Keeping Watch
fabricating a space of hesitation

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In 2011 the MV *Rena* struck the Astrolabe Reef in the Bay of Plenty, Aotearoa New Zealand. Stacks of containers fell from the ship and household goods, industrial items and oil washed into the sea coating beaches and birds. This project *Keeping Watch* involves the production of a series of large paintings and prints commenced after the grounding of the *Rena* and emboldened by a watery strand in Hélène Cixous’s writing. While Cixous is not a painter she has an affection for painting and the formal effects of writing and she advocates a practice that risks the unknown and the unexplored:

“Go, fly, swim, bound, cross, love the unknown, love the uncertain, love what has not yet been seen, love no one, whom you are, whom you will be, leave yourself, shrug off the old lies, *dare what you don’t dare*, it is there that you will take pleasure, never make your here anywhere but there, and rejoice, rejoice in the terror, follow it where you are afraid to go, go ahead, take the plunge, you are on the right trail!”

The work has been propelled by Cixous’s exhortations and and by an understanding, newly authorised in Aotearoa New Zealand, that the rivers and seas are much more than resources, having their own status and legitimacy as entities. Water and oil are both the site and medium of these projects and the work is an extension of previous research on politically and literally turbulent ground. Salty water, water that is tainted or tinted, that is both within and without, is the unstable ground of the projects.

The paintings operate with the materiality of the *Rena* in an acknowledgement of a complicity with the strange circulation of ordinary goods and empty containers across seas. In a fictional indexical operation, the writing and making describe the work of a woman, variously housekeeper, cleaner, architect and artist, who attempts to clean up spills that are both domestic and public. She paints, makes prints and draws trying to attend to those who do not have a voice. Knowing that it is impossible to put things to right she nevertheless keeps watch.

The black paintings, prints, and drawings, undertaken as signs of care, operate on the edges of the codes and materiality of a past practice of architectural delineation, though this is not easily recognised. Architectural sections cut through both the material support of building and also the occupation of space. The sections in this project catch discrete moments of an expansive oceanic field even as they allude to the human interior. The float and the swell of the works combine with difficult knots of matter, entanglements of mortality and the destruction of illusions. Following Cixous the painting undertakes the vital work of mourning associated with loss; it also is also indebted to Slavoj Žižek in its attempts to pay attention to toxicity through transformative pleasure.

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The smell of iodine, a somewhat bleak intimation of possibilities, and a hint of decay permeate Keeping Watch. The work is oceanic, domestic and preliminary and fuelled by a cry of fright and a love of water. The project discussed in this exegesis is an extension of former research that focused on ‘ground’ and the complications of ideas of foundation and site; ground considered in its political, architectural and literal turbulence. Ground owned, appropriated, and unstable. This new project addresses a specific marine condition of foundation in the Bay of Plenty, Aotearoa and is premised on an understanding that distinctions between the earth, water, objects and bodies are complex and constructed and that care is due to each.

In a world that is spinning on limits, warming and changing, the catalyst for the project is a specific material event, the wrecking of a ship, the MV Rena, on Otaiti, also known as the Astrolabe reef, in 2011 in the Bay of Plenty. An event which brought together global circulation of waste, birds and marine creatures, fuel oil, oceanic relationships of tangata whenua and political attempts to avoid responsibility. The story of the Rena has unfolded over a number of years and the consequences are ongoing.

This introduction indicates the writers to whom the work is indebted and the ideas that the project explores and it also outlines the structure of the research. Section two constructs the field in which the thinking operates, explored through the making of two series of prints and an identification of specific oceanic spatialities through the fabrication of word images. The impact of the Rena is then conveyed in the third section in a series of paintings and a written text which indicates the material and methodological nature of the work. The final section is a reworking of the Rena event through a series of ink drawings as a parallel, watery, but domestic condition. The exegesis ends with some reflections on the undertaking.

The focus of the work undertaken is on a blurred zone of making and unmaking that the disaster revealed; surfaces fabricated, surfaces concealed, actions of waves and words shaped over time. In the project edges of contact are worn into new accommodations and renewed resistance through repetitious processes found in painting, drawing, writing and printing. To attend to and acknowledge the surface conditions of objects, resisting containment and completion, is to diminish distinctions between familiar categories, (object, container, background), and this resistance is understood as the work of architects and housekeepers. The art project is based on years of manual repair and surface care undertaken during employment as cleaner, housekeeper and architect. The project is an acknowledgement that the world, which was once easily separated into discrete objects, patterned into various hierarchies, clean and dry, is no longer subject only to logic and
assertions of dominance. Secure understandings and physical encounters with the contours and boundaries of what constitutes the human, inhuman or natural no longer hold fast. Philosopher Jane Bennett, amongst others, acknowledges the “complex entanglement of human and nonhumans” pointing out that nature and materiality are not perfect machines and that there is always something that exceeds and alters. She notes that “there is nothing simple about materiality, and neither are material forces and flows best figured as determinate and deterministic. The need to be kind and respectful to other bodies will remain, regardless of whether one understands human individuals and groups as embodied minds/souls or as complex materialities.”

The fabricated work in this research, figuring a sort of embodied, spatial haziness, acknowledges Bennett’s position.

Writer Stacy Alaimo proposes that we inhabit, “Trans-corporeality – the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from ‘nature’ or ‘environment’. Trans-corporeality as a theoretical site, is a place where corporeal theories and environmental theories, meet and mingle in productive ways. Furthermore the movement across human corporeality and nonhuman nature necessitates rich complex modes of analysis that travel through the entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual.”
The project *Keeping Watch* draws on Alaimo’s theoretical site, accepting the entangled territories that she describes, and seeking to construct a space that allows for watchful encounters.

In her essay “The Cosmopolitical Proposal”,3 philosopher and scientist, Isabelle Stengers proposes that we could be attentive to the Earth from an ethical and political perspective. Her work suggests that, in a world of political speed and expediency, there is a case to be made for a holding up of proceedings, a slowing down that makes room for the consideration of those who would not, or who cannot, participate in decisions that affect their worlds. *Keeping Watch*, prompted by the effects of a regional disaster, is an attempt to take Stengers’ words literally and to try make space that does not propose the possibility of a solution to a disturbing event but which gives time and attention to the consequent specific materialities through fictional indexical proceedings.4

The question for the research has been how to make work that is intended, according to Stengers’ strategies for her own work, “to slow down reasoning and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations mobilizing us?”5 The slowing down and concomitant attentiveness, rather than being a search for a solution, instead requires what she calls “a space of hesitation”6 in which to stop and think – a space and time that allows for consideration of effects, connections and consequences.

Rather than offering any grand plans or solutions, the making in this project attends to the complexity of relationships of care hoping that the frayed ends
and edges have the potential to produce conditions that might reveal or enable new object relationships. Theorist Verena Andermatt Conley writes of the “continued decoupling of the links binding nature to culture and subject to object, while also dissolving differences between things human and nonhuman, human and animal, organic and inorganic.” She, too, is observing a world in which the primacy of humankind has been questioned and where boundaries are unstable, and she advocates relationships of care. However Conley is, at times, ambivalent about care as a practice. She writes that

“to argue today for the importance of care is to argue for a concept and a practice that hardly inspire. Rather, care reminds us of the daily grind, of the tedium of caretaking (say, of sharing energies with beloved souls in asylums or nursing homes, or of doing pro bono work in homeless shelters).”

She wants to focus on other aspects of care, care as empathetic; care as “a diagram—an intermediate form—between possibility and event” but this exegesis is interested in the ‘daily grind’ and in what she terms the ‘tedium of caregiving’. The work of the research is attentive to the materiality of the world discovered through repetitive, attentive, physical touch deployed to both enable and observe emerging conditions. The project has required repetitive attention to the specificity of matter in a local situation.

