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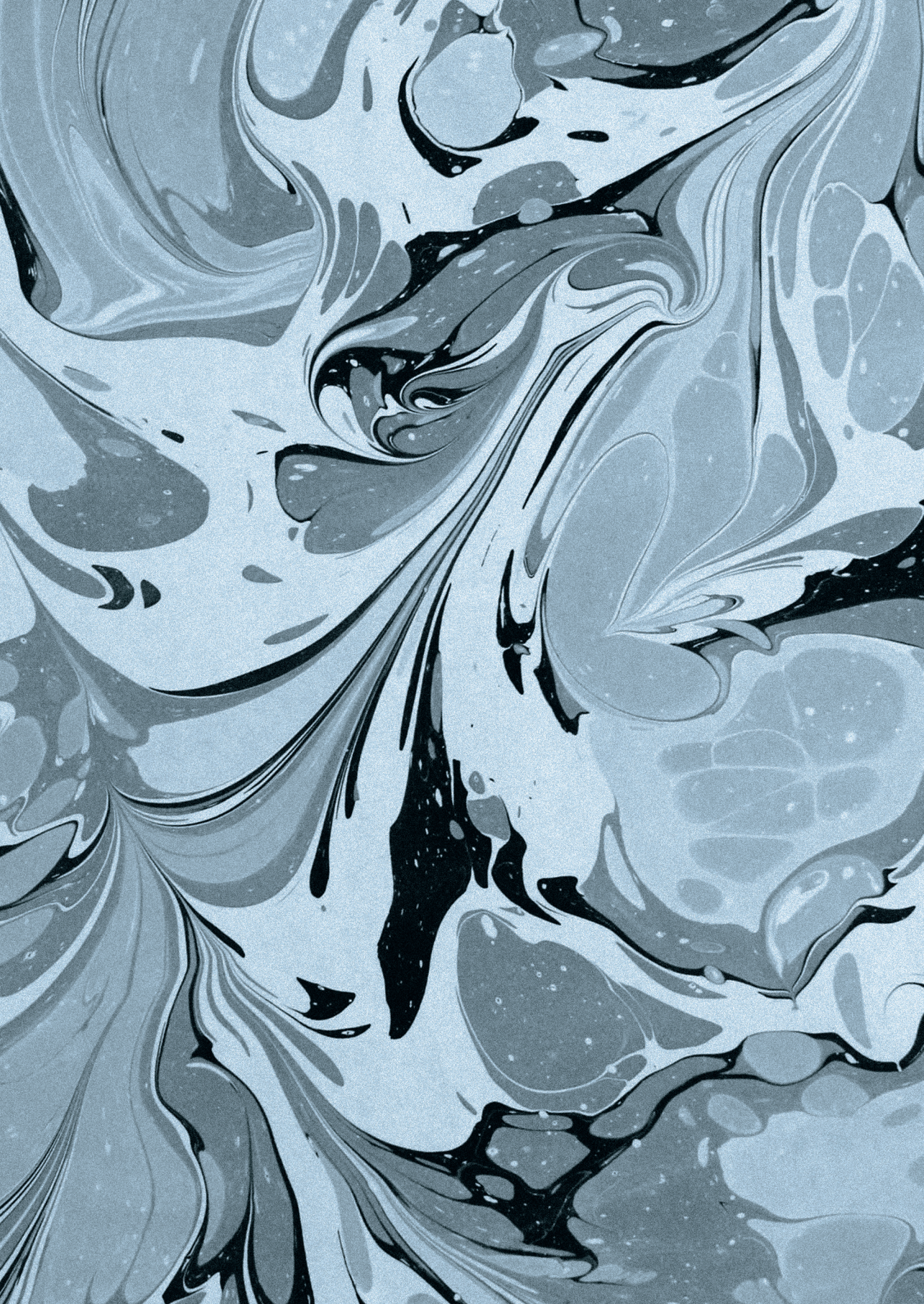
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JOURNAL OF NEW ZEALAND ART,  
MEDIA & DESIGN HISTORY



# BACK <sup>1</sup> STORY

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MEDIA & DESIGN HISTORY

# Editorial

It is a pleasure to be able to introduce the first issue of *BackStory*. The idea behind this journal is to provide a medium for those interested in 'looking back' at New Zealand's art, media and design history. These are the stories that lie behind current media, art and design production and practice in this country. It is envisaged that this new journal will provide an opportunity to explore our rich heritage in these fields.

In part the motivation to launch a new journal is to meet a perceived need. The country presently does not have a journal which has the focus envisaged for *BackStory*. *The Journal of New Zealand Art History (JoNZAH)* was last published in 2012/13 and its absence has meant that those interested in reading and writing about this aspect of our cultural history lost a valued publication. The editorial team has approached the Hocken Library who provided editorial and production input for the *JoNZAH* and gained their support for the *BackStory* initiative. It is acknowledged that the new journal is not a re-launch or continuation of the *JoNZAH*. Instead, *BackStory: Journal of New Zealand Art, Media and Design History*, seeks to broaden the scope of its predecessor to include media and design history. The editorial team hope that those who valued the *JoNZAH* will find value in this journal as a worthy successor.

The initial editorial team for *BackStory* is drawn from the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) and an Editorial Advisory Board has been established. The establishing editorial team are Minna Pesonen (Designer), Rosemary Brewer, Alan Cocker and Peter Hoar from the School of Communication Studies, Peter Gilderdale from the School of Art & Design and Simon Mowatt from the Faculty of Business.

It is the hope of this team that *BackStory* has an appeal beyond academia and will inspire contributions from those working in this country's libraries, galleries and museums as well as others who have an interest in the history of New Zealand art, design, photography and media. We are pleased that this first issue contains contributions from curators at the Auckland Museum and Te Papa, and that there is a wide representation of different material drawn from across the target disciplines. Our hope is that the quality of the research and writing, and the common New Zealand focus will entice readers into cross-disciplinary explorations.

All submissions except commentaries will be blind peer reviewed by two reviewers to conform to university research publication standards but we are seeking contributions that will have an appeal beyond the university. In the so-called online age the decision to publish a printed form is deliberate. The editorial team are seeking the highest print production standards conscious of the artifact value of this journal.

Alan Cocker

# Undressed: A study of Louise Henderson's 'Les Deux Amies' (1953)

Chelsea Nichols  
and Linda Waters

Keywords: # Louise Henderson # cubism # nudes # material analysis  
# infrared imaging # modernist painting

This article takes an in-depth look at Louise Henderson's cubist-inspired painting *Les Deux Amies* (1953), which she painted upon her return to New Zealand after a year studying in Paris with cubist artist Jean Metzinger. Using a combination of formal analysis, infrared imaging and a study of her materials, we go beneath the surface of the painting to find new insights into the creation of this important work, which helped introduce European modernism to the conservative local art scene. In particular, this paper argues that "undressing" the figures in *Les Deux Amies* reveals a rich, hidden record of how Henderson worked through key questions about material construction, subject matter and composition at a crucial moment in her artistic career.

## INTRODUCTION

Two women sit together in a chair, their bodies intimately entwined. The figure on the left drapes her arm around her companion, holding her hand with a firm grip. The right figure gazes down, and has strong, angular features. These are no gentle Venuses. Their bodies are fragmented into geometric facets, their mask-like faces hardened with acute black outlines. They have been built up like architecture, buttressed by thin layers of blue, grey and beige which form their dresses. Although this is undoubtedly a painting of two women, they are unlike any two women that had ever before been painted in New Zealand.

Louise Henderson painted *Les Deux Amies* (The Two Friends) in 1953, shortly after returning to New Zealand from a year spent studying in Paris with cubist artist Jean Metzinger. This painting was featured



Figure 1. Louise Henderson, *Les Deux Amies*, 1953, oil on canvas. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Purchased 2011, with the assistance of the Molly Morpeth Canaday fund.

as a key work in her 1953 solo exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery, one of the earliest shows to decisively introduce a modernist, European style of painting into the local art scene. The striking, cubist-inspired composition caught the attention of critics and artists like Colin McCahon for its emotional acuity and freedom from traditional depictions of space.<sup>1</sup> Through works like *Les Deux Amies*, Henderson posed a challenge to the naturalism of the Regional Realist style that dominated “modernist” painting in New Zealand.

Henderson’s approach to the cubist style is best observed in the way she has rendered the friends’ dresses from angular facets of colour. Although created from delicate slices of colour, the women have a strong and substantial presence, like roughly hewn marble statues. However, by undressing these figures, we find that there is even more to *Les Deux Amies* than first meets the eye. This paper goes beneath the surface of the picture to gain a better understanding of how the artist worked through formal, conceptual and stylistic concerns in the execution of her work. By analysing Henderson’s use of materials, examining the composition using infrared imaging, and comparing the finished painting to an earlier preparatory sketch, we gain new insights into her working methods and understanding of materials. In particular, we argue that a close study of this painting reveals that her extensive background in textile design strongly influenced the development of this work, just as much as her legendary encounter with Metzinger. Undressing the figures in *Les Deux Amies* reveals a rich, hidden record of Henderson’s thinking – and her rethinking – within a key moment in her artistic career.

## A CUB-ISH ENCOUNTER

Louise Henderson (née Sauze) was born in Paris in 1902. Her father was secretary to Auguste Rodin, and some of her earliest memories involved playing with marble chips in the sculptor’s studio. With such an environment framing her formative years, her calling as an artist might have seemed inevitable. Her parents, however, did not approve of such a career for a young woman. Instead of art school, in 1919 Henderson entered the *Ecole de la Broderie et Dentelle de la Ville de Paris* to study embroidery and lace design—a decision which would have a lasting impact on Henderson’s later career.<sup>2</sup> During her studies she met her future husband, New Zealander Hubert Henderson, while admiring

a display of medieval gloves at the Musée de Cluny.<sup>3</sup> After a long correspondence and marriage-by-proxy at the Embassy, she immigrated to New Zealand in 1925 to join her new husband in Christchurch.

For a young woman raised in the vibrant artistic milieu of Paris, Christchurch of the 1920s must have felt dull and provincial. But it was there, ironically, that she finally found the freedom and support to fulfil the full breadth of her artistic ambitions. Henderson took up painting and began teaching embroidery at the Canterbury College School of Art, quickly becoming a figure in the most progressive local art circles. She took frequent sketching trips with Rita Angus, and from the mid-1930s exhibited regularly with "The Group," an informal art association formed in reaction to conservative local art societies. The Canterbury landscape became Henderson's earliest testing ground for her interest in formal structure, liberally altering the features of the landscape in pursuit of a strong composition.<sup>4</sup> As she put it: "I wanted to express the fundamental of what I saw, the form of what I saw, the form of people, the form of things."<sup>5</sup> Significantly, however, Henderson did not limit herself to painting, but continued to develop a burgeoning modernism through fabric design, embroidery and textiles. She even exhibited her paintings and textile designs together as early as 1934.<sup>6</sup>

From the late 1940s, Henderson started corresponding with Auckland painter John Weeks, whose paintings explored an abstracted formalism that appealed to Henderson's growing concern with form and space.<sup>7</sup> Weeks had studied in Paris with cubist Andre Lhote in the 1920s, and he encouraged Henderson to return to Europe to study art in a more dynamic environment. Henderson took this advice to heart, and with the support of her family left for Paris in 1952 to expand the horizons of her painting practice.

Upon arriving in France, Henderson encountered the paintings of cubist Jean Metzinger by chance in a retrospective exhibition at the *Galerie Art Vivant*.<sup>8</sup> Metzinger was considered a major figure of cubism in the first two decades of the 20th century, developing the movement's theoretical foundations with Albert Gleizes in their 1912 text *Du Cubisme*. Metzinger was an early follower of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, and played an important role in winning public recognition for cubism by organising the first major exhibition in the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1911.<sup>9</sup> By 1952, the senior artist was nearly 70 years old, but still taught at the Académie Frochot in Monmartre. Henderson applied to the studio for lessons, and was accepted on the strength of a quick sketch of a model that she was asked to draw on the spot.<sup>10</sup>

Henderson painted *Les Deux Amies* after returning to New

Figure 2. Louise Henderson, sketch for *Les Deux Amies*, 1952, charcoal on newsprint. Private collection.

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Zealand in 1953, but the initial sketch for this work was made during her year in Metzinger's atelier. With its rhythmic lines and flattened sense of space, the sketch explores the use of intersecting line and shadow to delineate form. It reflects her interest in Metzinger's cubist sensibility, which followed in the spirit of Cézanne to break with illusionistic painting traditions by introducing multiple viewpoints at once.<sup>11</sup> She tests out this sense of simultaneity by creating dynamism in the legs of her figures, as if capturing their movements within a single picture. Henderson's faces are rendered simply, perhaps also inspired by the "primitive" African masks so admired by the cubists.

Interestingly, her use of two nudes in the sketches mirrors one of Metzinger's most important works, *Deux nus* (Two Nudes), which was exhibited in the first cubist exhibition at the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1911.<sup>12</sup> Like Henderson's *Les Deux Amies*, Metzinger's two nudes are fragmented into a rhythmic pattern of angular facets. Metzinger treats

the space around the figures much the same way, giving the picture an overall flatness and unity. Like Henderson's painting, Metzinger's two figures are not fully abstract. Henderson retains this essentially conservative approach to cubism in her own work, never completely abandoning the women or the portrayal of their relationship. As Metzinger wrote in his *Du Cubisme* treatise:

"Let the picture imitate nothing; let it nakedly present its motive...Nevertheless, let us admit that this reminiscence of natural forms cannot be absolutely banished..."<sup>13</sup>

Metzinger's reluctance to wholly embrace abstraction only increased as his career went on, and he returned to a more stylised, classical treatment of the figure from the 1920s. Christina Barton argues that these "gentler" avant-garde values were precisely what attracted Henderson to Metzinger's work, giving her a framework to experiment with the formal properties of line and space while retaining a connection to the figure.<sup>14</sup>

Henderson's encounter with Metzinger has a somewhat legendary status in New Zealand art history, because her paintings from this period were among the first to introduce this European, cubist sensibility.<sup>15</sup> However, Metzinger did very little actual teaching, merely encouraging his students to work through problems for themselves:

"He didn't actually teach you. He visited us once a week, looked at what we were doing and said – 'Keep working...You will find your way...And I did.'"<sup>16</sup>

Henderson never once saw Metzinger take up a pencil or paintbrush. In fact, she herself did almost no painting in the entire year she was there, instead drawing from the model with charcoal on cheap newsprint.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, by the 1950s there was no longer an active cubist scene in Paris, so it is unlikely Henderson received any significant exposure to actual cubist thinking while she was in Paris, although it is possible she encountered it there as a young woman before immigrating to New Zealand. *Les Deux Amies* is perhaps better understood as the product of a self-led period of study, in which Henderson was given the freedom and encouragement to work through the same problems of constructing pictorial space that the Cubists had tackled four decades earlier. Describing the drawing she had done in Metzinger's studio she later commented:

"Looking back on my pen drawing now, I see that it was certainly belonging to the family [of cubism] but why I could not say as I had used only my observation not any knowledge of the mind work of that school of thought."<sup>18</sup>

In this way, *Les Deux Amies* can only be considered cub-ish; although it shares a similar set of concerns around form and structure, Henderson's work cannot really be placed within any formal cubist school of thought.

