NEW PUBLICATION
PRESS RELEASE

Title: The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader
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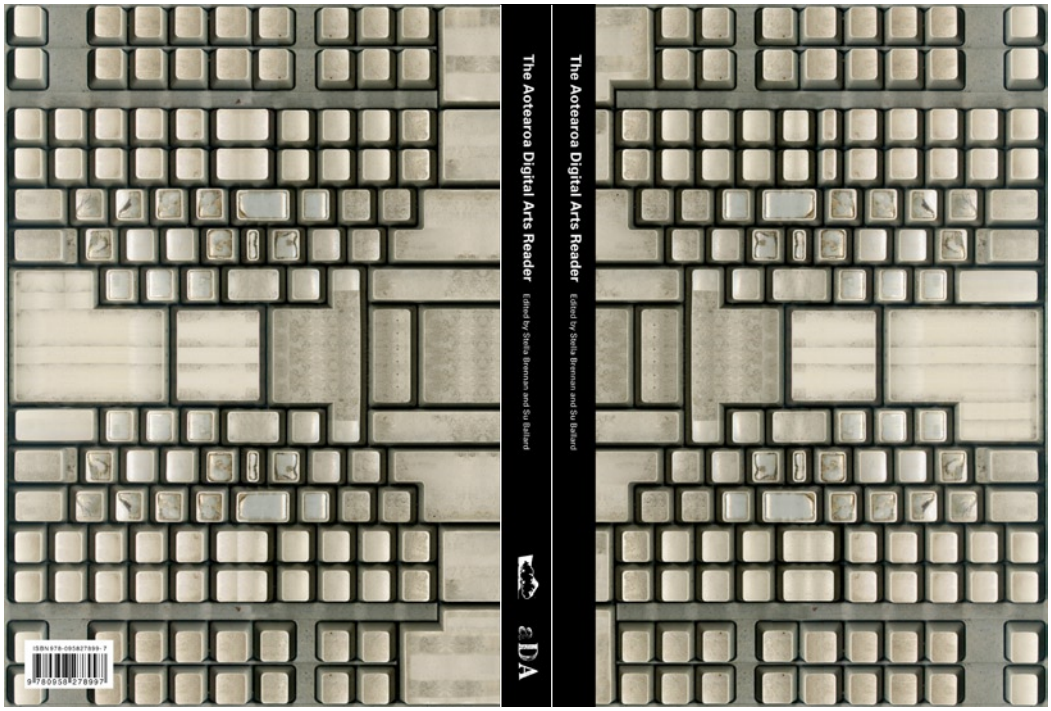
Publishers: Aotearoa Digital Arts & Clouds
ISBN: 978-0-9582789-9-7
Language: English
Softcover, 170 x 240 mm
240 pages (150 colour reproductions)
Distribution: Clouds (Australia & New Zealand)
Availability: 15 August 2008
Retail price (incl GST): NZD 60 / GBP 25 / USD 50
Trade terms available, contact us for details



The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader

A comprehensive anthology, *The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader* is the first single published source to provide a snapshot of digital art practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Editors Stella Brennan and Su Ballard present essays, artists' pageworks and personal accounts that explore the production and reception of contemporary digital art. Ranging from research into the preservation of digital artworks to the environmental impact of electronic culture, from discussions of lo-tech aesthetics to home gaming, and from sophisticated data mapping to pre-histories of new media, this book presents a screen grab of digital art in Aotearoa New Zealand.

All contributors are members of Aotearoa Digital Arts (ADA), New Zealand's only digital artists' network. The reader reflects the politics of location, yet is highly relevant to the wider contexts of digital media art and culture. With its mix of work by artists, theorists and educators, this book represents some of the best new thinking about digital art practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. The compilation is an essential resource locally and an important tool for the dissemination of New Zealand's digital arts practice internationally.

Introducing sculptor and film-maker Len Lye as a vital pre-cursor to current practice, and ranging from histories of early computer programming and gaming to analysis of environmental concerns and the social implications of new media, the book takes a snap shot of digital practices through the lens of New Zealand's leading digital arts network – ADA.