Watchful attention and imperfect but sustained care are modes of making that construct the project. To care for something, or to take care (in general), or to take care of something, all have slightly different alignments to the object of attention. The works assume these three modes of care: responsibility, wariness and affection. Care can also imply dependency, martyrdom or refusal of the new and these are, no doubt, a possible potential of the project. The work seeks to convey the qualities of ‘attention to’ and ‘watchfulness for’; aspects of care that signal a material undertaking, an enduring and respectful physical engagement between things and people.

The project has been undertaken in the context of bicultural islands of Aotearoa New Zealand. Maori accounts of origin suggest an oceanic beginning as Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal writes:

“Māori and their Polynesian forebears have been island peoples for many generations, so it is not surprising that water, particularly the sea, figures prominently in their world view. In some traditions the oceans’ depths are considered to be the origin and source of all life. The islands are believed to be fish, pulled up from beneath the sea, and humans are thought to have evolved from aquatic beginnings.”
Land as living fish, fish as the silken, mobile surface on which we exist. To live in Aotearoa New Zealand involves an awareness of the watery nature of the world in a ubiquitous, ever present sense. The long coast line, cut, imbricated and rearranged by an active geology, is like a stretchy seam in a skin that is variously dry or liquid. Standing on the shore, plunging beneath the sea, inclinations towards the marine become dominant. The work of the project, responding to the lunar pull of the oceans, is a liquid endeavour awash with the wonders of engulfing pleasure as well as a recognition of imminent obliteration by tsunami or rising seas.

The field for the project, discussed in section two, is the Pacific Ocean which, in scholar and teacher Epeli Hau’ofa’s analysis, is criss-crossed with the lines of navigators and voyagers over time. Hau’ofa refutes the once prevalent view of Pacific islands as small, inconsequential and ineffective, “But if we look at the myths, legends and oral traditions, and the cosmologies of the peoples of Oceania, it will become evident that they did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions. Their universe comprised not only land surfaces, but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it, the underworld with its fire-controlling and earth-shaking denizens, and the heavens above with their hierarchies of powerful gods and named stars and constellations that people could count on to guide their ways across the seas. Their world was anything but tiny.”

Oceanic spatialities are materialised in section two though an assemblage of writing that evokes an aquatic sensibility tinged, at times, with catastrophe. The section includes two series of prints, ‘Oceanic Foundations: Rising Waters’, one and two, which depict the oily strands on the surface of a rising sea, stretching out and connecting oceanic people across vast distances and paralleling the written constructions of the field. The sea is the subject of both the material works and the lines of text that are woven together through a sort of ekphrastic production that floods the project with marine tears and congealing oil.

In section three the exegesis examines the specific encounter between the sea, oil and material that fell from the Rena into a series of large, grey paintings. It considers in detail the materiality of the wreck drawn from the objects that tumbled into the Bay of Plenty. The paintings, large hanks of linen cloth, understood as abject cleaning rags, litmus and blotting paper, enact the conjunctions of the various materials; starch, chemicals, food stuff, furniture and oils. Like the ‘mop-up work’ discussed by architect Jennifer Bloomer the project acknowledges a specifically feminine relationship with ‘the spill’; liquid accidents are often seen as a responsibility that is gendered. Bloomer takes the term “mop up work” from
Thomas Kuhn’s scientific use but she notes the
domestic connotations in dictionary definitions: “to
drink greedily, to get hold of, to wipe up, to absorb,
to make an end of”.

The paintings, as fictional indices, enact and repeat the Rena disaster; they
are evidence of the desire, impossible to achieve,
to clean it all up.

Following the discussion of the Rena a parallel
undertaking is presented in section four in a text
and a series of grey drawings by the cleaner, as
another labourer, artist, caregiver. Coloured by
writer Hélène Cixous’s account of the care she
gave to the disintegrating skin of her aged mother,
the drawings bring the project’s undertaking
back to the domestic, locating the denial and
celebration of the excesses of the material world in
drawings that imagine, and remember, the work of
a house cleaner.

The conclusion of the exegesis briefly reflects on
the project and its informants and considers what
will happen next. As Jan Verwoert writes;

“The picture is the obvious result of painting.
But this result is not identical with the motive
for the painting. The picture is not the wish
that existed when the production of the
picture started. Nor are picture and wish
identical with the series of decisions, the
development of the criteria for making those
decisions and the state of the crisis that
accompanies the finding of the decisions,
which all determine the process of painting.
The fascinating thing about painting is
that the result, reason and process of its
production cannot be fully reduced to one
another.”
Sitting the exegesis:
A bicultural ocean

Salty water, water that is tainted or tinted, that is both within and without, is the unstable ground of the projects. Epeli Hau‘ofa starts his text, “The Ocean in us” with words from poet Teresia Teaiwa: “We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood.” On the other side of the world Philip Hoare writing of his daily immersion in Northern oceans titled his book, The Sea inside. And, earlier, artist Robert Smithson shaped earth and water into a spiral on the understanding that there was a connection between the red sea and blood. These recurrent references point to an internal and shared conjunction between body and sea and suggest persistent forms of spatiality.

Water covers approximately 70% of the earth’s surface and the salt laden oceans constitute the most extensive interiors that we confront and on which we depend. Because we have the sea within us and because we also fear immersion as death, the sea is envisaged as a spatial condition that epitomizes our vacillations between individuality and collectivity. This conflicted relationship is first explored through the making of a written image of the space of the sea; an image of oceanic spatiality constructed by following threads of writing and images that exhibit a sensitivity to the vast interior space that we exploit, pollute and endlessly imagine as escape.

Speculating on conditions of oceanic space that acknowledge the shared and the discrete natures of bodies and objects of the world, the written image addresses the inevitable tension between the spaces of our collective alignment and the temporality of individual lives. Each object in the world, non-human and human, tends to be resistant to being taken over and each body can also be seen to be open to combined engagements through the action of work and negotiation. To swim in the sea is to, momentarily and warily, form a collaborative relationship with the medium, whilst still maintaining our breathing selves and to undertake oceanic writing is to recall and enact that collaboration.

Oceanic writing acknowledges the scalar shifts between human and marine bodies, both liquid and teeming with life. Such oceanic interiority is maintained by permeable membranes, skin and shore, that permit separation and that allow connections at individual and global scales; these encounters have ethical and formal conditions. The immersive interior is, in one sense, a uterine space; a space of beginning that endlessly repeats the ordinary dramas of life. It also recognizes an exteriority within.

Epeli Hau‘ofa ends his influential essay, “Our Sea of Islands”, with the following words addressed to the people of Oceania:

“Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of
fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces that we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed places and from which we have recently liberated ourselves.”

Hau’ofa points to a vital enlargement of space, oceanic space as expansive, extending past the terrestrial ground of islands to make connections between people, goods, knowledge and stories.

Skills of navigation were recorded in the sand, in stick charts, and even in buildings, with precise spatial descriptions of bodies moving under a rotating sky in a wide horizoned ocean. The stick charts describe geometries of the surface of the sea aligned to time, with marks that record moving islands, rising stars and planets. Hau’ofa points out that prior to European arrival in the Pacific, “boundaries were not imaginary lines in the ocean, but rather points of entry that were constantly negotiated and even contested. The sea was open to anyone who could navigate his way through.”

The sea is porous, map-like, narrated and figured. On the other side of the world Philip Hoare in The Sea Inside, wrote of his daily practices of swimming:

“That fixity of sea and sky is a supreme deception. ...The horizon is only an invention of our eyes and brains as we seek to make sense of that immensity and locate ourselves within it. The sea solicits such illusions. It takes color from the clouds, becomes a sky fallen to earth; it only suggests what it might or might not contain. Little wonder that people once thought that the sun sank into the sea, just as the moon rose out of it.”