## FROM SKETCH TO PAINTING

After returning to New Zealand in 1953, Henderson began translating her sketch of the two women into its final, painted form. Although she roughly followed the basic elements of composition laid out in her preparatory sketch, the application of colour to the painting transforms the work into something quite different. Henderson shaped her figures by applying rhythmic facets of paint to create the illusion of volume through sophisticated handling of her medium. The muted colours and thin application of paint have a distinct softness to them, but Henderson layered them upon one another to create the effect of hard, angular bodies. The flat planes of colour slide over each other, employing subtle variations of tone to emphasize the fullness of the figures.



Figure 3. Detail of Louise Henderson's *Les Deux Amies*

These effects are enhanced by Henderson's unusually deep awareness and skilful handling of her materials. She has taken control of every element of the final product, making a number of judicious choices in the construction of her work in order to achieve the overall

effect. For instance, her choice of canvas for *Les Deux Amies* is a carefully chosen blend of linen and jute with a non-standard weave, similar to the open weave found in tapestry canvases. This produces a coarser surface, on to which Henderson laid down thin, fluid washes of paint usually associated more with a watercolour technique than oil painting. In some areas, the thin wash of pale paint sits in the valleys of the weave over the darker tones below, allowing Henderson to create subtle tonal shifts which create a sense of volume. On the right figure, for example, this effect serves to make the woman's lips recede and her chin more prominent, helping give shape to the lower part of her face (see Figure 3).

Henderson's sophisticated approach to material extends to every aspect of the final painting, demonstrating a deliberate set of choices around the final presentation of the work. The whole canvas is tensioned over a homemade strainer of heavy timber, and framed using a commercial frame moulding that was hand painted in an off-white colour.<sup>19</sup> Henderson demonstrates this high level of concern with material in correspondence with her mentor, John Weeks. In a 1948 letter to Weeks, for instance, she seeks his advice on procuring quality native wood to paint on, asks how to fashion a good easel, and laments the difficulty of finding good paint and brushes in New Zealand.<sup>20</sup> Henderson's creative process was not limited to the act of putting paintbrush to canvas, but involved every aspect of preparing her canvas and support toward the final product.

Henderson's discerning involvement with material reflects her extensive background in textiles, including her advanced knowledge of the qualities of different fibres and their effects on the weave. This was established in Henderson's earliest studies in embroidery and design in Paris, and continued through her teaching career in New Zealand. Here, she sought to raise the teaching standards of art and design in her adopted country by emphasizing a thorough knowledge of materials, design principles and their histories to her students.<sup>21</sup> She urged the Canterbury School of Art toward a more professional approach to design, shifting emphasis from domestic embroidery on petticoats and tablecloths to an intensive study of gold-stitch techniques and histories of medieval embroidery like the Bayeux tapestry.<sup>22</sup> Finding New Zealand resources for students inadequate, Henderson even published an authoritative *History of Embroidery* through the Department of Education, which outlines the importance of understanding the relationship between the foundation material, thread and tools in conceiving the overall design.<sup>23</sup> She also outlines a guide to local plants

and lichen that can be used to produce natural dyes for fabric.<sup>24</sup> These tools, for Henderson, were not merely the means to an end, but played an integral part in the development of a work of art.

In *Les Deux Amies*, Henderson's intimate knowledge of textiles helped her to achieve the painterly effects which she applies in a cubist (or cub-ish) style. The rhythmic pattern of colour in the friends' dresses even seem to resemble the arrangement of fabric pieces in a quilt. That is not to say that Henderson approached these forms of art as interchangeable, however—it was about developing a deep understanding of the individual properties of medium. In fact, she regarded paintings as a pursuit fundamentally different to embroidery or textile design:

"Sometimes one comes across landscapes executed in needlework...The only place for such things is the fire! However well they are worked, they are meaningless...and as decoration they only imitate painting, and in themselves are a false representation and a parody of art."<sup>25</sup>

Rather, Henderson advocated for a deep understanding of the individual properties of any given medium in order to utilise them to their full potential. Within *Les Deux Amies*, her expert handling of material helped her to achieve its modernist effect, employing colour and texture to convey a sense of volume rather than relying on the traditional perspectival laws.

## RETHINKING FORM: A LOOK UNDER THE DRESSES

In *Les Deux Amies*' translation from sketch to painting, the most important shift is in the application of colour to produce form. For Henderson, form and structure was often a stronger focus than her specific subject matter. However, it cannot be overlooked that in the painting the two nude figures have become clothed. Anecdotally, it has been suggested that Henderson did originally paint the figures nude, but went back and painted clothing over the naked bodies.<sup>26</sup> This theory has never been proven for *Les Deux Amies*, but we do know that it happened at least once before to a painting of a nude—Henderson later added clothing to the only painting she made in Paris in 1952



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Figure 4. Comparison detail of sketch and painting

(*Woman in Blue*), after being admonished by *New Zealand Herald* reporter Anthony Alpers for its indecency.<sup>27</sup>

Because the sketch confirms that the figures in *Les Deux Amies* were originally conceived as nude, infrared (IR) imaging of the painting was undertaken in February 2016 to investigate whether Henderson repainted this work as well. IR imaging revealed a series of drawn or painted lines that exist under the top layer of the painting, which aligns with those of the drawing. Easily seen in IR are the legs in the foreground, the midriff and breasts, and lines delineating her left arm. Traces of these lines are visible in normal light in some places, such as across the left breast of the figure on the left. The IR imaging also shows the lines tracing the legs, and—very faintly—the inner thigh and pelvic area, suggesting that the dress was indeed painted over the drawn form after re-thinking the initial composition.

This examination also revealed that Henderson cut the original picture down from a larger canvas, radically altering the dimensions of the canvas between two distinct applications of paint layers. The earlier paint layer extends around the tacking edges to the back of the work, whereas the uppermost layer sits within the confines of the current format. This indicates that the first configuration of the painting was larger, with the figures positioned higher on the canvas and with more space. There are also a number of subtle shifts in the texture of the paint surface around the figures in *Les Deux Amies*, which suggests that the forms beneath were later covered. Painted in two distinct layers,

this confirms that Henderson radically reconsidered her composition as she painted. Combined with the IR imaging, it indicates that she likely did paint clothing over the original nude bodies.

Through the addition of clothing in *Les Deux Amies*, dynamic line gives way to a more static and solid form. Between sketch and painting, the position of the heads have also shifted so the women no longer gaze at each other. In fact, the women's bodies are melded into one, interlocked together through the overlapping facets in their dresses and hair. This downplays the intimacy between the two women, adding to the sense that Henderson is more interested in their form than their character or relationship. As Henderson once described in a letter to Weeks:

"I am working at figures...and considering them as pattern within pattern. I find pleasant harmonies of form and colour and satisfactory design but my models who are friends seem to think this crazy – through this I lose likeness and vivacity but gain colour and forms..."<sup>28</sup>

The modified figures, in this way, reveal Henderson's conscious decision against naturalism, inspired by her interest in cubist forms.

Henderson may have chosen to dress her figures in order to address an unresolved problem about how to depict the upper legs and pelvic area in a satisfying composition. In her sketch, a series of overlapping lines and areas of shading leave the groin area ambiguous. This helps add a sense of movement to the figures' legs, but Henderson seems to have had difficulty in translating these intersecting lines into blocks of colour. A thicker band of paint is applied across the skirt, in the area of the sketch where the seat is positioned between their legs, suggesting she repainted this area several times. This thicker application seems slightly clumsy compared to the surrounding areas of paint, actually emphasising the high level of control and refinement in Henderson's usual painting technique. The arm of the right figure has also been re-positioned to cover this unresolved area, leaving her hand and wrist at an exaggerated, awkward angle. This strange position works well within the overall balance of the composition, but seems as if it was posed to strategically cover a problematic area.

However, it is also just as plausible that Henderson's choice to paint clothing over *Les Deux Amies* was guided by the same concerns about indecency that prompted her to repaint *Woman in Blue*. Adding to this theory, Henderson intended these women to be lovers, not

merely platonic friends.<sup>29</sup> This is alluded to with the French title *Les Deux Amies*, in which “the two friends” can be understood as a double entendre—a meaning that probably went over the heads of most New Zealand audiences of the early 1950s. There was little public visibility for lesbian imagery in this period in New Zealand; one only has to think of the negative connotations attached to the supposedly romantic attachment of Christchurch murderesses Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker in 1954, to see why Henderson may have been hesitant to make this content too overt. Henderson was already pushing the boundaries of the conservative art scene with her radical cubist style of painting – although it is unlikely that the bold and fearless Henderson would have felt threatened by risqué subject matter, the conservatism of the larger social context cannot be ignored either.

## THE RECEPTION OF *LES DEUX AMIES*

In 1953, Henderson presented *Les Deux Amies* in her exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery, alongside 40 of her other paintings, pastels and drawings. This solo show – a rare honour for a mid-career female artist in New Zealand at the time – was well-received by critics. She was praised for how her European travels strengthened and enriched her artistic practice. E. H. McCormick, for instance, wrote that the show gave Henderson “a leading place amongst artists practising in New Zealand,” admiring her technical skill, use of colour, and command of the cubist idiom “controlled by a subtle, mature intelligence”.<sup>30</sup> McCahon, too, commended Henderson’s work, writing that the two women in *Les Deux Amies* become real to the viewer “through the building up of apparently unrelated planes to become the very being of the two friends.”<sup>31</sup> From the very first time it was exhibited, *Les Deux Amies* was recognised as a significant achievement in the development of modernist painting in New Zealand.

Henderson’s unconventional painting style became an important part of the accelerated changes taking place in the conservative Auckland art scene of the early 1950s. As Francis Pound describes, up until this time the “modern” in New Zealand terms typically referred to the stylised, sharp-edged naturalism of the prevailing Regional Realist style. All manner of abstraction or experimental approaches to space were reprehensibly “foreign,” not seen as something that could be usefully employed in the art of New

Zealand.<sup>32</sup> It was only in the early 1950s that modern painters began, in any real measure, to consciously confront the abstract, expressionist and cubist experiments that characterised European painting in the first half of the 20th century. In many ways, Henderson’s work represented the bridge between local and international modernisms – a painting practice that pushed the boundaries of experimental painting, but with a radicalism gentle enough to be stomachable by the conservative local art scene. Although it is complimentary, McCahon’s 1954 review of Henderson’s exhibition takes on a defensive tone, making a plea for viewers to look at *Les Deux Amies* and be prepared to accept new realities in her work: “These paintings may surprise you, perhaps even shock you, but given a chance to reveal themselves they do have a lot to tell you.”<sup>33</sup> McCahon shows that he was aware Henderson’s work would indeed rub up against local conservative sensibilities.

On the other hand, later critics have dismissed Henderson’s work as not being radical enough, sometimes describing it in pejorative terms like tender-minded, feminine, and lightweight—a stark contrast to the robust intellectual reading usually afforded McCahon’s work of the time. For example, in his review of the 1991 exhibition *Louise Henderson: the Cubist Years, 1946-1958* (Auckland Art Gallery), Michael Dunn criticized the “decorative shallowness” of Henderson’s painting, which “gives all it has quickly and has nothing left for later.”<sup>34</sup> However, his critique overlooks the originality that Henderson applied to the cubist approach, framed by her encounter with Metzinger. Moreover, delving beneath the surface of *Les Deux Amies* reveals a rich record of how she worked through the formal elements of this work, and her sophisticated engagement with the materials of her craft. There is an unmistakable depth to this painting, both in terms of her thinking and in her command of the materials.

Today, *Les Deux Amies* is recognised as an important painting which represents the significant contribution Henderson made to modern New Zealand art. The work is an intensive study of form and structure in painting, which used the female body as a vehicle for expressing volume in space.

Henderson was the first woman in mid-century New Zealand art to really attack the human figure with her brush, breaking up the female body into rhythmic facets with a deft handling of her materials. The women of *Les Deux Amies* are not slick, or graceful, or beautiful, tender or romantic. They are blocky and confrontational—they do not exist to please the eye but to challenge the brain. In some ways, the strength embodied by her figures mirrors the strong position taken by Henderson

in the local art scene, as a serious and determined modern painter.

The enigmatic relationship between the two women in *Les Deux Amies* leaves the painting open to interpretation, which is partly why the work has remained so compelling to audiences today. Hidden under their dresses is a record of Henderson's thinking which shows how she worked out the elements of her composition. This was underpinned by a sophisticated command of her craft, enhanced by Henderson's knowledge of materials and her extensive background in textile design. A close examination of the painting reveals how she drew on this background in service of her art, using her technical knowledge to achieve the cubist-inspired effects in her painting. Although it is a striking and interesting painting in itself, undressing *Les Deux Amies* reveals the depth and intelligence of Henderson's work within a key period of her career.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 As Colin McCahon described in his 1954 review of the exhibition: "In Louise Henderson's 'Les Deux Amies,' the two women become real to us through the building up of apparently unrelated planes to become the very being of the two friends, quite real people with real personality...[T]he depicting of space and objects in space is no longer tied to the brief Renaissance heresy of lines running back from the picture frame, but is freed from these ties to reach out in all directions from the painted surface of the painting." See: Colin McCahon, "Louise Henderson," *Home & Building* (1 February 1954): 40.
- 2 Elizabeth Grierson, "The Art of Louise Henderson 1925-1990," MA Thesis, University of Auckland (1990): 14, 28.
- 3 Simone McKegg, "My grandmother, Louise Henderson," talk at the Christchurch Art Gallery, 23 March 2016.
- 4 McKegg at Christchurch Art Gallery, 23 March 2016.
- 5 Louise Henderson, as quoted in Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 13.
- 6 Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 21, 98.
- 7 John Weeks, "John Weeks: Career and Credo," *Art New Zealand* 22 (Summer 1981-82): 36.
- 8 Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 35.
- 9 Picasso and Braque, it should be noted, were not part of this exhibition. Rather, the cubists most publicly associated with the style in these salon exhibitions were Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes, Henri Le Fauconnier, Robert Delaunay and Fernand Léger – sometimes known as the Salon Cubists.
- 10 Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 36.
- 11 See: Edward F. Fry, *Cubism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966): 36-41.
- 12 Jean Metzinger's *Deux Nus* (1910-11) is now in the collection of the Gothenburg Museum of Art in Sweden.