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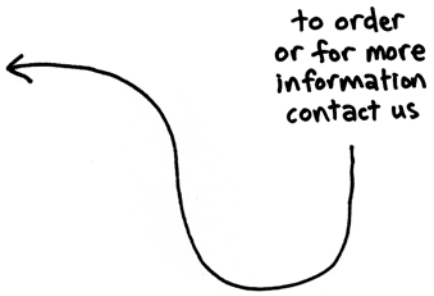

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Much of the technology used in media art is cutting edge, but this does not mean that the technology itself is uncritically celebrated. Rather, as *The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader* shows, a critique of technology is central to artists' uses and approaches. New media work within the broader sweep of contemporary art in gives us a unique perspective to address international practice and contribute to the development of broader discourses around new media art.

This book serves firstly as an introduction to new media and digital arts practice in New Zealand, and secondly, includes key critical discussions surrounding those works. *The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader* presents challenges and questions, provoking readers to think in fresh ways about the technologies they engage with on a daily basis.

See www.clouds.co.nz/012 for more images.

Contemporary Māori Women's New Media Art Practice

Maree Mills (Ngati Tuwharetoa, Ngai Tahu)

Digital art in Aotearoa New Zealand has a strong indigenous voice. Māori have taken up digital technologies in the same manner that they historically embraced new materials like iron and steel to effectively replace stone tools. This intersection between *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori world) and art practices that use digital media suggests that the two worlds are complementary. Digital media has empowered an oral culture by actualising it into a visual one, now accessible to a global audience.

A number of Māori digital artists are at the forefront of contemporary arts practice in Aotearoa. These artists are regularly showcased on the now established Māori television channel.[1] The success of Māori broadcasting is evident. In 2008, Māori Television will host the first world conference on indigenous television and launch a second channel on New Zealand's digital free-to-view platform. While it must be acknowledged that Māori Television operates within a commercial media context, it could be asserted that its success originates from a commitment to *tikanga Māori* (Māori customs and values) guiding its organisational principles and underpinning its creation and selection of content.[2]

Concurrently, indigenous women academics have seen the value of indigenous epistemology and philosophy in re-thinking cultural and economic conditions and the impacts that globalisation has on the culture of indigenous peoples. In recognition that 'new old' ways of thinking are a way forward, Makere Stewart-Harawira suggests that the central task of her book *The New Imperial Order: Indigenous Responses to Globalisation* is to argue that "traditional indigenous knowledge forms have a profound contribution to make towards an ontology for a just global order."[3] As Māori television has applied the principles of tikanga Māori to guide its operations, Stewart-Harawira suggests that global organisations could benefit greatly from doing the same. While this is seen by many to be a utopian proposition that does not acknowledge the inherent problems associated with the instrumentalisation of indigenous knowledge outside its context, it is often the desire of those communicating indigenous constructs with new media. In the Māori world knowledge manifests differently between tribes, between families, and between individuals. In a sense 'traditional knowledge' is a collection of individual knowledge and the differences are celebrated rather than contended. Sharing and the rearticulation of knowledge are required for the culture to remain alive. The old stories as well as new need to be told, and dialogue regarding their meaning and application in a contemporary world should be fostered. Much fear seems attached to this phenomenological, mobile and embodied aspect of Māori culture, but it is time for a Māori voice and a Māori knowing to be seen and heard. The way we experience being Māori, or our own experiences of what it means to be Māori, is valid and exciting territory for digital artists.

Māori women digital artists use moving image to communicate their ontologies and make comment on these connections between traditional knowledge and the contemporary world. Digital technology is employed by the

1. *Te Kete Aronui* is a Māori arts programme currently in its fourth season. It is produced by Kiwa Productions and screens weekly on Māori Television.
2. http://corporate.maoritelevision.com/about.htm
3. Makere Stewart-Harawira, *The New Imperial Order: Indigenous Responses to Globalisation* (London: Zed Books, 2005), 32.