In the surface, thickened with life, reactive to elsewhere, Hoare sees hints of a condition beneath the skin that is, at times, a mirror. Invention and unreliability collect in his descriptions of the surface;
meretricious, ornamental, the sky falls. Over the surface that stretches across the curvature of the earth, Hoare makes the horizon slide, which, while imitating closure, lures mind and body around the globe. Standing on the edge of a northern island he notes:

“...the sea defines us, connects us, separates us. Most of us experience only its edges, our available wilderness on a crowded island ... Perpetually renewing and destroying, the sea proposes a beginning and an ending, an alternative to our landlocked state, an existence to which we are tethered when we might rather be set free.”

Hoare reflects on oceanic, tidal oscillations that make and remove, his sea providing an image of the fluctuations of life: sailors might drown but Aphrodite was born of sea foam, the floating sperm of Uranus. For Hoare the sea is shaped as a sharp-edged image of freedom opening into the world.

Teresia K Teaiwa in an essay on Native Pacific Cultural Studies, “Lo(o)sing the Edge”, also tests the limits of oceanic edges. She writes of the edge of the ocean as a place to stand, a point to look out and back from and as a critical or cutting edge. She asked:

is the edge always held at the edges of the Pacific? Is it possible to have an edge on the world’s largest ocean?

Epeli Hau‘ofa says that our edge is the ocean (Waddell, Naidu, and Hau‘ofa 1993). No other people have had their history shaped so much by an ocean. The islands of Kiribati and Tuvalu may not exist in thirty year’s time.

The ocean has the edge.

The ocean in Teaiwa’s image is not only the recipient of history but also its instigator and participant. World temperatures have risen but it is the ocean itself that will pour across the reefs and beaches of Pacific islands removing traces of past and present occupation. The ocean will change the histories of Pacific people: it is not possible, Teaiwa suggests, for people to have an edge on the Pacific. Herman Melville in Moby Dick or the White Whale, went further giving the ocean a heartbeat and divinity: “Thus this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the world’s bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to it; seems the tide-beating heart of earth.”

From the edge, an opening into the surface conditions of the sea prevails: we look out to a pulsing liquid skin that surrounds us. To fall into water is the stuff of fantasies and nightmares. Those sailors who navigate instrumentally fear death by drowning, while things beneath the surface vanish from consciousness reappearing only as fleeting anxieties and desires. Attentive, no doubt, to the lines of reflection and dispersal that pattern and ornament the sea, John Ruskin, as a constrained child, gazed out from the edge. Rosalind Krauss has told the story of the child Ruskin watching the sea.
Her reportage evokes his restricted childhood that left him with the gift of observation. Ruskin says:

“But before everything, at this time, came my pleasure in merely watching the sea. I was not allowed to row, far less to sail, nor to walk near the harbor alone; so that I learned nothing of shipping or anything else worth learning, but spent four or five hours every day in simply staring or wondering at the sea, ...”

The small, immobilized boy is aligned with the beat of the sea, his stasis undone imperceptibly by the waves and the tides. The blood in his system barely circulates with the slow rhythm of passing time. An image of elsewhere, a removal from the social, the sea is pictured as “opening into onto a visual plenitude that is somehow heightened and pure, both a limitless expanse and a sameness, flattening it into nothing, into the no-space of sensory deprivation.” Krauss’ words, like the waves under observation, construct the sea as a neutral space for wondering, the detached plane of the surface as some sort of compensation for enforced restraint.

The contemplation of the sea, childhood troughs and peaks of desire, inscribed in a wash of salty liquid, would in Ruskin’s adulthood turn vividly to colour in response to J. M. W. Turner’s painting, “Slave Ship.” Ruskin wrote:

“Purple and blue, the lurid shadows of the hollow breakers are cast upon the mist of the night, which gathers cold and low, advancing like the shadow of death upon the guilty ship as it labors amidst the lightning of the sea, its thin masts written upon the sky in lines of blood, ... and cast far along the desolate heave of the sepulchral waves, incarnadines the multitudinous sea.”

Stained and flaming, the sea carries the guilt of the slave ship, tinted with the blood of those cast into the water; waves as a funereal procession, marking passing lives, approaching death. Deaths that reoccur in the twenty first century with the refugee flights across the Mediterranean, oceans coloured by disaster. Becoming blood, the sea is oxygenated with an infusion of red cells, the “second angel [of Revelations] emptied his bowl into the sea, which turned into a fluid like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in it died”. The sea is understood as a container of all the detritus and rejected things of the world.

Spatially imagined as a bleeding container of fear and trash, or a still surface mirrored and riven by geometry, or shaped as a mechanism for abstract detachment, the sea is currently remembered as an implacable leveler. In the early twenty-first century a number of severe tsunamis hit Aceh, Japan, Samoa and other countries in the Pacific. The seas spread, dissolving and eliminating many
thousands of objects; people, animals, insects, houses, furniture and plants.

Following the events it was discovered that

“Age and sex were described as risk factors for death ... significantly higher death rates were reported among females ... Significantly elevated risk of death was also observed in children ... and older adults ... Other risk factors included education which was inversely associated with mortality risk; fisheries-based livelihoods, indoor location at the time of the tsunami and home destruction and the physical environment. The majority of tsunami deaths were due to drowning.”

Statistics cannot remain dry in such circumstances. With the many deaths the sea became the instigator and repository of loss and mourning; lost love, becoming child in loss, the ocean filled with catastrophic tears. Hélène Cixous, in her story “Deluge”, wrote a final oceanic image of lost love and mourning:

...I went right to the end of the labyrinth, under the roar of the tidal wave, I ran beneath the sea, I ran on the earth, I went right to the end of misfortune, above the racing tide rattled to the wind, below I forced my way, I went right to the limit which I pushed back, alive I abruptly entered behind the time after hope, as long as we advance we prevent the story from ending, I ran, everlasting the love-mourning in me the child-suffering created a flow of tears matching the tidal wave above, bearing love death life farther, no I would not let myself be comforted and dried out, I would run on until dream or reality gave me back my love, to the end, I run ...

The space of the sea is a space mourning, filled with the running figure, unable to outstrip the water, a space of dreaming where the child cannot be reached in time, always out of reach, where loss of love and life is repeatedly imagined. The tidal reach of such images is found in the heaviness of slow moving water, in a deep oceanic space, which bears both the negligence and the beauty of the world.

Two series of reversed prints overlay the word-images that construct the oceanic spatialities above. The prints, ‘Oceanic Foundations: Rising Waters’, one and two, depict the oily strands created on the surface of rising sea-lines, which stretch out, connect and entangle oceanic people. The works trace the repetitive rise of tidal water through a repulsion of oil. Making the prints traces a series of states, each indebted to previous conditions in an acknowledgement of dependency and inevitable mutation. Initially drawn from a lithographic residue, the images were translated into an enlarged drawing, layered into a digital image, further translated into a cutting file before being inscribed.
into polycarbonate plates with a CNC router. The entangled images were finally hand printed in positive and negative versions.

In this section, marine references fabricate an image of oceanic spatiality that emerges through the deployment of thick, oily lines of things and words; the extracted space being poised between the poetic and the accurate. To write is always to construct an interior, through familiarity and estrangement, and to write a pattern of oceanic spatiality is a collaborative, formal undertaking. Royal points out that carving and tattooing, linear inscriptions of ancestry and history, “are said to have been discovered under the ocean by Ruatapupuke and Mataora.” Inscriptions are an important aspect of this section; invisible lines of influence and attempted ownership divide and separate the waters of the Pacific. The lines of the prints, the sticky residue of a convoluted process, map spheres of influence, ocean currents, movement of whales and krill and the trajectories of satellites, information and ships.
images
The housekeeper was born near the sea of Wellington harbour, *Te Whanganui a Tara* which is both liquid and a fish; an early name for the body of water was *Te Upoko o te Ika a Maui* or “the head of Maui’s fish”. Maori acknowledge that people are anchored in the place of their whenua (afterbirth and land) and in local mountains, rivers and sea. An oceanic sensibility seeps into island dwellers whose ancestors voyaged across the Pacific to get to Aotearoa. We are sea creatures given the amniotic waters that facilitate our slide into the world and we grow up and grow old in the Pacific with stories of oceanic connection and disconnection.