- 13 Jean Metzinger and Albert Gleizes, *Du Cubisme* (1912), translated by T. Fisher Unwin, as reproduced in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968): 212
- 14 Christina Barton, *Louise Henderson: The Cubist Years, 1946–1958* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1991): 22-23.
- 15 It is important to note, however, that Louise Henderson was not the only New Zealand artist to experiment with the cubist idiom around this period, although her 1953 exhibition significantly raised the local profile of these modes of painting. In particular, Auckland painter John Weeks was an important mentor to Henderson, and had drawn on cubist influences in his own work since studying with Andre Lhote in Paris the late 1920s. Although Weeks did paint a small number of figurative works (such as the *Bathers* series), his treatment of the human figure retained a much higher degree of naturalism than Henderson achieved in paintings like *Les Deux Amies*. In addition to Weeks, other local artists experimenting with these approaches around this period included Charles Tole, Melvin Day, Wilfred Stanley Wallis, and Colin McCahon (whose cubist experiments were strongly influenced by Australian cubist Mary Cockburn-Mercer).
- 16 Louise Henderson, as quoted in Elizabeth Grierson, "Louise Henderson," *Art New Zealand*, no. 46 (1988): 78. In an unpublished 1984 interview with Anne Kirker (Te Papa archives), Henderson also stated: "He was a little short man with the darkest blue eyes you've ever seen, and cold. [...] He came at 12 and left about 20 past 12 casting an eye on all the rubbish students."
- 17 According to Henderson, Metzinger instructed the studio assistants to give her a single canvas, which she would only have to pay for if she made a mess of it. On this she painted a nude that would later become known as *The Blue Bird* or *Woman in Blue*. See: Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 38–39.
- 18 Louise Henderson, in a letter to Mr T. Garrity, 23 June 1981 (Hocken Library, Dunedin).
- 19 It is likely that the artist painted the frame herself, but this cannot be confirmed. The frame is documented in a photograph of the artist with the painting in 1953. In 2015, painting conservators at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (who purchased the painting in 2011) restored the frame to this original colour, as it had been spray-painted gold at some point while privately owned.
- 20 As Henderson writes in a letter to John Weeks from September 1948 (Auckland Art Gallery archives): "I find wood hard to get – wood to paint on – I have a very nice piece of kauri – but only one – Would 3 ply finished in Matai, Rimu or Kauri do?"
- 21 Henderson's teaching career began as an instructor in embroidery and design at the Canterbury College School of Art in 1926, shortly after arriving in New Zealand. In 1938, Henderson applied for a research grant from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research related to upgrading craft teaching (especially embroidery) in the country, although the approved grant was never taken up. She began teaching "Art and Craft Expression" part-time at Rangiora High School in Christchurch from 1938–39, before being appointed as Assistant Teacher for the New Zealand Correspondence School (1942–1945) where she taught needlework and embroidery. From 1944 to 1950, she worked under Roland Hipkins at the Wellington Teachers' Training College teaching a range of arts and crafts to trainee teachers, including embroidery, bookbinding, painting, drawing and leatherwork. See: Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 96–99.
- 22 Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 28.
- 23 Louise Henderson, *History of Embroidery* (Wellington: Department of Education, 1955): 4–5.
- 24 Louise Henderson, *The Story of Knitting* (Wellington: Primary School Bulletin, undated), as reproduced in Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 128.
- 25 Louise Henderson, "Embroidery a Living Art," *Art in New Zealand* 14, no. 1 (September 1941): 38.
- 26 Verbal anecdote told by a private collector of Henderson's work to the author, September 2015.
- 27 Grierson, "Louise Henderson," (1988): 78; Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 50.
- 28 Henderson, in a letter to John Weeks dated 12 September 1948 (Auckland Art Gallery archives).
- 29 As Henderson stated in interview with Grierson on 4 December 1988. See: Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 43.
- 30 E.H. McCormick, "The Louise Henderson Exhibition: A Note in Retrospect," *Landfall: A New Zealand Quarterly*, no. 29 (March 1954): 54–55.
- 31 McCahon, "Louise Henderson," (1 February 1954): 41.
- 32 Francis Pound, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art & National Identity, 1930–1970* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009): 225.
- 33 McCahon, "Louise Henderson," (1 February 1954): 41.
- 34 Michael Dunn, "Louise Henderson at the Auckland City Art Gallery," *Bulletin of New Zealand Art*, no. 13 (1992): 45.

# Art in the service of agriculture: John Buchanan's nature printing of 'The Indigenous Grasses of New Zealand'

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# Colonial science # Nature printing # Photography # Botanical art

To disseminate new knowledge about scientific discoveries in New Zealand in the nineteenth century, draughtsmen were employed to convey the characteristics of a specimen using techniques of lithography, occasionally assisted by photography and microscopy. The *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* was an annual publication of scientific papers presented by experts at the various provincial branches throughout the country, and was first published in Wellington in 1868 and issued in 1869.<sup>1</sup> Until his retirement from government service in 1885, it was primarily illustrated by John Buchanan (1819-1898). This paper aims to give a broader understanding of Buchanan's significance for both New Zealand's science history and its art history by considering his relationship to the emergent techniques of photography and lithography. His isolated use of nature printing for the production of the three volume guide to forage plants, *The Indigenous Grasses of New Zealand*, is placed in the context of the nineteenth century approach to scientific illustration as evidence.

Natural history, and in particular botanising, was a popular interest for all strata of society in nineteenth century colonial society. Botanical science relied on illustration to convey the wonders of “the vegetable kingdom” throughout the era of colonial expansion, and was boosted to a peak in the mid-nineteenth century with the interest created by the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection* in 1859. Any able plantsman or woman could make a discovery of a species “new to science”. Specimens gathered and pressed by dedicated amateurs could be as important as those discovered by members of the nascent scientific profession in describing types. The centre for scientific authority was the Herbarium founded at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in London in 1853. Plants were shipped to William Jackson Hooker (1785-1865) and then from 1865 to his son and successor Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911) to be named and pass from being mere specimens to becoming the holotypes for the species. Joseph Hooker’s *Flora Nova-Zelandiae*, published by Kew in 1855, established the written descriptions for New Zealand plants from these holotypes and was updated as the *Handbook of New Zealand Flora* in 1864 and 1867. Duplicates of the same plants (isotypes) formed the basis for colonial herbaria or plant libraries where books were illustrated not only by using techniques of direct printing and photography but also with *exsiccata*, or the dried specimens of the plants themselves. The Herbarium attached to the Colonial Museum in Wellington, New Zealand, made increasingly large numbers of native plants available for consultation and study as the country was mapped.

The expansion of pastoral farming in New Zealand in the second half of the nineteenth century created a need for more information about the identity, distribution, spread and forage value of grasses, both introduced and native. Sir George Grey, elected Superintendent of Auckland province and also as the member of parliament for Auckland City West in 1875, had the House of Representatives pass a resolution on 29 June 1876 “to the effect that a work on the native grasses of the Colony should be prepared, with nature-printed plates, and descriptions of each species, the work to be accompanied by an essay on the grasses and forage-plants likely to prove useful in New Zealand.”<sup>2</sup> *The Indigenous Grasses of New Zealand* (1880)<sup>3</sup> was the first authoritative reference work on flora to be produced since the establishment of the Colonial Museum in Wellington in 1865 and was intended to assist with the identification of grasses for propagation purposes by farmers. Grey’s specification that the plates be produced by nature printing can be understood both in



John Buchanan (1819-1898), *Milford sound, looking northwest from Freshwater Basin, August 1963*, watercolour on paper, 222 x 509mm. Hocken Pictorial Collections, University of Otago, Dunedin. 7,444 a9892



John McGregor, *Carte-de-visite of John Buchanan, 1865-1875*, albumen silver print on card, 105 x 98mm, Toitū: Otago Settlers’ Museum, Dunedin, 1949.42.1, p.1.



John Buchanan, *Poa foliosa*, Auckland Islands, (a large littoral, tussock grass), from *The Indigenous Grasses of New Zealand*, illustrated by John Buchanan, F.L.S., Draftsman to the Geological Survey Department, Plate XLI, George Didsbury, Government Printer, Wellington, 1878.

relation to his own bibliophilia, and the nineteenth century insistence on objectivity in scientific illustration.

Nature printing is a process where objects (exemplary lace or plants in the nineteenth century) are coated in tusche or grease and pressed onto the smooth surface of a lithographic stone, and then removed before the stone is inked and printed. It was one method by which groups of plants that had been collected could be studied and compared, especially when drawing abilities were lacking or storage for mounted collections was restricted. Plant images produced by the nature printing method are characterised by their precise and detailed rendering of structures. This precision is one reason for the favouring of the technique for scientific purposes, since botanists could use them to carry out comparative morphological studies. In addition, the use of nature-printing offered a solution to two kinds of problems encountered by botanists: the conservation of herbaria which were frequently destroyed by insects, and the production of images that were both accurate and affordable. Christopher Dresser (1834-1904), who held the Chair of Botany applied to Fine Arts at the South Kensington Department of Science and Art, gave a paper on "A New System of Nature Printing" at the Society of Arts in March 1857 based on a lithographic process patented in England by Henry Bradbury on 22 December 1855.<sup>4</sup> In the lecture, Dresser describes coating a leaf evenly with ink, before placing it with the prepared side downwards on a lithographic stone which has been warmed to keep the ink liquid when it comes into contact. A sheet of paper is then laid over the leaf and gently rubbed so that the ink leaves an impression on the stone, and this can be printed from multiple times, just like a drawing with a lithographic crayon.

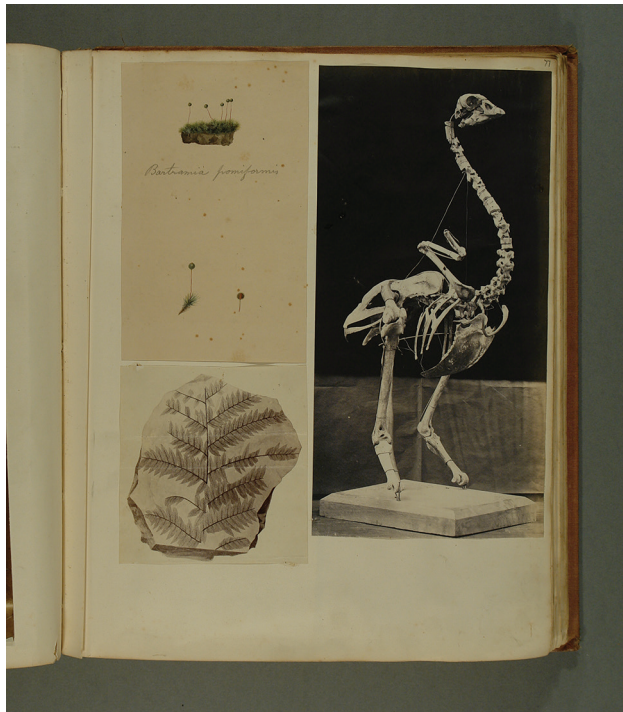
This method of nature printing for the dissemination of images of new plants found in the colonies is seen first in a plate prepared by Ludwig Becker to illustrate Frederick von Mueller's description of the species *Macadamia ternifolia* and published in the *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria* (Australia) Volume 2 in 1858.<sup>5</sup> His use of the process had no immediate followers, but from the late 1870s Frederick Manson Bailey (1827-1915), the Colonial Botanist of Queensland, used nature printing in several publications. In 1878 he produced an *Illustrated Monograph of the Grasses of Queensland* where the plates were printed lithographically, but each grass was electrotyped from herbarium specimens by Bailey and the Government Chemist, Karl Staiger. It proved a useful book for the Queensland pastoralist, but even though the volume was in large format, the

grasses were bigger. As Bailey wrote, "often a small portion or plant has had to be bent to fit the size of the plate."<sup>6</sup>

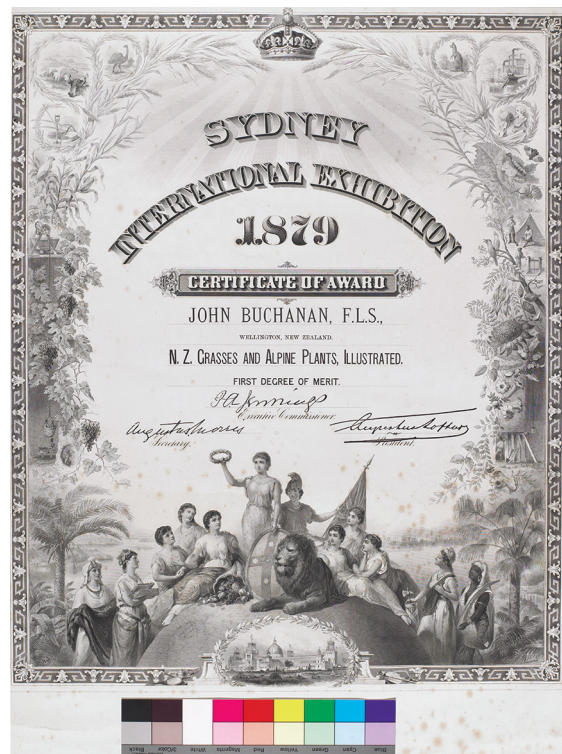
As well as the nature printing technique, photography was important for nineteenth century botany and was a useful technology within the larger scientific enterprises of observation, classification and documentation of natural phenomena.<sup>7</sup> Put at the service of "natural philosophy", as science was described, photography allowed an apparently unmediated encounter with nature. It was quickly adopted by the leaders of colonial expeditions, such as the Scottish naturalist and medical doctor James Hector (1834-1907). Hector seemingly pioneered photography's use in the Geological Survey of Canada, just a few years after Frederick Archer's patenting of the wet collodion process in 1851, and immediately prior to his being recruited to begin the geological survey of Otago and Southland in New Zealand.<sup>8</sup>

From Otago, Hector went on to found the Colonial Museum and Geological Survey in Wellington in 1865, taking all his staff from the survey office in Dunedin with him, including the draughtsman to the Geological Survey, John Buchanan. Trained as a textile designer, Buchanan could draw with facility and invention, but interpretation was not required in colonial science. The subjectivity of the artist was increasingly rejected as photography was popularised in scientific work in the nineteenth century: the mechanical objectivity of the lens began to be seen as superior to the draughtsman's skill. As Carol Armstrong and Catherine de Zegher have observed, "the human agency responsible for [a photograph's] manufacture [was] unacknowledged ... the photograph was seen to be more effective in its depiction than other methods of representation."<sup>9</sup> Photography was central to the establishment of the Colonial Museum in keeping with British precedents.<sup>10</sup> The essential task in botanical art is to reduce a plant from three dimensions to two. Using the plant itself to produce the image, in nature printing as in photography, was understood as a mechanical way of avoiding the need for the artist's eye, and for mind and hand to process the image and flatten it. It was therefore thought to be more truthful than drawing, with the Austrian inventor of this process, Alois Auer, claiming it surpassed photography in accuracy.<sup>11</sup>

Botanical drawing seemed to be on the verge of redundancy by the late 1860s, as "the nature print and photography both satisfied the growing requirement that scientific illustration not be influenced by the subjectivity of the artist."<sup>12</sup> Botanical drawings allowed subjective interpretations of a botanical specimen to infiltrate its representation. Lorraine Dalston and Peter Galison have argued for the



John Buchanan, *Bartramia pomiformis*, (apple moss), c.1863, watercolour on paper, 139 x 110mm, *Mataura fossil plant specimen, Lower Jurassic*, c.1864, photograph, 300 x 219mm, (original watercolour in Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa) and *Articulated skeleton of Cnemornis gracilis* (formerly *Cnemornis calcitrans*, the extinct North Island goose found in the Earnsclough Cave, Alexandra) 1873, photograph used to produce the lithograph to illustrate James Hector's paper in *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*, Vol.VI, plate X, 1873, 195 x 120mm, Toitū: Otago Settlers' Museum, Dunedin, 1949.42.2, p.1.



documentation of Victorian science being a site where accuracy was celebrated and "Nature spoke for herself", with conventional morality dictating that scientists restrain themselves from interpretation.<sup>13</sup> While agrostrigraphy, the branch of botany concerned with the systematic description of grasses, was not suited to photography due to the similarity of many of the species, nature printing preserved the idea of scientific objectivity.