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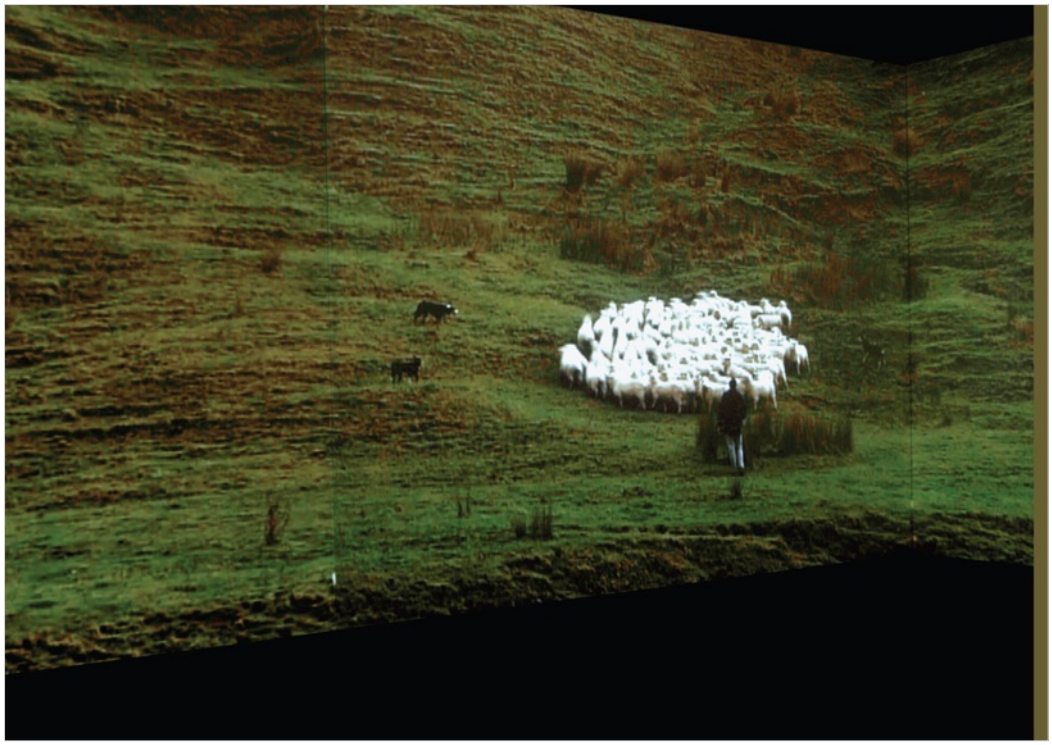

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Interdisciplinary Moments: A History in Glimpses

Andrew Clifford

Digital art has a legacy interweaving the histories of visual art, media and screen culture, music, dance, theatre and science. Gathered here are a series of fragments that either recall an interdisciplinary spirit, or have clearly glimpsed it on the horizon.

Technological developments have shifted modes of practice. New media can require the artist, if that is what they call themselves, to look beyond their own artform into other fields; to act more like a director, corralling content and collaborators—including writers, designers, musicians, scientists, programmers and photographers—towards the final production. There are moments too where it would be tempting to generalise about the role of fabled kiwi ingenuity in projects requiring unconventional combinations of expertise and resulting in unusual collaborations. When support might not have been present within an artist's chosen practice but could be found in surprising new locations, new resources and expertise developed, along with new frameworks from which to think about cultural production, collaboration and authorship. This shift has often also meant moving beyond the usual modes and venues of presentation to create new spaces for new kinds of experiences.

The Happiness Acid

From film to sculpture to photography and batik, Len Lye's multi-stranded career looms large across any discussion of interdisciplinary art in New Zealand. Born in 1901, as a child Lye was fascinated by the mechanical motion of the lighthouse he lived in.[1] By the age of twenty he was deeply interested in tribal art and already considering ways to compose motion in the way "musicians compose sound."[2] On moving to Australia in 1922 he began experimenting with kinetic sculptures and scratching directly onto film. Fascinated by Aboriginal and Polynesian objects, he decided to focus entirely on "black art" rather than "Western style draftmanship."[3] After a brief return to New Zealand, he spent two years in Western Samoa and Australia, arriving in London in 1926. He completed his first film, *Tusalava*, in 1929. Hand-painted frame by frame, *Tusalava* is a greyscale animation of primordial, cellular forms, the result of both Lye's interest in tribal artforms and his incessant doodling, a habit he saw as being able to free the hand from conscious impulses and connect with the 'old brain'—subconscious memories of primal instincts and images.[4]

Lacking funding to pursue his projects, Lye had realised that by scratching, painting and printing directly onto individual film frames, he could do away with the need for a camera. He recognised the potential for a technique that would seem too jittery and unpredictable for traditional animators but could produce colours much more intense than those realised through conventional processing. Much of Lye's film output during the thirties was in the form of advertising for the General Post Office, tagged with exhortations to send letters by 2pm or use the right postcode. Although fitting the commercial imperatives of short advertisements shown in cinemas, these snappy vignettes, cut to music,

1. Roger Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001), 13.
2. Wystan Curnow and Roger Horrocks, "Introduction," *Figures of Motion* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1984), xi.
3. Curnow and Horrocks, "Introduction," xii.
4. Curnow and Horrocks, "Introduction," xiii.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

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Morgan O'Brien, *New Work for PCs*, 2007, real-time projection, game mod.