So it was probably not surprising that, on 5th October 2011 when the MV *Rena* hit Otaiti, the Astrolabe reef, in the Bay of Plenty, the event seeped into national and local consciousness. A small ship by world standards, of the 1,368 containers she carried, just over 480 were said to be empty. The nature of the contents of the others was not officially released but some were washed ashore, caught along coastlines, floated to the surface and eventually dumped and poured out at the Braemar Howell’s container processing site. The grey paintings in this section record and enact the wrecking of the *Rena* and its oceanic dissolution.

The *Rena*’s containers carried timber planks and framing, hardwood, chipboard, shavings, pulp, paper, white and yellowy powders (possibly milk or flour), butter, whey, serum, fridges, patties, fries and battered cod. Hides, skins, noodles, twine, wine, beads, rice, wool, pet food, scraps, metal, ingots, plastic waste bundled together, gloves of latex and boxes labelled ‘fish cocktails’. A strange and incomplete list of commodities, construction materials and waste product, the inventory is curiously ordinary. As well as the commercial and industrial cargo, personal collections of household items were packed into shipping containers in the stewardship of the Mediterranean Shipping Co. who had chartered the MV *Rena*. Oil from the ship washed into the sea and across the shorelines; over 1300 oil soaked birds died. In the years following the wreck, storms and salvage operations removed parts of the ship’s structure but substantial amounts of material became entrenched in the reef and on the sea floor.

On the 30th May 2014, the Astrolabe Community Trust, on behalf of the *Rena* owners, applied for consent to leave the remains of the wreck on the reef. Local Maori objected and eventually applied to the Waitangi Tribunal for an urgent hearing. *The Final Waitangi Tribunal Report 2015* commented on the Crown’s response to the application to leave the wreck on the reef, noting that the terms of the wreck removal deed would provide the Crown with an opportunity for an additional payment of $10.4 million for public purposes if it supported a resource consent application. The claimants to the Waitangi Tribunal submitted that; “in agreeing to a payment to the Crown of $10.4 million if consents to leave a substantial part of the wreck on the reef are
obtained on conditions acceptable to the owner, the Crown has created a powerful new incentive, in the national interest, not to remove a substantial part of the wreck.\textsuperscript{44}

Judge Sarah Reeves for the Waitangi Tribunal pointed out that the Tribunal “found that the Crown was not adequately informed of the nature and extent of Māori interests in the reef or of how those interests might be affected by a successful resource consent application to leave the wreck on the reef”.\textsuperscript{45} The report pointed out that the relationship created by the Treaty means that the Crown has a duty to protect the environment as it affects the lands and taonga of Māori, and that the Crown should protect Māori in their exercise of rangatiratanga over taonga.\textsuperscript{46} There was no dispute from the Crown that Otaiti is a taonga of considerable importance to the claimants. The Waitangi Tribunal report quoted Elaine Butler of the Ngāi Te Hapū Incorporated Society who reported that, “Motiti people have continued to offer karakia to the reef in ‘acknowledgement of our taonga and our sure belief that when the time comes for us to leave this life Otaiti is the beginning of our pathway home to our ancestors.’”\textsuperscript{47}

Buddy Mikaere for Ngai Te Hapū informed the Tribunal that Motiti Māori were deeply affected by the Rena disaster as the surrounding sea provides resources for the nearby island and the on-going pollution of the resources of the reef and shoreline was a shock to the community. Seafood for important occasions, an issue of mana or status, is now sourced from elsewhere to the enduring distress of local people. The local Maori of Motiti felt that they had not been properly consulted and the Waitangi Tribunal agreed. However, on May 19, 2017, it was reported that the final report by the Waitangi Tribunal, while it had raised issues that were acknowledged, did not succeed in getting the Environment Court to remove the Rena and the wreck remains as a dive site to this day.\textsuperscript{48} The tourist potential of the wreck on the reef had been traversed by dive clubs and local businesses from early on and an increased number of visitors to the site has been noted.\textsuperscript{49} However the abandonment of the ship’s carcass on the reef continues to be a contested outcome with local iwi (tribes) stating that the life force and health of the reef, and their food sources, have been permanently compromised.\textsuperscript{50}

Images were influential in the accounts of the wrecking of the Rena, from the first television shots of the sinking ship disgorging orange containers, to photographs of grotesque bird-like creatures dripping oil, and the scene of a beautiful (but toxic) underwater garden that is now being presented.
The pictured materiality of the wreck has been vivid: many images depicted the undoing of the grids of efficiency that stacked the containers on the *Rena* and the milky, oily scum that tinted the blue sea of the Bay. The owners of the *Rena* have been allowed to leave the remainder of the ship on the reef along with tiny cloves of copper stripped from the buildings destroyed by the devastating Christchurch earthquake and a missing container of plastic beads, amongst other objects.

Driven by the images and the recorded consequences of the disaster, the research paintings imagined how the wreck might have affected those whose voices will not be heard. The paintings were informed by Isabelle Stengers’ position on eco-ethical work:

“Your responsibility is to be played in the minor key, as a matter of pragmatic ethos, a demanding one nevertheless-what you are responsible for is paying attention as best you can, to be as discerning, as discriminating as you can about the particular situation. That is, you need to decide in this particular case and not to obey the power of some more general reason.”

Following Isabelle Stengers’ suggestion that, rather than asserting that the solution can be known, or that expert knowledge can be proclaimed, the paintings attend to the particular conditions of the wrecking of the *Rena* and to an imagining and fabrication of a ‘space of hesitation’. Stengers proposes this space as a contrivance for slowing down, a resistance to the ways in which such situations are usually presented and action mobilised.

A space of hesitation is imagined without direction or framework; a space that might indicate that we don’t know how to repair, and that progress is not inevitable. To follow Stengers’ insight a grey shallow space is constructed in the paintings, a sort of permeable sieve that collects and releases as a slowing down to let through other perspectives. The paintings are undertaken by considering the specific material circumstances of the wreck which had consequences for people, animals and objects in the area. In particular, the work makes
an apocryphal story about the Rena and the krill which has been described as the last unexploited species having importance in ecological systems as a ‘keystone species’.54

Without a ‘keystone’55 things will not hold; systems and structures will fail. In the oceans the future of the krill is uncertain because of a lack of accurate knowledge about the numbers of krill in the world, the prevalence of illegal fishing and the warming water of the planet.56 Many of the birds in the Bay of Plenty feed on krill. Giving an expert view on a commissioned report, a Department of Conservation science advisor wrote

“In my opinion there is only one significant risk factor remaining for seabirds from the Rena salvage operation and consent application to leave the Rena wreck and debris field in place on Astrolabe Reef. That is the issue over the ongoing release of plastic beads both from those already present into the wider environment after shipping containers spilled and what remains trapped at the Rena site. ... Clear plastic beads present a serious hazard to seabirds that specialize on feeding on tiny plankton and salps (small clear jellyfish like organisms that are abundant in spring and summer months). The at risk groups are storm petrels (including the endangered NZ storm petrel that breeds on Little Barrier Island but has been observed in the Bay of Plenty), fairy prions, and shearwaters (especially Buller’s shearwaters, little shearwater and fluttering shearwater). Red-billed gulls also feed on plankton and krill when using marine ecosystems. Other seabird species may also take plastic beads occasionally but the risk is much lower.”57

Plastic beads misidentified as krill by local birds end up being fed to their nestlings leading to starvation, death and species reduction.