Buchanan preferred lithography to photography in his illustrations for the *Transactions*, which are annotated with "J.B. del. et lith.", but these could be mechanically reproduced. The Government Printing Office established a photolithographic branch for printing maps, plans, drawings and photographs in 1873, recruiting photographer Herbert Deveril (1840-1911) from Melbourne as the officer in charge.<sup>14</sup> It was common for photographs to be sold to the public or circulated amongst other members of the scientific fraternity locally and internationally and Buchanan was not averse to using photography as an aid in his work or in museum displays. A *carte-de-visite* made in a Dunedin photographer's studio at the time of the New Zealand Exhibition in 1865 shows Buchanan standing in profile, unfurling what at first appears to be a large scroll, but in fact is the articulated skeleton of the recently discovered *Dinornis*, or moa, which Director Julius von Haast had put on display in the Canterbury Museum.<sup>15</sup> Another photograph, gridded in pencil, was used to create a lithograph to illustrate Hector's publication on the extinct native goose, *Cnemornis calcitrans* in the *Transactions* in 1873.<sup>16</sup> Buchanan's albums show that he was adept enough with the camera to make photographic copies of his own paintings when the latter went on exhibition in the New Zealand Exhibition in Dunedin in 1865.<sup>17</sup> These examples point to Buchanan's endorsement of photography's role in the documentation and copying of existing images. Buchanan also deployed wet collodion process photography to record specific landscapes while on expedition. A receipt dated 4 October 1862 shows that Hector purchased photographic apparatus from the photographer Joseph Perry in Dunedin,<sup>18</sup> and Buchanan lists photographic chemicals amongst the equipment taken to Fiordland in 1863. Given that the whole area of southwest Fiordland was described on maps as "terra incognita" prior to Hector's expedition, the camera was a valuable tool in making first recordings of a place, although no photographic prints from this journey survive.

Other mechanical drawing aids were commonly used by Buchanan, it would seem. Returning from London, Hector wrote to



Mantell that he had obtained a large spectrograph which he was shipping to the Colonial Museum: "I want you to give [it] to Buchanan as I think it will be of use to him. It is a great improvement on the camera lucida."<sup>19</sup> A portable device with a beam-splitting prism on the end of an adjustable stand which was often used in conjunction with a microscope, the camera lucida allowed an artist to look down into the edge of the prism to view both the subject and their hand at the same time. The camera lucida (which could be used in daylight as opposed to the camera obscura which needed a darkened room to project a light image) was patented in 1807 by William Hyde Wollaston (1766-1828).<sup>20</sup> Glass spectrographs, developed later in the nineteenth century, used reflections to create virtual images for tracing.

Photography, for Buchanan, it seems, was a useful tool for the prosecution of science but to him it was always secondary to drawing – with or without the use of drawing machines – as a test of observation. He wrote to Georgina Hetley (1832-1898), who had visited him in retirement in Dunedin during the preparation of the plates for her *Native Flowers of New Zealand*, published in London in three parts, 1887-1889, exhorting her to "draw first, then use your photograph for the work on the stone."<sup>21</sup> His view seems to have been that photography should not usurp the place of the scientific illustrator – it was as "Draughtsman to the Colonial Museum and Geological Survey" that he was employed, after all.

Buchanan's letter to Georgina Hetley suggests that he saw photography as having limited application in botanical work, and his archive shows that he continued to emphasise drawing, often using a microscope, to identify differences especially in flowering plants. As a Glaswegian, perhaps he knew of the famous incident from 1839 when William Henry Fox Talbot had sent examples of botanical photographs to William Jackson Hooker (1785-1865)<sup>22</sup> proposing that they collaborate on a volume of native plants, illustrated with "photogenic drawings".<sup>23</sup> Hooker dismissed the proposal, commenting "Your beautiful *Campanula hederacea* was very pretty as to general effect but it did not express the swelling of the flower, nor the calyx, nor the veins of the leaves distinctly."<sup>24</sup> Even Talbot's own uncle, William Thomas Fox-Strangeways, an amateur botanist, was concerned that photographs only showed the plain surface of ferns, and did not "express the fructification or venation".<sup>25</sup>

Buchanan's technique for the nature printing of *The Indigenous Grasses* is his own adaptation of the European process, possibly because of the difficulty of procuring zinc and lead for intaglio printing. There

was even some delay in the preparation of the plates initially, "owing", according to Hector, "to the want of proper lithographic stones and other appliances which could not be procured in the Colony".<sup>26</sup> In order to make his nature prints, Buchanan first pressed and dried the representative specimens of each type of grass then coated the grass with tusche (a greaselike liquid used in lithography as a medium receptive to lithographic ink) before pressing it to the surface of a smooth plate of limestone. As is customary in the lithographic process, the limestone plate was then moistened and inked with Buchanan adding details by hand. The greasy imprint of each grass specimen accepted the ink but repelled the water with those parts of the stone that the grass had not touched accepting water and consequently repelling the ink. Each plate had its tinted background block printed first, then the paper was aligned and passed through the press a second time, to overprint the image of the grass on its background.

The *Indigenous Grasses* won Buchanan a third order of merit certificate at the Melbourne Exhibition in 1880-81 in recognition of his ability with lithographic processes. Clearly Hector admired Buchanan's facility with nature printing, sending printer's proofs of the plates to Hooker in London for his comment.<sup>27</sup> However Hooker failed to appreciate the technical skill, and responded: "What you want is a properly organised Bot. Garden like the Australian, Indian, Ceylon, Mauritius, the Cape, Trinidad, Jamaica, Guiana & Hong Kong – all these colonies are immeasurably ahead of you in this respect. Meanwhile your money is wasted on futile books on Grasses, the object of which it is difficult to conceive – dried specimens of the useful kinds would be cheaper to prepare & better suited to the wants of the ignorant."<sup>28</sup>

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa holds a complete set of specimens used in the production of Buchanan's book, as well as his drawings of the floral parts. Hector makes it clear in the Preface to the *Manual* that Buchanan was charged with collecting the grasses for the book himself, and that where the collectors were other botanists they had been acknowledged. Buchanan is clearly indebted to Alexander McKay for gatherings on the Mount Arthur Plateau and H.H. Travers of Wellington is frequently cited as a collector for the Tararua Range and for Nelson Province but, for the most part, the grasses are Buchanan's own discoveries. This results in them now having the unusual dual status of being both type specimens and worked materials. Remains of the printer's ink can be seen on most of them and they are mounted in a "guard book"<sup>29</sup> referred to as "Buchanan's printer's set". The pages bear the same titles as the plates and are in

the order of the plates, but there was no obligation on Buchanan's part to ensure that the specimens and the illustrations corresponded in every positional detail, as the specimens could only be mounted after the nature-printing procedures had been completed. His obligation seems to have been to ensure that the plants he used in nature printing became the specimens mounted in the guard book.

These same grasses now have the special status of holotypes, which is the term given to the type which establishes the name of a species or infraspecific taxon, or else they have the status of lectotype, a specimen designated as the nomenclatural type in the absence of a holotype. At the time of Buchanan's creation of this guardbook, holotypes were not described as such, nor as "type specimens". Now they are considered taonga or treasures by the Museum of New Zealand which holds them. This is because for each of his newly defined taxa, Buchanan's specimens, illustrations, distribution data, and commentaries established the standard example of the newly described species. Science was advanced by Buchanan achieving the greatest possible verisimilitude in the illustrations, yet there is ornamentation in his rendering, particularly in the way that the fronds are arranged to be aesthetically pleasing on the page, suggesting that artistic interpretation also played a role. Buchanan also prepared enlarged drawings of floral parts using microscope dissections and prepared a brief text to accompany each plate. Fifty endemic, 18 other indigenous, and 9 naturalised species appear in the publication, some of them under two names. As well as recording and describing indigenous species new to science, the plates in the book made images of the grasses available to new colonists, particularly sheep and cattle farmers, who could then select appropriate ones to encourage or cultivate for pasture. With its high production values, and enthusiasm for the new species discovered, the Imperial Quarto edition, with 64 plates, and the smaller Royal Octavo edition gave colonists ready information on the characteristics of the fifty species of grass described, but according to later commentators Henry Connor and Elizabeth Edgar, he "over-dramatized their possible future utilisation".<sup>30</sup> Although plates from the book are now broken up and sold separately by dealers for framing and display, Buchanan's prints of grasses were never meant to be considered as objects for aesthetic contemplation.

The production of *The Indigenous Grasses* resulted in Buchanan making a lasting contribution to science, then, but what implications does the volume have for the understanding of the development of the art of scientific illustration in the nineteenth century? Given that John

Buchanan was already prized as a scientific illustrator by his employers at the Colonial Museum, why was he required to use the technique of nature printing for the *Indigenous Grasses*, and does this compromise or enhance his reputation as an artist? The choice of nature printing can be seen to relate to the establishment of "objectivity" as the core principle of scientific research by the middle of the nineteenth century. Nature printing integrated several earlier ideals of artistic practice, among them the notion of "truth to nature". Nineteenth century scientists were searching for an imaging technique which could overcome the limits posed by the subjectivity of the artist.

Ironically, due to their precision and the values of authenticity and uniqueness which they embody, Buchanan's images in the *Indigenous Grasses* have now moved from science to art. Yet ultimately nature prints - and their successor technology, photography - underscore the importance of the artist as an active intermediary. Buchanan had no affection for the nature printing technique, and never returned to it again in a career of scientific illustration that lasted until 1885. In his work in botanical illustration he relished the opportunity to include whatever parts of a plant were deemed important by the particular audience he envisaged. As an artist he worked to convey a generic three-dimensional structure by a deft use of the placement of parts including twisted leaves, colour, and shadows, suppressing the defects of the individual specimen and emphasizing the generic. His nature prints are flat and impoverished by comparison. The simulacrum that is the botanical drawing carries more conviction, and is more "real", than an impression of the thing itself, in terms of its value as a complete picture. The problem with both photography and nature printing for botanical purposes was that these technologies reproduced the specifics of an individual plant rather than showing the generalities of the type which would allow any specimen to be recognised by comparison. To a botanist working in the 1860s, only a rendered drawing could characterise a species properly, ensuring that skilled draughtsmen such as John Buchanan would be assured of continuing governmental employment.

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## ENDNOTES

- Volume 1 was reprinted, with some additions, by the Government Printer in 1875. The *Transactions* were originally printed by private contractors, but the work was taken over in 1888 by the Government Printer. See W.A.Glue, *History of the Government Printing Office*, (Wellington: R.E.Owen Government Printer, 1966), p.83.
- James Hector, "Preface" *The Indigenous Grasses of New Zealand illustrated by John Buchanan, F.L.S., Draftsman to the Geological Survey Department, Sixty-Four Plates, Published by Command*, (Wellington: Government Printing Office, 1880).
- John Buchanan, *Manual of the Indigenous Grasses of New Zealand*, (Wellington: Colonial Museum and Geological Survey, 1880). In June of 1878 the first of three fascicles of 20 plates was published in Imperial Quarto size. In the preface, the Colonial Museum's director, James Hector, explained that since the request had been for the grasses to be nature-printed and thus natural size, it had been "necessary to publish the work in a large size which is both inconvenient and expensive". In the Museum's Annual Report, Hector commented that the production was making good progress, "considering the difficulties to be contended with in bringing out such an extensive and laborious work. Parts I and II, comprising twenty-one folio plates were issued last year, and Parts III and IV are now ready for the binder. The letterpress of the remainder of the work is now in the printer's hands, but some months will be required to complete the plates." It would be another two years before the work was complete, with the second set of 23 plates appearing in June 1879, and the third of 21 plates in 1880. Despite Hector's impatience with the process, the length of time it took to illustrate all 87 species of grasses allowed inclusion of new species that were discovered during the volume's preparation. The consolidated Imperial Quarto edition with an imprint that stated that it had been published by command finally appeared in 1880 as *The Indigenous Grasses of New Zealand* priced at a costly 3 guineas. Later that same year, a smaller version in Royal Octavo was published as the *Manual of the Indigenous Grasses of New Zealand*. The Manual consists of all the plates in the Imperial Quarto edition together with a newly set letterpress and sold for a more affordable 7s 6d.
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# Daguerreotypes by Hartley Webster

Shaun Higgins

Keywords: # daguerreotype # photography # pictorial # Webster # portrait # missionary

Known works by early New Zealand daguerreotypists are rare, being both scarce in number and difficult to identify. A reference in a journal entry by Rev. Charles Baker reported the creation of a "portrait in a machine" by Hartley Webster in 1852. Auckland Museum staff asked Baker family descendants about the existence of a daguerreotype matching the entry. This led to the discovery of two daguerreotypes inside a writing desk, one of which was labelled 1852. The pair were taken during a visit by Hartley Webster to the Bay of Islands and provide confirmed examples of his early work. This, in turn, has enabled the identification of further Webster works in the Auckland War Memorial Museum pictorial collection.

