory engagement with the plane, a sensitivity which is sharpened by the proximity of death.

It seems to me that both Chuchú's text and Stevenson's installation sought to bridge the camera obscura's cognitive separation of the visible from the real. The transcendental state that a pilot can achieve during flight, the ability to sense what is not immediately visible, is "a new dimension of matter." There is, in fact, no categorical opposition between what is in front of the pilot's eyes and the obscure operations of the apparatus that enables this view. They are continuous, connected, part of the same system. Similarly, the camera obscura's image is not categorically different from the apparatus that produces it. As Stevenson pointed out, standing in front of the image floating in Portikus's exhibition hall, "you were in relation to this thing, but you couldn't tell, you really couldn't tell."[618] The image enabled a view of Stevenson's model of Chuchú's plane, which was physically nearby but inaccessible. The image was also generated by the structure of the building in which the viewer stood. It was an index of the encompassing structure that produced it, and of which it was a part. With Stevenson's architectural interventions, Portikus's building became an apparatus for revelation which physically surrounded the viewer standing in the exhibition hall. The live image generated by the camera obscura conveyed a powerful sense of a mechanism invisibly at play—right now, continuously—and acting through the very structure of the building. Standing in Portikus's darkened exhibition hall, I experienced a sudden bodily awareness of my own physical immersion in the system ceaselessly producing the image floating in front of me. The work offered a fleeting recognition of the fact that there is much we cannot comprehend or control. It indicated the extent of our epistemological limitations. The camera obscura became an analogue of the apparatus that is the universe operating ceaselessly around us: the seamless and incomprehensible coincidence of actions, processes, forces and infrastructures which produces the mirage-like fragment that we can see.

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[618] Michael Stevenson, unpublished interview with Nicholas Mangan, 1 October 2013, Melbourne.

Conclusion

I began this thesis with an account of *Michael Stevenson*, the survey exhibition held at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art in 2011. The opening room of this exhibition contained two works: *The Gift*, 2004–2006, from Stevenson's project *Argonauts of the Timor Sea*, and his 1987 painting *Stacked Hymnals and Collection Plates*. This juxtaposition insisted on a thematic unity to Stevenson's practice which had thus far evaded at least some of his audience. I offered an interpretation of the two works which sketched out what this elusive thematic connection might be. Describing *Stacked Hymnals* as a still life of objects constitutive of a religious community's financial and spiritual togetherness, I contrasted this reassuring image of group identity and cosmic certainty to the dangerously ramshackle vehicle which Stevenson titled *The Gift*. A recreation of the raft that Australian artist Ian Fairweather cobbled together for his near-suicidal sea journey to Indonesia in 1952, I described Stevenson's *The Gift* as an embodiment of Fairweather's solitary vulnerability to unknowable risks.

The two works, in my interpretation, could be considered bookends of a period of biographical time and also a body of work: the *before* and *after* of the artist's departure from the religious community of his early life, and his entrance into the volatile and unpredictable cosmos of post-faith existence. This interpretation was supported by Stevenson's own performative re-enactment of the final, imaginary, part of Fairweather's raft journey. Theorising that Fairweather's trip to Indonesia had been the first leg of an attempt to reach London, where an exhibition of his works was being held at the Tate Gallery, Stevenson re-enacted the last leg of the voyage and the raft's entrance into the mouth of the Thames. The video documentation *Making for Sheppey*, 2004, recorded his endeavour (fig. 124). Working with a local group of Sea Scouts and other assistants, Stevenson reconstructed his raft sculpture over the course of a day on a stony beach near Whitstable, in Kent. As the evening shadows lengthened, the raft was completed and launched. In *Making for Sheppey*, the industrious communal activity of the group building the raft gave way to Stevenson's solitary departure from shore into the imminent darkness of the twilight. It was an

anticlimactic launch: there wasn't a lot of wind, and the raft drifted slowly away from the beach with the artist awkwardly half-lying on the unstable deck, attempting to manage the tiller while pushing the boom away with his foot. The video faded to black, with the soft sound of the waves rhythmically splashing onto the pebbly beach. We do not know if Stevenson successfully sailed his rickety craft to the Isle of Sheppey, but it would seem a minor miracle—as was Fairweather's arrival in Indonesia, of course.