In another misidentification, the owners of the Rena, when alerted to what was thought to be an oil spill surrounding the wreck, proclaimed that, rather than being oil, it was instead a bloom of krill. Krill seem to have been used by the owners as a sign of both abundance and as an assertion of the health of a reef which was in fact toxic.58 Krill, as the species that maintains ecosystems, that feeds whales and other marine mammals, inform the paintings that investigate the materiality of the Rena disaster. Tiny, shrimp like sea creatures they do “not have a political voice, cannot have or [do]... not want to have one.”59 Making the large grey paintings is an attempt to imagine with the krill, even though, despite the hopeful alliance, it is understood that this is not possible. Following Stengers, the sombre works seek to make a space in which “a cry of fright can be heard ‘collectively’ ...” 60
To make work that acknowledges the complexity of such an event, in a country dependent in many ways on the sea, has involved a sense of uncomfortable complicity. The objects on the *Rena* were associated with building and with households. (Two refrigerators eventually washed up on the East Cape⁶¹) and the housekeeper benefits from the circulation of such inconsequential goods. The housekeeper asks herself Stengers’s question:

“How can I present a proposal intended not to say what is, or what ought to be, but to provoke thought, one that requires no other verification than the way in which it is able to “slow down” reasoning and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations mobilizing us?”⁶²

The dark paintings consist of layers intended to defer and delay, each layer predicts and influences the next without deliberate intervention. Giving up control, however, is not that easy and automatic behaviour is always compromised. The layers of the paintings accumulate and their stability is precarious as the media enacts some of the processes of the dissolution of the *Rena*. Toxic conditions accumulate leading to crazed matter that required constant remedial work that is bound to fail. The paintings stage a relationship between the world of the krill (oceanic inhabitant) and the world of the housekeeper/cleaner who is the model of an everyday artist/architect. The story is told through discussions of the layers of the paintings as a form of housekeeping where the everyday actions that are utilised to order, clean and maintain, are set beside the material consequences of the sinking *Rena*, which turn out to be the materials of art.

The first layer across the canvas is intentional and, in this narrative, is the layer of the krill, a critical other that queries notions of a freely available resource (cold pressed krill oil for cardiovascular health is currently being promoted). Prevalent in the temperate and Antarctic oceanic zones the science on krill (whose collective bulk exceeds the biomass of Earth’s human population) appears to be thin.⁶³ Inscribed into the white surface of the canvas the krill, in various mutant forms, spoil the blank sheet of opportunity and have consequences for all subsequent layers.

“Krill travel in swarms primarily as a defence mechanism to confuse predators that would pick out [a] single krill. Krill ... spend their day in the depths of the ocean and rise during the night toward the surface.”⁶⁴

The second layer consists of a transparent primer/size. Made from starch, from household plants, corn or potato, swelling like the rice on the *Rena*, it bulks out the work, attempting unsuccessfully to stiffen, like starched cloth, any wayward edges of
the story. As it is invisible the housekeeper applies it unknowingly, without control, trying to seal and cover the krill, which nevertheless has a tendency to leak and bleed into the gelatinous substance. The housekeeper wields a large brush facilitating location and movement of subsequent additions while also trying unsuccessfully to promote adhesion. The invisible layer becomes tinted with the matter of the krill. “With large black eyes, krill are mostly transparent, although their shells have a bright red tinge. Their digestive system is usually visible.”

The housekeeper swishes water over the desiccated layer of starch, pouring it into pools with vigorous splashes. “Euphausia krill are at the bottom of the food chain and are found in the [so called] pristine oceans around Antarctica, where there is ... limited accumulation of contaminants” but the housekeeper’s water is dirty, full of pigments, binders and additives: mercury sulphide, cadmium sulphide, green copper and aceto-arsenite, ground flowers and insects, rust-stained clay. Rather than water as purification the housekeeper imagines reactions and revelations of matter and water combined. Days pass and the residue is inspected, signs are examined.

Charcoal, the residue of celebratory and destructive fires, is then employed on the paintings, as a filter, to bring to the surface traces of previous proceedings. To make charcoal hard woods are starved of oxygen in a fire, grape vines, cherry wood, oak or hickory are recommended, transported no doubt across the Pacific even as hardwoods of the local region burn. The housekeeper breathes in the flying particles of carbon caused by the abrasive rubbing across the surface; she burnishes the work with intensity. Slowly, shadowy traces of previously unseen creatures emerge.

Krill seep through the housekeeper’s imagination; oily figures emerge. Unions between animate forms usually kept apart occur in the darkness of the night and the black forms that the housekeeper inscribes no longer comply with agreed dispositions of body parts. Dripping oil, partial birds and sea creatures, grotesques, stretch boundaries between ordering categories in the paintings.

The housekeeper inspects the surface closely. She notes that the layers disagree; reactions are toxic, the work spalls. Things cannot be kept intact or apart. Charcoal clouds puff out as the work is stirred by passing bodies. She gets out a spray can and a plastic film envelopes the work, and her lungs, but it is not possible to subdue the miasma of the blackness. In this time of art and architecture types of technologies have expanded and, as Jacques Rancière has suggested, they can, no matter how eccentric or ordinary, come together without the exaggerated differences or control that a singular technology would produce. Looking at her decaying work the housekeeper wishes this was so.
Accepting that art practices are made possible by writing or speaking about art she tells herself stories as she struggles up and down the ladder. One story sees traces of the krill persisting and the utter failure of the housekeeper’s practice of hygienic compartmentalisation. Another story finds in the unstable conjunction of the layers new and beautiful possibilities, krill metamorphoses are abundant. Following Rancière, the housekeeper notes that aesthetic experience is allowed to involve autonomy and it is also always simultaneously something other than art. Home maintenance, other than art, is a labour deployed for imagined and (possibly) real benefits for collective life. Attending to surface conditions and spatial arrangements a series of prescribed practices are employed, actions that always seem to lag behind new technical, labour-saving inventions; the housekeeper’s work is archaic, her practices from another era.

The housekeeper hopes that she has made interventions that might freeze time momentarily allowing consideration of the dilemma of the krill in its grey, oceanic interiority. It is a space that is also the undertow of daily interior life: a shallow space of consumption and circulation and a record of the material dissolution of substance and things. The space of krill and the oceanic space of domestic life are both redolent with bits and pieces that clog systems, producing a matted registration. Responding with Stengers, “to a felt necessity of trying to listen to that which insists, obscurely” the housekeeper pauses. Despite all the difficulties, she is flushed with enthusiasm for her hopeless project. Becoming krill, she contemplates blooming as the cycle of work continues.

Acknowledging that the surface/depth couple has a history that privileges the deep (and so called meaningful) at the expense of the glittering surface, a spatiality has been sought for this project that would be ambivalently within and outside, both at once. A way of working activated by imaginatively deploying the architectural section, a drawing type that cuts through matter and space, peering into internal depth while simultaneously acknowledging the materiality of containment. The section is an analytical drawing type traditionally used to explain structure and fabrication and to picture the geometries of inhabitation. The paintings are imagined sections of the sea; occupying matter and attending to the contours of a liquid, material world. The oceanic sections that the paintings register arise out of an understanding that there is continuity between the materiality of a human interior and the earth.
Materiality is sometimes seen as base matter in opposition to form and, in other times, as the site of ornamentation or the guarantor of authenticity. More recently there has been the rise of ‘new materialisms’, described by William Connolly as a “series of movements in several fields criticising anthropocentrism and rethinking subjectivity by focussing on the role of inhuman forces within the human.” Petra Lange-Berndt’s recent reader, Materiality, indicates the multiplicity of strategies employed in consideration of matter, medium and materiality as contested concepts in contemporary art and architecture. The paintings in the project abandon an architectural view of material as foundational support or authoritative substance and instead struggle to record consequences through a play of oscillating matter and words. Jacques Rancière alludes to such shifts in a discussion on the plane of painting as a surface of defiguration; “Words no longer prescribe, as story or doctrine, what images should be. They make themselves images so as to shift the figures of the painting...”