Hartley Webster was a daguerreotypist who operated in Auckland, arriving from England in 1852 on March 9th with his wife Elizabeth. He began offering his services as a 'Photographist, from London' in April, clearly wasting no time in establishing himself.<sup>1</sup> He could "take portraits in five seconds at a cost from ten shillings to two guineas."<sup>2</sup> In August that year he advertised his intention to stay in the Bay of Islands for a fortnight.<sup>3</sup> Webster was by this time aware of the limited Auckland market, seeking clients further afield. He would also engage in several other business ventures with his wife, ranging from millinery to saddlery.<sup>4</sup>

Though later work from Webster is well known, his early work is scarce. Later examples from the 1860s include his work in *cartes-de-visite* format, his coverage of officers of the 65<sup>th</sup> regiment and colourful characters like Gustavus Ferdinand von Tempsky, Prussian adventurer, artist and soldier in the New Zealand Wars. In the case of the *carte-de-visite* we are fortunate enough to have his studio text and verso logo printed on each example. Earlier work, however, is usually completely bereft of markings, certainly in the case of daguerreotypes. Some daguerreotypists in the United States were known to use embossed names or initials on the brass mat.<sup>5</sup> In New Zealand there were simply too few practitioners to warrant such proprietary delineation. The identification of daguerreotypes made in New Zealand involves the study of provenance and sitters alongside the physical evidence the actual piece presents. Did a sitter leave New Zealand and where were they based? Do diaries and letters mention such events? Do the daguerreotype cases, if original, fit within a particular style or time period?

The Rev. Charles Baker, a missionary who arrived in New Zealand in 1828, kept a series of journals which are held by Auckland War Memorial Museum. Working under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.), he and his family lived in a number of different areas such as Paihia, Waikare, Tolaga Bay and Rangitukia. In an entry from 18 October 1852 he makes mention of a visit to Russell.

"18 Went to Russell. Called on Capt Russell at the Wahapu & went on to town. Found Dr & Mrs Ford in affliction. Their youngest child but one (the oldest now surviving) is near its end. Spent some time there & went on to Mr Bateman's. A Mr Webster took my portrait in a machine. It is said to be a good likeness. Had tea with Rev Mr Gould & slept at Mr Batemans."<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1, Hartley Webster. Rev. Charles Baker. Quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1852. Mount size 157mm x 129mm. Private collection.



Figure 2, Hartley Webster. *Hannah Baker*. Quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1852.  
Mount size 157mm x 129mm. Private collection.



Figure 3, Unattributed. *Alexander Alison and his wife Jane*. Half-plate daguerreotype.  
Mount size 185mm x 155mm, PH-1995-9-1, Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Figure 4, Hartley Webster. *Archdeacon Henry Williams*. Quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1852.  
Case size 120mm x 95mm. PH-1964-2-1, Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Figure 6, Unattributed. *William Kemp*. Quarter-plate daguerreotype.  
Case size 120mm x 95mm. PH-1970-4-3, Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Figure 5, Hartley Webster. *Mrs. Henry Williams*. Quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1852.  
Case size 120mm x 95mm. PH-1964-1-1, Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Figure 7, Unattributed. *James Kemp*. Sixth-plate daguerreotype.  
Case size 95mm x 80mm. PH-1970-4-2, Auckland War Memorial Museum.

Baker's journal entry recording the creation of a mechanical portrait alongside a name such as Hartley Webster established the possible existence of a rare example of a New Zealand made daguerreotype. Auckland War Memorial Museum staff approached the Baker descendants prior to a recent family reunion and indeed it was found that a daguerreotype was extant, known to some of the family. Further investigation revealed there were, in fact, two daguerreotypes in identical cases (figures 1 & 2). The objects had been largely hidden from sight, kept in an ornate writing box in the bottom compartment of a writing desk that had belonged to Charles Baker. One portrait was of Charles, with a label on the verso, "Rev C. Baker 1852." The label does not match Baker's hand. The other was unlabelled but determined to be of his wife, Hannah Mariah Baker.

Baker was well known to many in the region. Staying with friends and fellow C.M.S. missionaries was a regular occurrence, as noted in his journal on numerous occasions.<sup>7</sup> The Bakers' close association with families such as the Kemp family features in travel from KeriKeri to Waimate.<sup>8</sup> In the months to come, word of Webster's work would have spread quickly throughout the region.

Hartley Webster's name has been associated with both daguerreotypes and calotypes by John Nicol Crombie, albeit unconfirmed.<sup>9</sup> Giles notes Crombie arrived late in Auckland not appearing on the scene until 1855, meaning his knowledge of Webster's early work may have been incomplete. During a visit to England, Crombie presented a paper on "The Rise and Progress of Photography in New Zealand" in which he referenced his predecessors, including one gentleman who arrived in the early part of 1851 and whom he credited as adding both the daguerreotype process to his skills as well as introducing the calotype process to that part of the world.<sup>10</sup> Both technologies were available in the early period of photography. However, without examples of this work, it has previously been difficult to attribute unidentified daguerreotypes from this time.

The discovery of two confirmed examples of Hartley Webster's daguerreotypes from 1852 presents an opportunity to directly observe his work from this early period. As regards style, the portraits are fairly conservative, having seated subjects facing the camera with hands on their laps. The images are heavily faded, obscuring their clarity in part. Mounted in the European style of presentation, unusual for New Zealand, these examples appear in a brown painted glass mount with a brass *passe-partout* (type of 'mat' placed between the picture and frame). They are sealed with a brown adhesive cloth tape. Most

examples of daguerreotypes made in New Zealand are presented in Morocco cases; small portable enclosures that protect the picture and allow for storage or display on a mantelpiece. The European style of glass *passe-partout* mount was designed for wall mounting in a wooden frame.<sup>11</sup> The confirmation that Hartley Webster used such mounting is helpful in that it may point towards other works presented in the European style, such as a large unattributed daguerreotype held at Auckland War Memorial Museum featuring Mr and Mrs Alison (figure 3). Curiously, the inward face of the paper backing of the daguerreotype of the Alison couple features an advertisement for an H. Webster, importer and dealer of cigars, Portsmouth. Hartley Webster is identified as a corn dealer in the 1851 census (incorrectly entered as Harthy), also under Portsmouth with his wife Elizabeth.<sup>12</sup> Though they appear to be the same man, the clipping could have been used by anyone as backing paper for a daguerreotype. It is nonetheless uncanny to find it on another New Zealand-made example presented in *passe-partout* style and sealed with a brown adhesive cloth tape. The 1853 electoral roll lists Alexander Alison as a shipwright in Official Bay, which would have afforded easy access to Webster's services.<sup>13</sup>

Close inspection of the Hannah Baker daguerreotype (figure 2) shows a different setting to the Charles Baker portrait. The back of the wooden chair has a crochet cushion visible behind the sitter. Charles' journal makes mention of another visit to Russell on October 30<sup>th</sup>, this time by his wife and son.

"30 Mrs Baker & Charles returned. They had had the great pleasure of seeing Archdeacon & Mrs Williams who they met at Russell. The whole party were together two days and two nights."<sup>14</sup>

Not only is this likely to be the occasion on which the Hannah Baker portrait was taken, but it also leads to another striking connection, that of Henry and Marianne Williams. Archdeacon Henry Williams, an early C.M.S. missionary who played an important role in the translation of the Treaty of Waitangi, and his wife Marianne were regular acquaintances of the Bakers. Inspection of the Auckland War Memorial Museum daguerreotypes of both Henry and Marianne (figures 4 & 5) reveal the very same chair with the same crochet pattern cushion behind them. The chair and crochet cushion have been used for all three portrait sittings; Hannah Baker (figure 2), Henry and Marianne Williams (figures 4 & 5). When this is taken into consideration alongside



the journal entry, which stated they were together, it is clear that Hartley Webster took all three daguerreotypes on this occasion. In a recent paper, the author wrote of the possibility of a hitherto unknown Baker daguerreotype in relation to the Williams pair, citing an earlier 20 October entry in the journal where Charles met Henry and Marianne Williams.<sup>15</sup> It was only after examining the unexpected Hannah Baker daguerreotype, however, that the creation of the Williams daguerreotypes could be placed within the events described above on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1852.

Bringing together the evidence for these sittings suggests that Hartley Webster was based in Russell for a good portion of his time in the Bay of Islands, possibly at Thomas Bateman's residence. His clients included Charles Baker on 18 October and Hannah Baker, Henry Williams and Marianne Williams on 30 October. Notable names to be investigated further are the Batemans, the Fords and Captain Russell.

The early work of daguerreotypist Hartley Webster can now be observed through four confirmed examples of quarter plate daguerreotypes. The authentication of early Hartley Webster works of the Baker and Williams couples provides an opportunity for further comparison with other surviving examples. The mounting alone may have been shared by a number of daguerreotypists in a given shipment, and indeed, the four Webster daguerreotypes presented here show different housings for contemporaneous plates, with the Bakers in *passee-partout* mounts and the Williams in morocco cases with plain brass mats. This suggests Webster's customers had a degree of choice in their purchase. It is remarkable, however, that such variety was on offer to such an early and relatively sparse market. Previous advertisements of daguerreotypes in New Zealand newspapers have made mention of morocco cases.<sup>16</sup> John Nicol Crombie listed an extensive assortment of cases, plain and ornamented<sup>17</sup>, along with daguerreotype apparatus, so perhaps offering a variety of mounting options was common practice. Once demand was established, a larger variety of imported cases became available.

Further daguerreotypes at Auckland War Memorial Museum are mounted in cases identical to the Williams pair; those of brothers William Kemp and James Kemp (Figures 6 & 7). Living in close association with the Bakers, the family of C.M.S. Missionary James Kemp could have similarly taken advantage of the opportunity presented by Webster's visit to the region. At the very least the identical cases and mounting presented here suggest contemporaneity, all being early in style. Nolan's dating guide to American daguerreotypes

places the plain ecliptic mat either side of 1852 depending on source (American or British).<sup>18</sup> New Zealand's supply of cases could have come from several possible locations, so it is difficult to know how reliable such case chronology is to a local context. The Kemp brothers' cases are very plain with a maroon velvet pad, the same as Henry Williams example. This has been noted as early in use in the United States of America context.<sup>19</sup> The Marianne Williams daguerreotype features a lighter brown velvet pad not present in the aforementioned guide. Though similar, these can only prove contemporaneous use and not direct attribution.

It is clear is that Hartley Webster's work, although limited to the small market of the day, was presented in both attractive European *passee-partout* glass mounts as well as Morocco cases. It is also possible that rehoused examples of his work exist, as cases could have been changed when later more embellished styles became available. His visit to the Bay of Islands in 1852 brought him into contact with some of the prominent missionaries of the day, and may have reached other individuals within the region whose daguerreotype portraits have either survived in private hands or are no longer extant. There is also the possibility of a calotype and resulting salt print mentioned by Crombie.<sup>20</sup> Though no examples are extant, the mere mention of the use of this technology demands further investigation. Further research into the journals of missionaries and other notable families for whom daguerreotypes were affordable is required. Perhaps the experience of having your portrait taken with a machine warranted a mention in someone else's diary or even in a letter.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Nobby Clark

Keith S. Clark (1921–2008)

Graphic designer, illustrator, writer and artist

## A Profile Commentary by Philip Heath

Gerry Barton and I encountered Nobby Clark during our research for *Coral Route; Tasman Empire Airways Ltd, Flying Boats and the South Pacific* which was published in 2015 – Air New Zealand's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.<sup>1</sup> The book provided a wonderful opportunity to explore Nobby's works and showcase surviving examples of his contributions to the development of TEAL visual identity. This paper expands on that account.



Born in Hull, Yorkshire, in 1921, Keith S. Clark showed an interest in drawing from an early age. Educated at Hull Technical College,<sup>2</sup> and keen on pursuing the creative path, he joined a small advertising firm in Hull as a copywriter and assistant, driving his railway signalman father to worry over his only child's future prosperity. Advancing to a London advertising firm, Clark attended evening drawing classes and was gradually assigned illustration and design work. World War II thrust him into service as a radio operator with the Royal Signals, and a unique tour through North Africa, Italy and France. Stationed in Paris and looking to make military service tolerable, he visited galleries and churches, and took art training at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. On return to civil life, and marriage to his sweetheart



Illustration for Keith S. Clark's children's story, *The Little Sailor Boy* published in India, 1948.

"Well," snapped the sailor boy, and flicked a speck of dust off his coat—just to show how particular he was about appearances.  
 "Don't you remember me?" said the piece of splintered wood very dolefully.  
 "No, I don't," replied the sailor boy, and turned his back on it.  
 "Look a little closer." The newcomer made a pathetic effort at puffing out his chest as the sailor boy turned on him a disdainful glance.  
 "You don't mean to say—you can't really be—" gasped the sailor boy.  
 "Yes, I'm the admiral," the pathetic creature said, and began to cry, which didn't sound very nice because he had a cold in his nose.  
 "But where are your lovely medals and your big cutlass?" asked the sailor boy.  
 "Gone—all gone in the storm," and the admiral began to cry much louder.  
 "Never mind," said the sailor boy, who felt really sorry now for the poor admiral. "This is a very nice garden, and I feel sure that we will be quite happy. Personally, I am rather pleased, because it has been most lonely and I should love to hear some more about China, and South America and all the other wonderful places to which you have been."  
 The admiral flushed a deep red beneath his splinters and sobbed;  
 "I've never been to sea really—never at all."  
 "But surely," cried the sailor boy (now he thought the admiral must certainly be ill or have lost his memory) "surely you must have been to sea, or how else would you know all those wonderful things about China and South America?"  
 "I read it all in books," blurted out the admiral. A big tear rolled right down his cheek, fell with a wet splash on the garden path, and rolled away over the cliff and into the sea.

Margaret Hussey in June 1945, the lure of adventure took the couple to Bombay in March 1947, with Clark to work for *The Times of India* as a writer and illustrator. One of his children's stories, 'The Little Sailor Boy', published in India in 1948, was broadcast by the BBC in Children's Hour. During a four-month holiday back in Hull in mid-1950 with their young son Timothy, Margaret reported to the Hull *Daily Mail* that she loved living in India.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless the economic and political turbulence that followed Indian partition and independence led to their leaving India in early April 1951. Having had a taste of lively ex-patriot life, and with the old country now distinctly unappealing, the family emigrated from England to New Zealand the following year.

When Clark arrived in Auckland in July 1952, the place seemed like a boom town, and a new life there quickly blossomed. As he recalled:

*'all those steak and eggs and fizzy beers!! It was so cosy and intimate and soon I knew all the local artists who taught exciting new skills such as concreting, drain-digging and homebrewing.'*<sup>4</sup>

Starting out at Ryder Advertising, Clark soon moved across to W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd, which had held the Tasman Empire Airways Limited (TEAL) advertising account since Bill Haythornthwaite and George Moore established the firm in 1946. TEAL was extending its international capability beyond the trans-Tasman routes with the Auckland–Pacific Islands–Tahiti Coral Route flying boat service. Clark recalled TEAL to be the 'arty account', the 'cream of the accounts',<sup>5</sup> allowing creative freedom and quality printing. Haythornthwaite, Moore, Arthur Thompson and Linwood Lipanovic had been garnering international recognition for TEAL's visual identity and destination posters particularly, with examples selected for *Modern Publicity* from 1952,<sup>6</sup> and TEAL's playful graphic style became an ideal launching ground for Clark, whose work began appearing recognisably from 1953. The New Zealand–Fiji Douglas DC-6 Hibiscus Service from 1954, expanded TEAL's leisure market, providing a great opportunity for Clark to apply his extraordinary skills of caricature and setting, while his Pacific island themes were further lent an air of authenticity by an August 1955 familiarisation trip to Fiji. Vignettes for the *TEAL Flight Companion* magazine, provided to Hibiscus Service and Coral Route passengers, mimicked linocut / woodblock prints, as well as Fijian tapa cloth patterns. Also, his pineapples and coconut palms became persistent reminders of an exotic tropical paradise only hours from the nation's doorstep.