My research into Stevenson's work has been motivated by two questions: What is it that ties this artist's practice together? And what is its particular contemporary relevance? I reached for Stevenson's biography, and specifically his experience of departure from religious faith, to indicate the thematic unity underpinning his artistic practice of the last three decades. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, Stevenson's works are much more than an account of his personal experiences. Building from the cataclysmic collision of postmodernity and Pentecostalism in the artist's life and thinking during the 1980s, his practice has been a multi-decade project to reconstruct a shattered world-view, and also a deep engagement with the historical conditions of our time. Repeatedly circling the intellectual problems he encountered in and around the late 1980s—problems thrown into relief by the coincidence of postmodernism, the end of the Cold War, and his departure from the Church— Stevenson has developed a model of historical time that draws from both postmodern scepticism and religious faith. Expressed within an artistic practice, this model takes the form of a particular approach to representation.

Stevenson's critique of Pentecostalism centred on the denomination's conviction that it is possible to have an unmediated bodily experience of divinity. The experience of "spirit baptism," which is key to Pentecostalism's charismatic spirituality, is the experience of being possessed by the Holy Spirit itself. Drawing from the postmodern critique of representation, Stevenson has always insisted that mediations cannot be bypassed. From the "parochial-supernatural" paintings of religious paraphernalia and church halls he made in the 1980s to his later sculptural replicas of historical artefacts, the resolutely material focus of Stevenson's work insists that knowledge of what is beyond direct contact or cognition is always mediated by the physical objects that are not. When Pentecostals claim direct, bodily knowledge of something categorically

unknowable, Stevenson points to the everyday objects that, in practice, serve to facilitate their experiences. While Stevenson's approach to representation was deeply informed by postmodernism, however, it departs from postmodern relativism.

The model of historical time underpinning Stevenson's practice is eschatological. Postmodernism performed a gesture of liberation from the racist and patriarchal "grand narratives" of culture. Stripping away these mechanisms of ideological control from above, it claimed to have unmasked the simple truth of the way the world works. Instead of absolute difference or a naturally hierarchical system, postmodern critique asserted that there is only a densely interconnected network of relative differences, more or less incompatible perspectives and shifting identities. To be immersed in this pluralist universe of floating values, bloated with multiple pasts, presents and futures, is to experience profound epistemological disorientation. Stevenson's works reintroduced the apocalyptic horizon towards which Pentecostalism is oriented— towards which it strains with particular urgency—as a fixed point into the temporal soup that was inaugurated by postmodernism. The apocalyptic horizon of a categorically unknowable future stands, in Stevenson's works, as the absolute difference that postmodern critique attempted to dispatch. It is the "beyond" towards which faith is oriented, but as Stevenson has shown it is not something that can ever be known, or experienced directly.

In 1952, Fairweather constructed his raft from the materials available to hand: driftwood, and an array of found and repurposed items that he was able to scavenge. Stevenson's efforts to approach the horizon of the knowable were also formed from what was given. He has examined the material residue of history, discovering traces of a pattern apparently underlying events. Rejecting the ideological certainty that stimulates fanatical belief (and that motivates the zealous imposition of such beliefs onto others), Stevenson's approach is to "zoom in" on enigmatic clues rather than attempt an overview. With strategies of quotation, repetition and doubling, he used what was given, which was an inherently compromised language of expression. His works nevertheless stage an uncertain glimpse of some "other thing": as in forensic evidence, the clue was embodied by the artefacts that he replicated.

The profoundly open future towards which Stevenson's works are oriented is as risky and terrifying as Fairweather's gamble with fate, when he offered himself to the mercy of the Timor Sea. Pentecostals believe in a deity who is unpredictable, but they have faith that they themselves are among the righteous who will be saved when Judgement Day comes. As Stevenson's painting *Jesus Loves Us All: In Clinton*, 1988, dryly pointed out, the smug exclusivity of religious communities is predicated on a belief in their personal acquaintance with a benevolent God that simply can't be substantiated (fig. 10). There is no such promise of redemption or salvation in Stevenson's model of historical time. I have demonstrated that—as in Chuchú's lopsided theology—the unknowable "beyond" in his work is as likely to be diabolical as it is benign. So: how can we know the universal when everything we can see is specific? The short answer is that we can't. However, "the paranoiac," as Hal Foster noted, "projects meaning onto a world ominously drained of the same."[619] Stevenson's gestures towards transcendental insight are always wryly cognisant of our vulnerability to ideological suggestion and self-delusion. His practice rejects the overview, and also the promises of redemption which depend on a knowable future. In addition to this rejection of the promise of cosmic redemption, it also refuses art's various redemptive roles: for example, its alignment with progressive politics under modernism, and also the compensatory reassurance of postmodern art's capacity to express multiplicity or offer alternative views. Instead, Stevenson's practice is grounded in a politics that knowingly speaks a compromised language, recognising that there is no other. It is a politics centred on epistemological uncertainty, the possibility of absolute otherness, and the exhilarating and terrifying sublimity of an unknowable future.

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[619] Foster, 2004, p. 21.

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