The paintings draw into the thickness of a sea that is salt, dreams, bodies, words, creatures and the shifting material evidence of repeated tsunami and neglect. There are no frames or limits beyond the arbitrary dimensions of the rag or cloth that absorbs the spill in haste; the sea field is sampled with a sectional disposition. The notion of an empty sea as the background to the contested matters of the Rena has been replaced by an uncertain figure/ground relationship. Small particles of milky plastic mimic foaming bubbles of oxygen and greyness pervades the paintings replacing dreams of translucent blueness with a sea now thickened and concretized. The ostensible control with which architectural drawings operate is seen to falter as the works contract and expand from macro to microscopic and back again.
This piece of writing is a transitional negotiation between drawing and cleaning, two modes of attention that operate with some care for the world and that might now be a passing figment of the cleaner’s imagination.

The drawings that make up this section, along with the text, involve recognition of an oceanic quality in everyday space that is revealed through the practices of care undertaken in relationship to the materiality of interiority. As she sweeps and scrubs, the cleaner, who is another version of the housekeeper and the artist, acknowledges her complicity with material consumption and the wayward crumbs of matter that eventuate from a life lived; her small domestic actions, repetitive, liquid, are imagined in a scalar connection to the rising oceans.

Usually associated with buildings the cleaner is the not-architect – a figure upon whom architecture depends but who sits outside the discipline. Nevertheless, like architects, the cleaner makes material drawings with repetitive movements and a dreamy, obsessive attention to the physical world. Her production is an effect of labour rather than a predetermined object and, as with most cleaning processes, the spurious goals of order and hygiene are represented rather than achieved. Every brush stroke selects, gathers and leaves a residue behind. The cleaner is understood in this research as a carer of bodies, attentive to the surfaces of the small and ancient; wiping away the tears and bodily waste of the child, smoothing the crumpled skin of the dying. In Hélène Cixous’s book Hyperdream the protagonist, who might be Cixous, anoints the failing, suppurating skin of her elderly mother:

“When all’s said and done I tell myself, dabbing with a kind of acquired boldness at the burst vesicle plump as an oyster under her left arm, this malady speaks directly and indirectly to me as my mother-to-be and guardian of my mother here present, all these withered puckered lips address their recriminations and regrets from pus filled sinkholes to me, ...I’ll be this skin tomorrow, I tell myself. ... I make joints, I attempt to close, to wall up fissures and cracks, to plaster over her surface, block, meanwhile I confess.”

Contorted, the cleaner looked back and forwards to hear the conversations that she has had with the houses in which she worked. Now older she had been trained in the space of a room, operating outside notions of occupation, situated between life in the house and the life of the house; memories of that time would arrive without warning. A shadowy figure (barely there) the cleaner came to treat the houses that she cleaned as knowing and aware, and always in need of physical attention. A sort of loving and disowning, a relationship that mimicked maternal gestures of attention and affection but which was also momentary, temporary.
The cleaner had no ‘proper’ relationship with the houses but rather a dreaming, physical engagement, a compound of labour, boredom and fantasy. Stray hairs, pieces of skin, crumbs of bread, wrinkled cloth, dirt from the outside world, germs from interior regions, the housekeeper pretended that these things matter. Her work drew on emotions of homeliness, aesthetics of class and a parody of medical science; her labour seemed to be situated in a proprietal zone of denial. Black dust and thickened seawater would become the substances of drawings that the cleaner made as she moved away from the houses in her later life.

Perforated skin is an unreliable surface that threatens to undo the surface/depth couple. The craters of the wounds on her mother’s skin folded open and the centres of the hole looked back at Cixous kneeling to apply an ointment that will not stop time. Cixous evoked cleaners when she noted that;

“In order to live we busy ourselves casting off our sloughs. We pretend to be virgin and free from mortal remains and decomposition. We disown ourselves in bits and patches. Poor us, the denizens of heightened buildings, champions of denials, defenders of the Clean and Proper, we scaffold distances, walls, skyscrapers, classes, borders, in order to separate ourselves from our improper proper part. We furiously distinguish ourselves from our animality. We forget our natural mortality every day.”

Cleaners, chasing the bits and pieces, might be seen to stand in for such desires as they, (we), endlessly attend to such disownings.

The difficulty of removing mortal remains of hardened food scraps, traces of nail polish, inadvertent splashes of Indian ink beset the cleaner; a grey ring around the bath composed of soap fat and skin particles was resistant to her attentions. In her childhood she had been fascinated by the strange, purple-grey hue of an indelible pencil. The word ‘indelible’ seemed to be from elsewhere suggesting another property of being not of the everyday world. Marks from that pencil embossed surfaces intended to be blank and traces of illicit inscriptions persisted throughout her life. Indelible drawings grew in her imagination as she observed the patterns on the wallpaper and the grain of the wooden balusters gathering fluff in their intricate turnings. In an interview in which she spoke of painters as receivers of messages that come from the past and from an arriving future, running ahead, Hélène Cixous said, “We have to lend ears ... to what is speaking, murmuring, signing around.” The cleaner records unconscious murmurs encountered in her past and future acts of cleaning.

She tried to capture the intricate mould patterns that the old leaks had made. Leaks in the childhood home of the cleaner had been a source of contention and anxiety; they had also been a commonplace occurrence with plastic buckets
decorating the floor of the upstairs hall. As Mark Cousins, noting the irrationality and apprehension that occurs around about the decay of a house induces, wrote "It is clear that the house is one of the primary objects in which people can both project fantasies about their bodies and in a sense defend themselves against thoughts about their bodies by projecting them onto the house." Small fountains sparkled as water dripped into red bucket, blue bucket. Leaks might signal a lack of organization, lack of money, an endless dissolution of the proper and discrete container of family life but leaks also came with risks, with experimental joints, radical materiality, and permeability.

The cleaner remembered other leaking roofs in her life. To be without shelter, without security, is commonplace and fearful; she sleeps badly after watching the news and black thoughts escalate. Creatures of the night leak through the ceilings, crawl out of the floorboards, slide from under mattresses, from behind the fridge, beneath the table. They change scale, cease to be invisible and proliferate. Stirring in her sleep the cleaner emulates Hélène Cixous’s night time practice of recording dreams and draws the creatures onto scraps of paper.

Black and scratchy drawings bubbled with gentle laughter from the occupants of the houses, tainted by the bitter taste of lack, patterned by the variable shape of labour; the cleaner carefully makes and remakes the contours of the drawings, paying particular attention to surface conditions. Tears, at times, drip onto the paper blurring the precision of aesthetic intention. As Cixous suggested about writing, cleaning and drawing might be seen as strategies “of repairing the biting of death into life” in the morning the creatures are flat and slightly strange, confirming Cixous’s suggestion, directed at her writing, that “everything that happens on the surface... is a surprise.”

As she drew, the cleaner recognised the night time visitants as the concealed surface of her daytime labour; “[t]he drawing wants to draw what is invisible” Dark drawings emerged endlessly, hovering in a shallow space of displaced attention; the cleaner imagined a clear surface but could not believe in the eradication of dirt, sorrows or the displaced. Accepting the sharp teeth of death, the cleaner cultivated only an appearance of obliteration. As a practitioner of surface attention and material care, she acknowledged the slow continuities of the house.

Suppressing sticky secrets, her small movements traverse material; hands and knees touch the house, repetitively, obsessively going over the surfaces. Lines of movement, threads and comings, an unstable surface of a house is rewoven:
births and deaths are recorded, acknowledged, felt and never eliminated, treacheries and pleasures are threaded through the surface constructions with ornamental repetitions. Her work slows as she drifts off into memories which are also part of the fabric that she makes. The physical labour, in its repetition and rhythms, is a song, a Deleuzian refrain, a mobile bubble of sound that momentarily calms the world. Singing to the house tunelessly, the pulsation of her throat binds her to the matter of space; in tandem with the machines that growl across the floor she is at once absorbed and detached.