August, 1954. Page 5

# Tahiti via la route du corail

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TEAL Coral Route map designed by Keith S. 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd, published in TEAL's Your TEAL Flight Companion magazine, 1950s.

TEAL Hibiscus Service and Coral Route destination posters designed by Keith S. 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd, and silkscreen printed by Matt Chote & Co. 39 x 25 inches. 1955  
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TEAL Samoa Coral Route destination poster designed by Keith S 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd. Silkscreen printed by Matt Chote & Co. 39 x 25 inches. 1955.



Illustrations for a magazine article on Samoa, with Samoan caricatures, motifs and settings.

Clark's TEAL posters for the Hibiscus Service for Fiji and the Coral Route for Samoa and Tahiti appeared about 1955, and it is no surprise that Clark would catch the eye of *Modern Publicity* with 'Fiji—fly TEAL', a cheerful Fijian boy riding a turtle in the sea, which appeared in that annual's 1956 edition.<sup>7</sup> Though the image was used on brochures, the extent of the poster's distribution in New Zealand is unclear, and in later years it was reworked to promote Tahiti. 'French Tahiti—fly TEAL', showing a French rooster, was also particularly striking, and a distinct contrast in style to the Samoa and Fiji posters. Clark's known Australia posters present an idea of the lively cosmopolitan social life of Australian cities as a natural extension of good old New Zealand. TEAL ephemera such as these posters, once common and of the moment but now scarce, are considered classics of New Zealand travel advertising.



TEAL Tahiti Coral Route destination poster designed by Keith S. 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd. Silkscreen printed by Matt Chote & Co. 39 x 25 inches. 1955.



TEAL Australia destination poster designed by Keith S. 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd, 1950s. Clark Family Collection.

By 1958, Clark had moved to the advertising agency Carlton Carruthers du Chateau & King, working again with Lipanovic and Thompson on TEAL work. A special bond had formed between the 'Three Musketeers,' as they came to be known. Examples of their works were exhibited in the 1958 Auckland Society of Arts exhibition *Art in Advertising: An Exhibition for those who have an Interest in the Useful Arts....* with Clark presenting four works.<sup>8</sup> And success brought opportunity.

*'I found working in New Zealand immeasurably nicer than working in England, there was tremendous full employment and you could change jobs like that; you could pick and choose where you wanted to work....everybody was enormously helpful and I made many enduring friendships.'*<sup>9</sup>

Generally, stints at the agencies—Haines, Goldbergs and Dormer-Beck—lasted two to three years into the 1960s, supplemented with freelance work for agencies, the *Auckland Star* and the *New Zealand Herald*. Taking charge of the creative process, Clark worked on such accounts as Malthoid, Formica, Topper Brew, Weetbix, Formica, Duroid roofing, Durock sidings, Durolac paint, Chesdale cheese, Gray Bros and Dominion Breweries. His work in promoting DB Brown beer, whilst at Dormer-Beck, sought to break free of overseas influences by portraying the actual market, the drinking New Zealanders, as they were—an innovation it seems, as little has changed since.<sup>10</sup> As Clark put it:

*'At that time New Zealand advertising for beer struck me as being terribly amusing because there were rather bad drawings of people, usually gathered around a grand piano or in evening clothes, drinking beer. When you consider what drinking in New Zealand was like then with six o'clock closing, it was really hilarious. So I doodled around and produced an idea where I simply did drawings of people in what I considered normal situations, drinking beer, with about three lines of copy which I wrote. They accepted it and the campaign ran for five or six years.'*<sup>11</sup>

Regular television broadcasts from 1960 onwards, with images fundamental to the advertising medium, radically increased Clark's scope, and his Betty Crocker cake mix television commercial was one of the first three made in New Zealand:



Beers by the barbeque.

Illustration for an article about what happens when one tries to discuss linguistics instead of cars and real estate. 230 x 270mm *New Zealand Herald*. 26 January 1985. Clark Family Collection



Aotea Square  
270 x 320mm N.Z Herald. 22 March 1986.  
Clark Family Collection



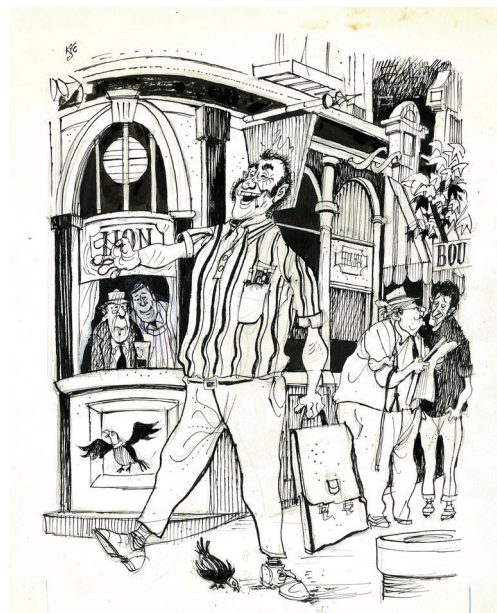
Kiwi Tourists in Japan  
230 x 260mm N.Z Herald. 21 December 1985.  
Clark Family Collection



On Grafton Bridge  
Nobby meets a stripper on Grafton Bridge, on her way back from buying blood capsules for a vampire act. She's visiting a friend in hospital.  
238 x 230mm. 8 August 1985.  
S Clark collection



Reading the South China Morning Post  
Illustration for an article about a lady reading a paper in the local library—wanting news of Hong Kong (or Honkers, as she called it).  
250 x 280mm N.Z Herald. 9 March 1985.  
Clark Family Collection

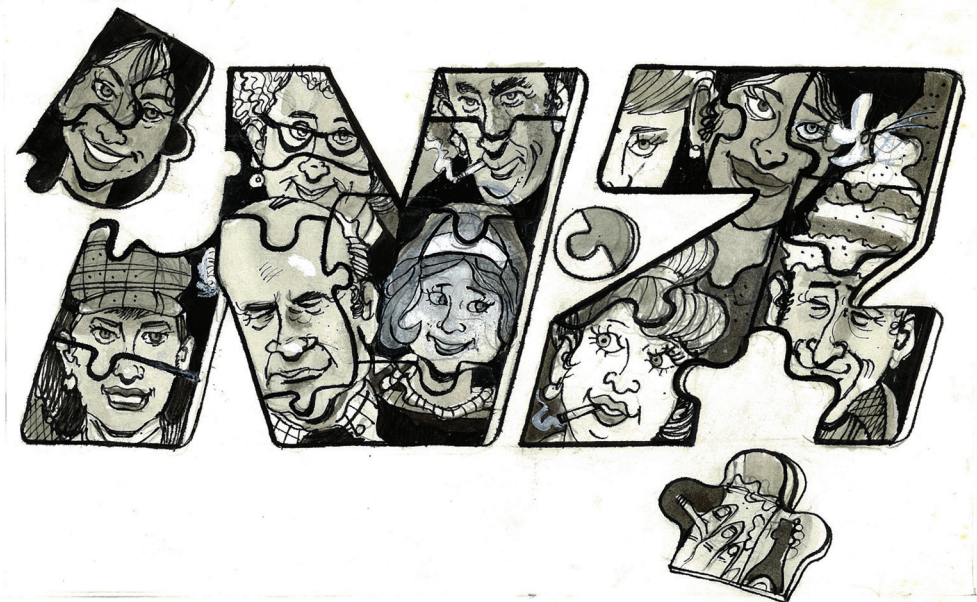


Vulcan Lane  
Nobby bumps into a former colleague who is now 'riding the crest of the video wave'.  
230 x 310mm N.Z Herald. 13 April 1985.  
Clark Family Collection





Music Hall Jingo  
175 x 215mm N.Z Herald. 26 July 1986.  
Clark Family Collection



Kiwi Jigsaw  
270 x 180mm. 28 September 1985.  
S Clark collection

*'As far as I knew there was only one animator around at that time and I decided that I would do the drawings and we would cheat by doing a close up and then drawing back. I did about sixty drawings and took them to the TV producer, then we rearranged how we would shoot them. It was really quite successful. I found the doing of the TV quite intriguing.'*<sup>12</sup>

In subsequent years Kolynos toothpaste and Chesdale cheese commercials also benefited from Clark's contributions.

Back with newspapers in the 1970s, Clark's work as an illustrator for the *Auckland Star* became somewhat permanent, rolling on to a regular *New Zealand Herald* column called 'Encounters' in the 1980s, of which, he recalled:

*'Whenever I was out drawing in Auckland, invariably someone would come up to talk to me. Very often what they told me, what they said, was very amusing. So I recorded it and did an illustration to go with it.'*<sup>13</sup>

He'd illustrated books for authors for years, including Stewart Kinross's *Please to Remember* (1963), Pat Booth's *Dear Chevvy* (1965), Mary McKay's children's readers (1974–75) and Bill Hohepa's *Fishing Book* (1976). Then his own *Auckland, their Auckland*, published in 1983 and *Nobby Clark's Auckland* in 1985, a remarkable and amusing body of tales, sketches and paintings recording the way it was then within that ever-changing city.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently he illustrated E.V. Sale's *Country Diary* (1987), Eirlys Hunter's *The Robber and the Millionaire* (1996), Richard Hadlee's *Hard Knocks and Caught Out* (1997), and Lew Goodman's *Jerry Attrick's Dictionary: Modern Words for Old-fashioned New Zealanders* (1999). Naturally there were also his paintings and exhibitions of his work.

Nobby Clark made a distinct mark with his art. His lively style, prodigious output and influence have ensured a deserved place in New Zealand's design, illustration and advertising history. He lived to see his life's work celebrated through a retrospective exhibition *Nobby Clark's Auckland*, at Auckland Library's Special Collections, in February–April 2007, curated by his son Simon Clark.<sup>15</sup>

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# The Influence of the Infomercial in New Zealand

Rosser Johnson

Keywords: # Infomercials # New Zealand television # Cultural history # Commercial speech # Media deregulation # Promotional culture

New Zealand television networks introduced infomercials (30 minute advertisements designed to appear as if they are programmes) in late 1993. Although infomercials date from the 1950s in the USA, they were unknown in this country and quickly came to be seen as a peculiarly “intense” form of hyper-commercial broadcasting. This article aims to sketch out the cultural importance of the infomercial by analysing historical published primary sources (from the specialist and general press) as they reflect the views and opinions that resulted from the introduction of the infomercial. Specifically, it outlines the three main areas where that cultural importance was located. It concludes by analysing the significance of the cultural impact of the infomercial, both within broadcasting and within wider society.

## INFOMERCIALS AND FREE TO AIR TELEVISION IN NEW ZEALAND

In the USA the infomercial form became widespread in the mid-1980s after the Federal Communication Commission removed the statutory maximum number of advertising minutes per hour of broadcast time.<sup>1</sup> Cable channels in particular required low-cost content to fill their schedules, and infomercials were attractive because they were delivered at no cost to the station. Typically, an infomercial promoted a product that was easily demonstrated, visually straightforward and relatively inexpensive.

In New Zealand the Fourth Labour Government deregulated broadcasting along very similar lines to the changes in the USA. In short, the end result was a system wherein the commercial nostrums of the market were raised to an unchallengeable dominance and public service ideals were sidelined or ignored. By the end of the 1980s New Zealand's was "one of the least regulated broadcasting environments in the world."<sup>2</sup> The result was a system where:

... there is no local content quota, or requirement to broadcast news or any other "informative" or "educative" programmes. Broadcasters may broadcast anything, as long as it does not contravene the broadcast standards or the censorship laws, and adheres to the notion of "balance".<sup>3</sup>

In practice, this meant that television networks were in the, perhaps enviable, position where the only practical limit on the amount of commercial material they could broadcast was the audience's willingness to continue watching. Here, it is important to note that infomercials were often found in the same timeslots across most, if not all, free-to-air channels. This makes perfect sense; infomercials were scheduled when audience numbers were too low to attract 'normal' commercial advertising – predominantly late nights and weekday mornings. Viewers were therefore not offered meaningful choice about what they could watch; if they wanted the television on during those times (for relaxation purposes perhaps), they had to watch the infomercial. Of course, it is also possible that (some) viewers chose to watch infomercials for their novelty or because they offered readily available solutions to everyday problems.

As with any new cultural product, the infomercial can be expected to have an influence within a local context (television, as

broadly understood) and a wider frame of reference (society as a whole). This influence and, specifically, how it manifests at the local and the wider level, can then be analysed and the significance of the infomercial "read back" into the context of the time.

In order to unpack the influence of the infomercial, it is necessary to outline the method through which data were collected. Two databases – *Newstext* and *Newsindex* – were searched for the term "infomercial" featuring in the text of the article (these databases covered New Zealand newspaper and magazine titles). Once the articles were identified, they were then accessed via the hard copy of each title. Duplicate articles were removed (duplicates were found because several newspapers might carry the same story). The search period was from 1993 to 2006.

Analysis of the articles showed that the influence of the infomercial manifested in three distinct areas. To some extent these areas overlapped chronologically; however, each began to be covered in the press at distinct times during the sample period.