1980s Home Coding: The Art of Amateur Programming[1]

Melanie Swalwell

Writing code oneself was a key part of the reception and culture of early home computers; systems such as the BBC, the Spectrums, the TRS-80, the Atari, Commodore and Amiga ranges, and the Sega SC3000.[2] In the 1980s, home coding was a significant use of these computers, both in terms of the numbers of people who dabbled at coding, and as a mode of engagement with a then-new technology. A highly experimental practice, it presaged many of the contemporary practices involved in digital culture, the often-discussed phenomena of appropriation, modification, and remixing. Yet while the 'advent' of Web 2.0 has raised the profile of productive consumers, remarkably little attention has been paid to the earlier practices of home coders.

This essay focuses on the *experimental* basis of home coding in the 1980s, drawing on archival and interview-based research into the New Zealand reception of computers and digital games during this decade.[3] This research into home coding enables us to develop a clearer understanding of the uses that people made of home computers. After the French theorist, Michel de Certeau, I suggest that we know very little about what people actually *did* with these early items of digital consumer technology.[4] Though some accounts do exist, these tend to be more concerned with either the spectacular (hacking) or the feared potentials of the 'computer revolution', such as job losses, thus they provide only partial understandings of early engagements with digital technology.[5] One reason why home coding may have been overlooked is its *everydayness*, its homeliness, if you like. Even today, those who dabbled at writing software at home—after school or on the weekend—typically consider that their activities were unremarkable, expressing their sense that 'everyone was doing it.' Unfortunately, this popularity does not guarantee that home coding will be remembered; indeed, many of the creations of this era—dubbed 'hobbyware' by one of my informants—have already been lost.[6]

I have conducted in-depth interviews with people who were active home coders, and in this essay I blend extracts from the accounts of Katharine Neil, Mark Sibly and Simon Armstrong, Fiona Beals, and John Perry, with material from other informants (including the founding editor of *Bits and Bytes* magazine and technology journalist, Neill Birss) and archival sources. I focus here on the twin issues of how my informants learnt to code and what it was that they wrote. In many, if not most cases, the simple answer to the question of what they wrote was, 'games.' I have pursued informants who are knowledgeable about early games, because games were often a key reason why people purchased or otherwise acquired a computer. An important driver not just of the development of early home computers—or 'micro-computers', as computers for the home or office user were then called—games also drove the uptake of many early home computer systems, as Neill Birss observed. Though they are often deemed unworthy of serious consideration, digital games are significant in the histories of both home computer use and amateur coding.

1. This research was made possible by grants from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the University Research Fund, Victoria University of Wellington.
2. This last system attracted immense interest in New Zealand, probably because there was little commercial English-language software available for it, at least to start with; because of this gap, people rose to the challenge and wrote their own. Collectors have compiled a list of literally hundreds of software titles that were locally written. See A. Wheeler and M. Davidson, "SC3K Tape software list," *Sega Paradise*, 28 May 2005, http://homepages.paradise.net.nz/atari/sc3000lists.html. This system is the focus of a pilot project by VUW's NZTronix research team, of which I am a member: we plan to port and re-distribute an early locally written game title for use on a mobile phone platform. For more information, see http://www.nztronix.org.nz
3. New Zealand is a specific case in the reception of early home computers with its own idiosyncracies. Research indicates that the advent and arrival of early computers in New Zealand was uneven vis à vis the rest of the world, both in terms of the systems that were brought in and the issue of delay or "lag." Nevertheless, a number of similarities exist between the New Zealand reception of home computers and that of other geographic contexts. Some of the research detailed here will, therefore, resonate with the histories of computing in other locales. See Melanie Swalwell, "Early Games Production in New Zealand," paper presented at *Digital Games Research Association Conference*, Vancouver, Canada, 17 June 2005, and Melanie Swalwell and Loyer, "Castoffs from the Golden Age," *Vectors: Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular* 3, April 2006. http://www.vectorsjournal.org

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