The cleaner can induce only a pause in time and occupation; her work creates merely an apparition of some original condition. Time falters as the mop moves back and forth, the pace and after-effects of physical action are regular, peristaltic. In an oblique alignment with the surfaces of the house, but conscious of her alienation from a property she doesn’t own, the cleaner constructs a space of hesitation full of halting doubt and potential promise. Age is both denied and cultivated; polish builds up, patinas are preserved. In the cultivated surfaces, the shadow aspects of occupation, echoes of disputes and words of love, fail to register clearly and the rooms in which so much was promised, so much was given, have only an inkling of the future.

Blackness in the pot of ink, in the thick meniscus of liquid which catches the light, is dispersed by a nib dragging across stained paper, trying to catch the fleeting visitants. Inklings, sharp, dark creatures, partial in their definition; suggestions of relationships, of dreams that remain unfulfilled or excesses expended and enjoyed, born of idle observation. The drawings can only catch the barest black inkling of all the words, all the effort expended, the coming and the going of the interior. An arc of dirty water slashed across the stainless-steel tub, drips flying, gritty. The cleaner gathers her belongings and left the house to others as the day ended.

The odd culture of maintenance, reluctant to acknowledge change, uneasy with the release of time, seems to belong to the old world, to another world. As she walked home the cleaner admitted to herself a minor tendency to celebrate the slow dissolution of the house; lightweight frames burn, decay flourishes with the constant rain: carvings might be preserved but the house could blow away. Maintenance might be said to demonstrate compliance and obedience to societal strictures on hygiene and conformity; it might also be a sort of blood-letting.

In television programmes on hoarding and obsessive cleaning the cleaner recognised the thin border between her work and anarchy. Out walking one day she had seen another older woman, haunted by the unseen, trying to wash away the gleaming weatherboards of her house. Hands scrabbling, lines of anxiety marked her
face. At home, thinking of the houses that she had cared for, the cleaner washes creamy paper with memories of mother’s milk and Indian ink. She sweeps a broom across the skin removing surplus tears. The stories of her day and the detritus that her works keeps at bay, crawl across the surfaces of the houses that she draws but cannot inhabit. Joining together the drawings spread across the wall; there is no distinction between wallpaper and her never-ending work.

Walking on the beach in early morning after a heavy storm the cleaner observed the plastic bottles, labels, broken combs, spoons and containers of all sorts. She gathers them up each day, shaking them free of sand and seaweed. Walking has become a continuation of her daily labour and she cannot free herself from the obligations of a cleaner. Attentive to surface conditions, cleaning, which is never about obliteration, is understood as a sensitivity to the oceanic nature of architectural occupancy and the interiority of oceanic space. Cleaners are imagined as painters, oscillating across scales, making a work only to remake it endlessly.

"And what is a painter? A bird-catcher of instants." Writing, in this story, is imagined as a light net that envelopes and enfolds airborne moments that pass by. Caught in a brief curtailment of freedom instants are drenched in the dampness of ink, making pictures that remain when the bird has vanished. Considered as swabs, as pathological and affectionate rubbings that seek to retain traces of substance, the drawings have a tendency to accumulate all the problems and curiosities of decaying matter. Neither possessive nor embedded, the operations of cleaning houses are understood to foster brushwork skills; soft techniques that are forms of inscription, accumulative, preoccupied and material. While the Rena stranding activated a hopeless desire to put things to right, to undertake restorative work, the cleaner’s housework confirms that this is not possible; there is no return to a departed origin.
Reviewing the exhibition, “Aquatopia: art on the ocean wave”, Adrian Searle suggested that,

“Perhaps more than the exhibition itself (its loans are a bit patchy), Aquatopia excels in its studies and excerpts of literature concerning the seas and their denizens, both real and imaginary, and our complex relation to them. One thing missing is a sense of the scale of the oceans, their almost unimaginable volume. The things that live down there are more interesting than scary; the things that swim through our heads are another matter.”

Art endlessly attends to the ocean through notions of transformation, sublime nature and a Freudian oceanic unconscious. It is a field that expands and contracts, filled with excess, hyperbole and recently, in the Mediterranean, images of untimely death.

In this project the sea is imagined as a bicultural site in which a small disaster occurred. The event is explored in terms of specific spatialities, with the section device endlessly reforming depth and a shallow space of hesitation. Operating with site and detail and particular fauna, shaped by word images and the vivid materiality of the wreck, the work in the paintings, drawings and prints is undertaken as a practice of care, with an obsessive watchful attention to abstract matter. It is maternal in the ambiguous sense in which Hélène Cixous connects la mère (mother) and la mer (sea), and the material undertaking is encouraged by her exhortation to throw yourself into the depths.

The research acknowledges Slavoj Žižek’s point that constructing epic tales of ecological disaster tends to the formation of conservative ideologies and that imagining a return to nature is futile. As Stathis Gerostathopoulos writes, Žižek “rejects contemporary ecological discourse as an oppressive ideology in favor of a more holistic theory of coexistence.” Žižek points out that approaches to ecological disasters are often a form of mystification tempting us to seek meanings. Rather than seeing global disasters as punishment for upsetting the so-called harmony of the world Žižek understands that ecological disasters are prevalent and posits nature as a series of catastrophes.

Žižek points to our disavowal of the consequences of our actions, how we act as if we don’t know that rubbish has to go somewhere, that the planet is warming, that bodily deposits don’t just vanish, observing that nothing changes despite our scientific knowledge of future events. He argues that we need to accept our alienation from nature acknowledging also that nature is us and that we are both the perpetrators and the victims of the altered world. Looking at a pile of rubbish bags and refuse he suggests that we might cultivate an aesthetic dimension towards this difficult material production.
In some senses this project is such an aesthetic undertaking as it formally rehearses the material assemblages of the disaster and the anxieties and pleasures that practices of care evoke. Now barely a cleaner, housekeeper or architect the work is the first step in a practice that inevitably combines modes of making and which will always be indebted to teachers and to the thinking of others. The lines of architectural drawing have now, with this new work, become thickened and emotional, and if the work of a cleaner or an architect is to seek a sort of impossible precision or perfection, then the work of this project is to always fall short, to acknowledge excess, impoverishment, and potential.
one

1. Peter Gratton, “Vibrant Matters: An Interview with Jane Bennett”


9. Verena Andermatt Conley, “In ecological thinking, the term care is of shifting valence. In philosophical and literary history, care is inflected as worrisome, burdensome, while, at the same time, uplifting and given to life. It has functional virtue in material practices based on what can be called an empathic relation. In recent critical texts addressing ecological dilemmas, care emerges as a diagram—an intermediate form—between possibility and event. Both palliative and favoring what is possible, care is inflected multifariously and with uncommon force of attraction in the materialist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari that inspires the work of Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, Brian Massumi, Isabelle Stengers, Mark Hansen, and Jussi Parikka. In each, the care of the possible is based on experimentation and embrace of open-ended practice: collaboration rather than individual profit; posthumanism that recognizes universal entanglements; attention to the role technology plays in all spheres of inquiry; and, increasingly, sensors that produce a surplus of sensibility. This article argues that open-endedness, or possibility, has to be coupled with a palliative care brought to dwindling material resources.” “The Care of the Possible” in Cultural Politics, vol. 12, no. 3, 2016, 339–354. http://culturalpolitics.dukejournals.org.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/content/12/3/339.full

10. care [n.] Old English caru, cearu “sorrow, anxiety, grief,” also “burdens of mind; serious mental attention,” from Proto-Germanic *karo “lament; grief, care” … Different sense evolution in related Dutch karig “scanty, frugal,” German karg “stingy, scanty.” The sense development in English is from “cry” to “lamentation” to “grief.” Meaning “charge, oversight, protection” is attested c. 1400, the sense in care of in addressing. To take care of “take in hand, do” is from 1580s. care [v.] Old English carian, cearian “be anxious, grieve; to feel concern or interest,” from Proto-Germanic *kar- “lament,” hence “grief, care” (source also of Old High German charon “to lament,” Old Saxon karon “to care, to sorrow”), from Proto-Germanic *karo (source also of Old Saxon chara “sorrow;” Old High German chara “wail, lament;” Gothic kara “sorrow, trouble, care;” German Karfreitag “Good Friday”), from PIE root *gar- “cry out, call, scream” (source also of Irish gairm “shout, cry, call,” see garrulous). OED emphasizes that it is in “no way related to L. cura.” Related: Cared; caring. Positive senses, such as “have an inclination” (1550s); “have fondness for” (1520s) seem to have developed later as mirrors to the earlier negative ones. http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=care


16. A version of parts of this section has been accepted for publication in Gregory Marinic (ed.), The Interior Architecture Theory Reader, Routledge. Forthcoming 2017.