## CRITICISMS OF BROADCASTING

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the extent of broadcasting "reform" after 1988, the infomercial was used as a cultural reference to connote certain – usually negative – results of deregulated broadcasting. The initial outlet was reviews of the infomercial format itself, with its style and content being used as a marker of a peculiar kind of consumerist Americanism:

Here's great news for all trash TV addicts - trash TV can perform a valuable public service function. How? you may ask. Because it can tell you, through the Infomercial Hour, of many essential products you didn't know you needed until the TV told you.<sup>4</sup>

Then there are the infomercials already filling up "dead" time on TV One and TV3. From cursory - and not to be repeated - research, infomercials seem to be made in Californian malls, around Californian pools or on Californian beaches. They consist of male and female presenters with glazed eyes and perpetual grins atop tanned and perfectly toned bodies telling

audiences of unspontaneously enthusiastic Hollywood hopefuls down on their luck about an extraordinary range of chrome and leather contraptions to flatten tummies, sharpen pectorals, tighten bottoms, and add rippling muscles to the upper arms. The fact that Americans remain among the most obese people anywhere may not be good news for advertisers depending on an infomercial future.<sup>5</sup>

The majority of cultural references linking television and infomercials were similarly negative. For instance, in 1994 the *New Zealand Listener* annual reader's poll found that the least favourite TV commercials were "any containing the phrase "But Wait there's more!" (33%),"<sup>6</sup> and one of the magazine's annual 'awards' – for most irritating show – was named 'The Suzanne Clip Award' after one of the first local products to be advertised on an infomercial.<sup>7</sup> However, the term 'infomercial' was not only used with reference to the worst excesses of the new mediascape. It was also used when referring to examples of 'public service' television – or what passed for it in New Zealand in the 1990s. The most obvious example was in March 1994 when the production house Communicado made ten infomercials as part of a campaign against domestic violence (the infomercials supported an hour-long documentary which screened on TV One).<sup>8</sup>

Diana Wichtel – the *New Zealand Listener* television critic – probably offered the most consistent referencing of the infomercial with respect to the wider television system. In 1995 she explicitly linked the infomercial to the inability of New Zealand broadcasting to fulfil non-commercial objectives in her criticisms of the Auckland version of the short-lived Horizon network:

A commercial interlude? Ye Gods, what have we been watching, *Macbeth*? Although, when it comes to tales told by idiots full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, you can't go past the infomercial. They say regional television is the ideal vehicle for expressing a sense of local identity. After a few hours of watching the amazing Slice Buster slice, and muscle-bound goons demonstrating the incredible Gravity Edge with free padded V bar, the sense you get of the identity of the Greater Auckland region is that it is much like being trapped in K-Mart.<sup>9</sup>

Wichtel deployed a similar analysis when reviewing the TVNZ's flagship news programme, *One News*:

Then there are the teasers for the weather, sport, *Holmes*, *Sportsnight* ... The first few nights there was so much selling of product going on you half expected to see Richard and Judy come back after the break wearing blue blockers and demonstrating the amazing abdominiser.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, such sentiments are noticeable primarily because they were unusual given the pro-market climate in New Zealand in the early 1990s and it is reasonable to assume that the *New Zealand Listener* was the only mainstream publication where these views would be expected to feature (because this was the only publication that regularly featured points of view that were critical of the growing neo-liberal consensus).

Nonetheless, as that decade progressed other critical voices within the New Zealand media began to develop the idea that the infomercial form might typify major shortcomings of the broadcasting system. Freelance journalists like Tom Frewen (on radio) and Paul Smith (in print) tried to mount a sustained critique of the consequences of the infomercial within the public sphere. Initially, this critique continued the link between infomercials and the composition of New Zealand broadcasting; for instance, Smith introduced his commentary on the new report by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Affairs (commissioned by the Ministry of Commerce, which, tellingly, was the government department "responsible" for TVNZ at the time):

Eek! Another broadcasting review. Run for the hills. But wait, as they say in infomercials, there's more, much more. The latest review gives real value for money, especially if you're short of a laugh.<sup>11</sup>

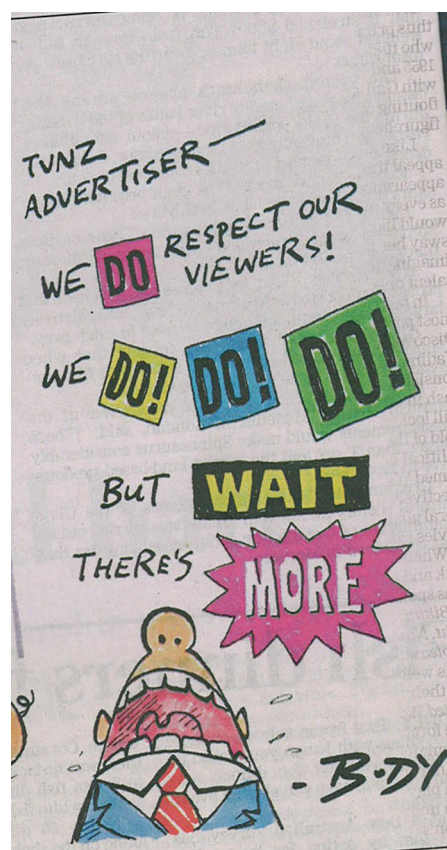
However, by the end of the 1990s, Smith was writing infomercial-themed criticisms that were explicitly linked to the deregulation of broadcasting and the infomercial was used as an example of the worst excesses of such policies.<sup>12</sup>

Other, less critical, voices aired more positive cultural references connecting the infomercial and the wider television system. In 2003 Julie Christie, founder of Touchdown Productions, identified the key 1990s trend as 'aspiration', which, again, implicitly links to the infomercial form, with its relentless focus on self-improvement.<sup>13</sup> That same year the most well-known infomercial catchphrase – "But Wait! There's More!" – was named as the second 'best ever' advertisement tag line.<sup>14</sup> And the infomercial continued to be a marker of "bad" television:

In the US or the UK, the late-night schedules offer edgy comedy, talkshows and comment. Here, we tend to get repeats of *Mercy Peak* and shows either too bad or too gay to play earlier. TV3 after midnight is just scary; Yea, though I walk through a valley of infomercials, I shall fear no evil, because some dotty televangelist will be along at dawn.<sup>15</sup>

The infomercial was also mobilised as a point of critique about the wider television system. For instance, the question of advertiser influence on TVNZ channels (largely played out as ‘the amount of advertising on television’) was satirised through using the most famous infomercial tagline ‘But Wait! There’s More!’:

Figure 1: Detail of ‘The Week’ cartoon, *New Zealand Herald*, February 18 2006.<sup>16</sup>



Notwithstanding the continued relevance of the infomercial to television in New Zealand, much of the initial sting left its referencing so that it became normalised as part of the unspoken reality.

## CONSUMER RIGHTS

After television (as broadly understood), the second major area in which infomercials came to be referenced within New Zealand culture in the 1990s was when the popular press publicised infomercials and / or infomercial companies as part of a consumer rights discourse (often in response to unethical or fraudulent business practices).<sup>17</sup> In 1998 Prestige Marketing was criticised for radio advertisements that featured unsubstantiated promotion of two ranges of vitamin pills – Super Fruit Plex and Super Veggie Plex – as “an easier way to get the benefits of fresh fruit and vegetables than the health sector’s preferred five plus a day.”<sup>18</sup> In 1999 one infomercial – for the *Taebo* martial arts workout – was so successful at entering the public consciousness that many fitness centres developed their own versions of the routine.<sup>19</sup> Although Quantum Prestige (the rights holder of *Taebo*) attempted to stop non-licensed versions,<sup>20</sup> it became clear that the routines themselves were not subject to copyright (although the name was) and the infomercial business was, ironically, accusing mainstream operations of the kinds of business practices they pioneered (that is, marketing substantively the same product as a competitor by using a different frontperson and / or name).<sup>21</sup>

There were, however, a number of more serious complaints about infomercial practices involving members of the public. As the national daily press reported, in April 2001:

Television consumer programme Fair Go broadcast a complaint this month from a man with cerebral palsy who found Mega Memory ineffective, but could not get a refund. His money was refunded only after Fair Go pursued his complaint.<sup>22</sup>

That same year a company part-owned by John Banks was reprimanded by the Advertising Standards Complaints Board (ASCB) for its claim that the “potentiated” bee pollen it marketed was superior to traditional rivals.<sup>23</sup> This is an interesting (and unusual) instance where infomercial jargon was found to be misleading. A year later Banks was censured by the ASCB for appearing in his own infomercial and posing as a satisfied customer without acknowledging that he owned fifty per cent of the company.<sup>24</sup>

## PARODY

The first parody of infomercial style advertising came in late 1995 when Saatchi & Saatchi promoted a variety of beer brands in commercial which featured “a stereotypical beer drinker using take-home packs of beer as exercise accessories.”<sup>25</sup> This was widely recognised as a creative and popular move within the advertising industry.<sup>26</sup> Light-hearted cultural visibility continued for the infomercial: in 1995 Prestige Marketing won the *Fair Go* worst advertisement award for the *Ab Isolator*,<sup>27</sup> in the 1996 general election campaign party political broadcasts were reviewed as “infomercials”,<sup>28</sup> and by 1997 commentators had begun to use the catchphrase “But Wait! There’s More!” to connote over-the-top products, services or events.<sup>29</sup> The important point here is that infomercial marketers and spokespeople exploited these opportunities (for instance, by accepting ‘worst advertisement’ awards) and promoted their business in a knowingly ironic manner.

By the later 1990s, however, this strategy seemed to have reached the end of its usefulness and cultural referencing of the infomercial became more hard-edged. In 1998 one of the few serious current events programmes on TV One – *Extreme Close Up* – was critiqued by one reviewer as ‘god’s infomercial’<sup>30</sup> and the nightly soap opera *Shortland Street* featured a storyline in which an infomercial was used to promote the hospital after a new ‘appearance medicine’ (i.e. plastic surgery) doctor joins the staff. Within the narrative of the show characters were unproblematically excited by prospect of appearing in the infomercial.<sup>31</sup> More mainstream uses of the infomercial as a marker of kitsch or parody continued throughout the 1990s. For instance, during the 1999 election campaign a journalist’s associating of the televised leaders’ debates with ‘infomercial’ seemed to be designed to refer to the innate untrustworthiness of politicians.<sup>32</sup> Despite the growing negativity associated with the infomercial, at least one organisation decided to consciously associate itself with the format through parody.

The Mental Health Foundation launched the first of its themed awareness weeks in 2000. This was the *absolutely nothing* promotion, and the goal was to encourage people to take daily micro-breaks to reduce stress.<sup>33</sup> Two years later the campaign was augmented with a series of short infomercials that played on TVNZ (as part of its community support policy) and were also available via the World Wide Web.<sup>34</sup> At least three separate commercials were produced, each of

which parodied different aspects of the infomercial genre (for instance, one featured a doctor who woodenly recited the benefits of doing “absolutely nothing”). These commercials were a clear parody of the infomercial style and used a number of obvious “infomercial” features:

The grabber opening – “Are you stressed out?”

Solving the problem with the product – the “marvellous new system”

Commodifying well-being through use of the product – “make you look years younger”

Relatively unsophisticated on-screen graphics

Abrupt sound drop outs

An ‘ordinary’ person (who waves to the ‘audience’)

Picture-in-picture framing

Before and after photographs

Interestingly, the presenter (“Bob Byers”) was played by an actor who had fronted the local version of the infomercial for *Motor Up* (an engine oil additive).

Apart from the obvious point that using a parody of the infomercial form for a generalist, public service announcement indicates that the Mental Health Foundation thought that its target audience would ‘know’ infomercials sufficiently to receive the underlying message, the interesting issue for my purposes is that this was a particularly short-lived campaign. By the middle of 2003 the Mental Health Foundation had removed the commercials from its web site and had linked [www.absolutelynothing.co.nz](http://www.absolutelynothing.co.nz) (which had been that the host page for the infomercials) back to the standard campaigns page on at web site (see Figure 2).

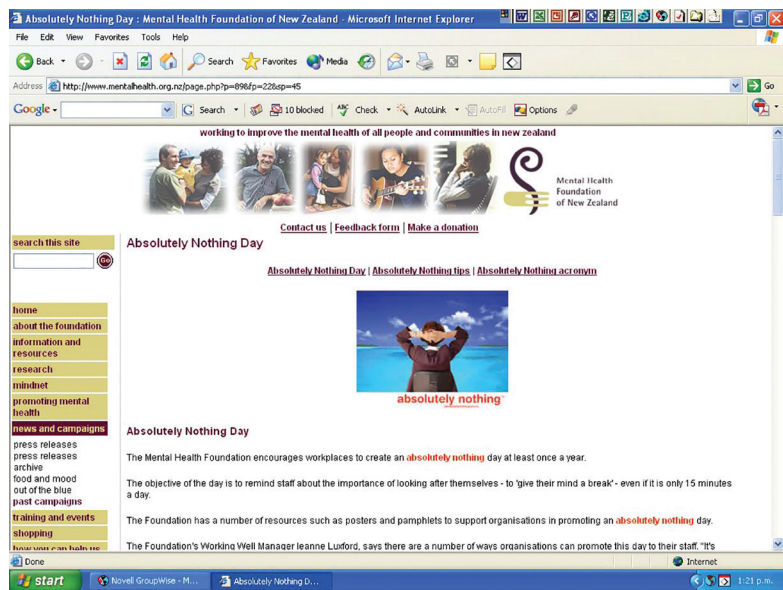


Figure 2: Absolutely Nothing webpage.<sup>35</sup>

The Mental Health Foundation was not willing to participate in this research and it was clear that the organisation had no interest in discussing or justifying its decision to use an infomercial parody for this campaign.<sup>36</sup> It is almost certain that the decision to use a mock infomercial style for this advertising was not taken lightly; however, it is probable that the campaign was pulled because of growing negative reactions to the infomercial form.

## DISCUSSION

On the surface the infomercial is an unlikely form of television to be particularly influential. It is generally cheaply made, tonally strident and qualitatively “low end”. Nonetheless, in New Zealand from late 1993 the infomercial became an important cultural marker both within television as broadly understood and within wider society. This is important for three reasons. First, in the arenas where the infomercial became deployed within criticisms of broadcasting, that deployment occurred on two distinct levels. On the one hand, the term itself became synonymous with particular, often cheaply made and / or overly enthusiastic, approaches to making programmes. On the other, however, it became possible to see the use of the term infomercial as

an attempt to begin and extend a line of argument about the wider broadcasting system. Here, one can point to those commentators and critics who tried to explicate the infomercial as symptomatic of the state of television in New Zealand after its deregulation. Given the general lack of wider public interest in such debates, this was perhaps a less successful or obvious influence of the infomercial; nevertheless, the critiques that did develop around it show some evidence of a rational argument being made within the public sphere.

Second, the practices of infomercial marketing companies necessitated some discussions about New Zealand’s consumer rights legislation and business practices within it. Here, there is a degree of hypocrisy (or at least double standards) in play. Infomercial marketing companies were very quick to resort to using the law to protect their interests and products when others sought to copy or adapt them (as in the *Taebo* case). Of course, this makes perfect sense; no business is likely to simply acquiesce when it is threatened by another. But the less than perfectly ethical practices of the infomercial marketing companies themselves (such as a business owner appearing in an advertisement for his own product) opened them up to considerable criticism. For this reason, the infomercial’s association with questionable or even illegal tactics and strategies manifested early in its history in New Zealand and this association remained and became more entrenched over time.