25. Philip Hoare, The Sea Inside, 17


34. The Book of Revelations, 36.

35. Becky Oskin, “Japan Earthquake & Tsunami of 2011: Facts and Information” August 22, 2013 06:02pm ET: Accessed 15 May 2015. http://www.livescience.com/39110-japan-2011-earthquake-tsunami-facts.html “In Japan, residents are still recovering from the disaster. Radioactive water was recently discovered leaking from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which suffered a level 7 nuclear meltdown after the tsunami. Japan relies on nuclear power, and many of the country’s nuclear reactors remain closed because of stricter seismic safety standards since the earthquake. Two years after the quake, about 300,000 people who lost their homes were still living in temporary housing, the Japanese government said.”
36. Toni O’Loughlin and Adam Gabbatt, “Samoa tsunami: at least 100 feared dead on Pacific islands” The Guardian, 30 September 30 2009. Accessed 15 May 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/30/samoa-tsunami. “At least 100 people are believed to have died and many more been injured in the Pacific island nations of Samoa, Western Samoa and Tonga after the powerful undersea earthquake this week that led to tsunami waves up to six metres high. Officials in Samoa, the worst-hit location, said 63 people were known to have been killed as the fast-churning waters flattened buildings and swept people and cars out to sea, although this figure was expected to rise significantly with many more remote locations still being searched.”


three

41. An earlier draft of parts of this section was presented at the Performance Studies International #22 Melbourne, Australia, 2016.


43. Alkylsufonic liquid, used for detergent, surfactants, dyes, as a acid catalyst, drugs (UN2586), was disgorged along with tanks that once held hydrogen peroxide in different strengths (for wastewater treatment, pulp/paper bleach and in the defense system for the bombardier beetles. Used as hair bleach, to whiten bones and disinfecting cuts, peroxide mixed with baking soda and hand soap will remove odour. Containers also held ferrosilicon (4?), UN1408 (21.7T), potassium nitrate UN1468 (24.096T), potassium superoxide, and below deck was trichloroisocyanuric acid, dry; an industrial disinfectant, bleach in white crystalline, tablet or granule form for domestic pools & commercial use (textile dye, sanitation, food preservation, wastewater treatment, as an algaecide for recycling water, an anti-shrink treatment for woolens, and in the organic synthesis industry).

44. The Final Report on the MV Rena and Motiti Island Claims Downloaded from www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz p.19

45. The Final Report on the MV Rena and Motiti Island Claims Downloaded from www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz p.xi

46. The Final Report on the MV Rena and Motiti Island Claims Downloaded from www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz

47. The Final Report on the MV Rena and Motiti Island Claims Downloaded from www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz p.14


49. Phillipa Yalden, “Rena Wreck a Dive Destination” “The president of the national diving association is calling for the Rena wreck to be left on the Astrolabe Reef as a dive attraction. NZ Underwater Association president Shane Wasik says comments that the Rena wreck will be ‘dangerous’ or ‘kill divers’ are misleading… He says the wreck has huge potential as a dive attraction and could bring international and national business to the Bay of Plenty. He says divers are able to undertake specialist wreck diving courses designed to educate and train divers in the equipment, techniques and planning to make exploration safer.” Posted: 4:01pm Thursday 12 Jan, 2012 http://www.sunlive.co.nz/news/20696-rena-wreck-dive-destination.html


53. “Rena Oil reports ‘krill’ – Bay of Plenty Times (Monday 15 December 2014). Reports of oil leaking from Rena have been explained by the wreck’s owners and insurers as krill. The spokesman for Rena’s owner Daina Shipping Company and insurer The Swedish Club, Hugo Shanahan, said a Resolve Salvage & Fire patrol boat went out on Wednesday to inspect a report of a brown bloom at Astrolabe Reef and found the substance was krill, not oil. The response comes after a story published today about reports on Tuesday and Friday of large amounts of oil believed to have come from the wreck. In today’s story, Mr Shanahan said Resolve salvors had noted that trapped pockets of residual oil would be released as part of the recovery operation. “Sightings so far have all risen to the surface and dissipate[d] before evaporating very quickly – confirming that these deposits are in very small quantities.” Mr Shanahan has since added to his original response today by saying, “An area of about 0.4 nautical miles was travelled before it was confirmed that what was being observed was in fact krill.” Three men spoke to the Bay of Plenty Times last week concerned at what they believed to be oil leaking from Rena.

54. Penguins (chinstrap, Adélie, emperor, gentoo, macaroni, king, rockhopper), seals (fur, crabeater, Weddell, elephant, leopard), baleen whales, finfish, squid, albatrosses and most other species of flying seabirds eat krill. Krill breed in the Southern oceans and the animals and birds that they feed spread around the world. Krill are currently caught by the following countries: Chile, China, Korea, Ukraine and, extensively, by Norway. “Krill plays the important role of re-packaging vast amounts of primary production into their own body by grazing micro-size phytoplankton to make them available for marine predators.”

55. A ‘keystone’ in architecture is the central stone at the summit of an arch, locking the whole together and activating the structure. It is also understood as the central principle or part of a policy or system, on which all else depends.

56. “Because krill life history is strongly related to sea-ice, reduction of sea-ice in the future may reduce krill habitat and abundance. Further, warming is expected to cause a pole-ward reduction in areas of the habitat that can support growth of krill because under rising seawater temperatures krill may need more energy to live, which will negatively affect their ability to grow. Krill eggs are sensitive to ocean acidification. Based on projections of future CO2 distribution in the Southern Ocean it is suggested that some of the important krill habitats could become unsuitable for krill recruitment in the next century. These environmental changes are thought to act in concert to modify the abundance, distribution and lifecycle of krill.”


58. “The history of the bay, from the arrival of canoe voyagers from Eastern Polynesia some 700 years ago, is recorded in place names and traditions. The Māori name for the Bay of Plenty is Te Moana a Toi (the sea of Toi), commemorating the legendary ancestor Toitūhuatahi, also known as Toikairākau.”


63. The krill, Euphausia superba, crustacea, shrimp like creatures that are important in the food web with whales and other sea creatures depending upon them. Predominantly in the temperate and Antarctic zones the science on krill (who exceed the biomass of Earth’s human population) appears to be weak. REF

64. http://www.krillfacts.org/1-krill-facts-center.html


### four

73. A draft of parts of this section has been published as Sarah Treadwell, “Working with Cixous: The cleaner’s grey drawings”, *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* 17, 2017, 32–40.


78. Cixous, Hélène and Adrian Heathfield. 2010.


### five


83. “Let yourself go! Let go of everything! Lose everything! Take to the air. Take to the open sea. Take to letters. Listen: nothing is found. Nothing is lost. Everything remain to be sought. Go, fly, swim, bound, descend, cross, love the unknown, love no one, whom you are, whom you will be, leave yourself, shrug off the old lies, dare what you don’t dare, it is there that you will take pleasure, never make you’re here anywhere but there, and rejoice, rejoice in the terror, follow it where you are afraid to go, go ahead, take the plunge, you’re on the right trail!” Hélène Cixous, ‘Coming to Writing’ in ‘Coming to Writing’ and Other Essays, (trans.) Sarah Cornell et al, Camb. & London: Harvard University Press, 1991, 40.

84. Stathis Gerostathopoulos in Cityvision http://www.cityvisionweb.com/competition/2cedf/


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