Third, the infomercial became sufficiently well known, perhaps even ubiquitous, that it could be used as the basis for parody and cultural appropriation. In the earlier 1990s this was limited to using the infomercial’s catchphrases and visual tropes within other forms of advertising, and to thereby play with genre expectations. By the later 1990s and into the 2000s, however, the parodic use of the infomercial had become more culturally important. Here, the Mental Health Foundation’s decision to base an entire public campaign on the infomercial form is particularly instructive. In seeking to use and build on infomercial structures and techniques the Mental Health Foundation, perhaps unwittingly, drew attention to the inherent contradiction with using such a marginal cultural form. Simply put, the potential benefits of referencing the infomercial form (such as its over-the-top style and relentlessly positive tone) were outweighed by its negative connotations.

Overall, therefore, the influence of the infomercial in New Zealand can be best described as negative. This is not to say that the infomercial was in itself a “bad thing”; rather, the cultural reactions to the form quickly coalesced around its undesirable and even deleterious



consequences. Although comparisons are beyond the scope of this article, the overall negativity attached to the infomercial in New Zealand was not unusual by international standards. What was unusual is the degree to which the infomercial became located within everyday discourses. Yet this is not surprising given the degree to which New Zealand broadcasting, and particularly television, was opened up to commercial logics during the 1990s. In an environment where there were (and continue to be) so few limits on the use of commercial speech the infomercial is, arguably, the most useful and the most honest metaphor for the mediascape as a whole.

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# "A Lucid lecturess": The Voices of New Zealand's Silent Cinema

Dr Peter Hoar

Keywords: # Silent Cinema # Voice # Film History  
# Audiences # Listening

This article attempts to record some of the faint echoes left from the days of silent cinema in New Zealand. Sound has been an integral part of cinematic experience in New Zealand since the very first exhibitions during 1895 but the acoustic dimension of film has been little explored by local historians and media scholars. Cinema audiences listened as much as they watched and these sounds were generated by many sources from gramophones to orchestras. This article concentrates on just one aspect of this richly polyphonic cinematic soundscape: the human voice. Through a discussion of the ways in which lecturers, actors, and audiences used their voices as films were played, this article recovers important aspects of how films were experienced in New Zealand before the arrival of synchronised sound and pictures during the late 1920s.

It is a cliché to write that it is a cliché that silent film was never silent. But both clichés are true. Film was never a silent medium although its silences might be just as important as its sounds at various times and places.<sup>1</sup> There is a large and increasing volume of scholarly work on the wide range of sonic practices that were typically part of cinema-going before the advent of synchronised sound.<sup>2</sup> But the history of New Zealand cinema is something of a mime show in that very little attention has been paid to the sounds of cinema in general let alone those of the silent era. As an example, the latest general survey of New Zealand cinema makes only passing references to audio and these are mainly about the arrival of synchronised sound (the Talkies) during the late 1920s.<sup>3</sup> This is part of a wider pattern of deafness on the part of cinema studies in general with regard to sound.<sup>4</sup> But the rise of Sound Studies over the last twenty years has seen scholars across a variety of disciplines turn their attentions to the important roles of audio in history, cultures, and media.<sup>5</sup> It is no longer possible to describe cinema or television as 'visual media' and simply ignore the important and vital roles that sounds play in their construction and reception. The screens we are surrounded with are as much audio devices as visual and scholars must take this into account if they are to grasp old and new media fully.

During the silent era local film viewers were exposed to a rich variety of sounds as they watched the flickering images projected in theatres, churches, town halls, cinemas and wherever else a projector might be set up. Film exhibitors used a wide range of techniques and technologies to generate sounds that filled the acoustic spaces around the films. These included orchestras, lecturers, pianos, actors, audience members, kazoos, wind machines and anything else that could make sound.<sup>6</sup> It was one experience to watch a film such as *Quo Vadis* (1913) in a plush theatre with an orchestra and choir performing the especially composed score that went with it.<sup>7</sup> It was quite another to see the same film in a school hall with a pianist improvising music to suit the action on the screen.

The range and variety of these experiences contradicts the idea of cultural modernity as a series of mass produced and standardised experiences or a 'culture industry'.<sup>8</sup> The silent films enjoyed by New Zealanders were mass produced copies of images but the sounds heard with these films were anything but. Considering silent cinema only as moving pictures ignores the important roles sounds played in local experiences of this emblematic technology of modernity. Far from being the production and consumption of mass-produced and identical

experiences, adding sound to the mix makes local experiences of modernity varied, lumpy, and uneven. This article adds to this lumpiness through a discussion of the many ways in which human voices were important parts of cinema for New Zealanders during the so-called silent era.

The human voice played varied and surprising roles in silent films — from bare description to poetic recitation — from the first appearance of moving pictures in New Zealand. The first film exhibitors in New Zealand used their voices to describe both the equipment and the action on the screen. The vocal accounts given by exhibitors, along with the written accounts, explained the machines and helped to familiarise them. The films were not seen as self-explanatory. The lecturer might expound on the technology being used and also explain what the moving pictures depicted. During his 1896 exhibitions, J.F. MacMahon 'announced the subjects' of the films while a Mr J. Margery operated the equipment.<sup>9</sup> Newspaper accounts of the technology seem to have been common in the very early years of film exhibitions and served to familiarise the curious with the details of the equipment. Such accounts were often part of the publicity associated with the exhibitions.<sup>10</sup> The explanations of the exhibitors seem to have soon moved from descriptions of the technology to descriptions of the projected scenes.

Women also worked with the new technology of moving pictures, which had not been the case with the earliest phonograph exhibitions. The moving pictures were shown in theatrical contexts where women were established as performers so the moving pictures became another element of stage work. The men and women who described the moving pictures were versatile entertainers. The Christchurch Kinematograph Syndicate toured New Zealand through 1899–1900. Typical of the itinerant film shows of the time, the Syndicate featured several singers, comedians, lantern slides and musicians as well as a variety of kinematograph films including scenes of the South African War. This was a varied night of entertainment of which the films were just one part and during which the performers took on various roles. Harry Baxter, a well-known and popular singer, 'announced' and explained the films.<sup>11</sup> As some films were played, Baxter combined both roles of announcer and singer. One reviewer commented on the scene of a troopship leaving for war, 'the effect of which is enhanced by Mr Baxter's singing of an appropriate chorus while the picture moves across the screen'.<sup>12</sup> The sounds that were heard with the Syndicate's films were not continuous and were made by the voice, either as

commentary or as song delivered by a versatile entertainer.

Women also participated with great success as the principal attractions of such tours. In 1900 the Happy St. Georges Company showed kinematograph films including '4000 ft. of animated pictures of the *Passion Play*, with a young lady lecturess', and also offered the traditional repertoire of singer, lantern slides, dancers and variety turns.<sup>13</sup> This 'young lady lecturess' was Nena Manning and she was an able singer. Her repertoire included *Oro Pro Nobis*, *The Lost Chord* and the 'pathetic song' *Little Hero*, all of which were illustrated with slides and were well received.<sup>14</sup> As versatile a performer as Harry Baxter, she also described the film of the Oberammergau Passion Play that was the company's drawcard. Her descriptions seem to have been as appreciated as her singing. One reviewer noted that her 'distinct delivery and grasp of elocution materially added to the pleasure and interest in the entertainment'.<sup>15</sup> Another described Manning as 'a lucid lecturess'.<sup>16</sup>

The announcing roles of Baxter and Manning raise some interesting questions about what they said, how much they said and what their words meant to the audience. The sequences of the war films and the *Passion Play* were published in newspapers and the broad outlines of what the films showed may well have been known to the audience in advance, particularly the events of the *Passion Play*.<sup>17</sup> Did the speakers say only a few brief phrases that gave such details as names, locations or short descriptions? Manning was described as prefacing each view with 'explanatory remarks' which implies that she did not talk all through the pictures but rather set the scene for the viewers so that they could follow the action without distraction.<sup>18</sup> The South African War films often provoked noisy audience responses. Faced with such reactions, speakers such as Baxter may well have struggled to be heard and perhaps made only brief remarks. What was said or left unsaid may have varied from audience to audience and indicates how varied the experiences of early film might be.

The rise of fictional narrative films during the early 1900s called for more complex and, at times, continuous commentaries from film announcers to match the more complex plot structures. These longer films, both comic and serious, went beyond the 'emphasis on display rather than storytelling' that characterised the early 'cinema of attractions'.<sup>19</sup> The rise in popularity of such so-called 'picture dramas' in New Zealand, as elsewhere, was noted by one writer in connection with the activities of the actor Alfred Boothman.<sup>20</sup> Boothman was an Australian actor who was popular in New Zealand in the early 1910s. One of his main activities was as a film announcer but he seems

to have gone far beyond the short scene setting that Manning and Baxter had done. The Australian-made film *For the Term of His Natural Life*, a dramatisation of the popular book by Marcus Clarke, was very popular in New Zealand during 1910. At about one hour in duration and with many scene changes and plot elements, the picture was praised by reviewers for its stirring cinematography and ambitious scale.<sup>21</sup> Boothman's role in this production was to narrate the events that unfolded on screen.<sup>22</sup> As one reviewer wrote, Boothman 'describ[ed] the main features of the drama'.<sup>23</sup> Boothman carried on narrating films until 1914. He was described as 'speaking the dialogue' for the 'stirring' film *The Kelly Gang* in 1910. A reviewer commended Boothman's 'clear, expressive voice' and noted that his 'splendid oratorical efforts' were admired by the audience before concluding that 'to have the tragic story of the Kellys explained as the pictures were thrown on the screen was to make one feel that the stirring events being portrayed were being enacted in the flesh at the moment'.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, for this reviewer at least, Boothman's spoken commentary added to the images on the screen. But just what was added is unclear.

The words used in conjunction with Boothman's performance – 'describing', 'explaining', 'telling' – conceal as much as they reveal. Did he describe scenes and actions or did he say things that might have been said by the characters? Did he do both? What did the 'explaining' of the pictures consist of and how did his 'oratorical effects' contribute to the realism felt by the *Argus* reviewer? It seems probable that Boothman worked from scripts but without these scripts it is impossible to recover just what he, or other such announcers and actors, may have said. We do not know whether they improvised to suit local conditions or if different speakers used the same scripts. The range of choices indicates the variety of possible experiences with early cinema. The moving images looked the same wherever they were screened but there was nothing standardised about the sounds that went with them.

One later performer in New Zealand who did leave a script for the historian to consult was Barrie Marschel. His 15 stanza poem about Gallipoli, *The Kid From Timaru*, was popular in New Zealand during the First World War and was filmed in 1917. This one-reel feature showed the events of the poem and Marschel toured the country reciting the verse in time with the action on screen. Marschel had some experience as a film lecturer, having provided 'an explanatory lecture' to a 1914 film biography (an early 'biopic') of Queen Victoria.<sup>25</sup> *The Kid From Timaru* film was very popular in New Zealand and was described as a 'poem picturised'.<sup>26</sup> The poem had been popularised in theatres as a recitation

piece.<sup>27</sup> Marschel's touring version was in some ways an extension of the theatrical 'one-hander' shows during which a solo actor presents a piece.<sup>28</sup> In this case, however, Marschel presented an entertainment using the popular modern technology of cinema to create a suitable backdrop for his recitation.



Figure 1.1: The poster for *The Kid From Timaru* promised stirring images involving '5,000 New Zealand soldiers' and a recreation of the landing at Gallipoli. But the words spoken by the man who wrote the poem were also billed as a major drawcard for filmgoers.

Eph-A-  
CINEMA-1918-01.  
Alexander Turnbull  
Library, Wellington,  
New Zealand. [http://  
natlib.govt.nz/  
records/32200240](http://natlib.govt.nz/records/32200240)

Marschel claimed to have written the poem after reading a soldier's letter that described the exploits of a young man from Timaru. Some have identified the 'Kid' as being based on James Hagerty who was a famous boxer originally from Timaru and who died at Gallipoli on 27 August 1915 but this is now disputed.<sup>29</sup> The poem uses a ballad structure and simple rhymes that make it easy to remember and understand when heard rather than read.

And when the fight was over and each had done his part,  
And felt a man and soldier, with aching eye and heart,  
I searched among the wounded for the fellow that I knew,  
I turned one over on the sand — 'twas Kidd from Timaru.

He'd carried in his Captain, almost dying through the wrack,  
Of smoke and fire of battle; but just as he'd got back,  
A Turkish sniper "pink'd" him but the bullet went clean through,  
And when he's well they'll hear again from Kidd of Timaru.<sup>30</sup>

The impact of the war and the sentimental and heroic nature of Marschel's story made the show very popular.<sup>31</sup> As with the case of the popular Boothman's 'descriptions' and 'explanations', Marschel's feature length vocal performance was an important attraction along with the pictures. These types of silent cinema required close listening from their audience members.

Some spoken film shows were intended to do more than entertain and inform. Moving images became an important part of the lecturing involved in popular education and self-improvement, as films became popular adjuncts to the already familiar lantern slides.<sup>32</sup> Lecturers often used films to both emphasise their messages and attract listeners. The New Zealand Salvation Army was quick to take up films as part of their struggle against sin in general, and drunken sin in particular. Major Joseph Perry of the Salvation Army made many films in New Zealand and toured them throughout the early 1900s in the service of the Army's 'Good Fight'.<sup>33</sup> These shows combined band music, lantern slides and moving pictures.<sup>34</sup> Viewers seemed to admire the variety of pictures shown along with the music from the highly drilled musicians.<sup>35</sup> In fact, some may have felt the moving pictures to be far more entertaining than the lectures that accompanied them.

Figure 1.2 shows a contemporary light-hearted view of the relative attractions of improving lectures and moving pictures. While many may have heard lectures such as the Salvation Army's as uplifting

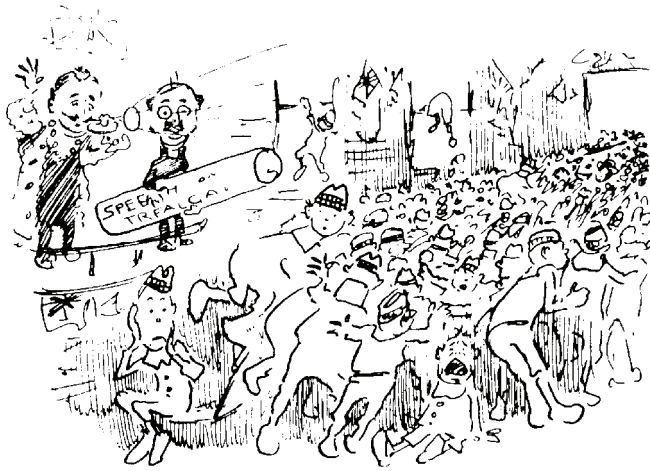


Figure 1.2: The caption reads: 'Cadet (at the Drill Hall, after the pictures had been rung off for speeches): Get, boys, get! They think they've got us here to work off a prohibition lecture on us. It's deadly'. Any moving pictures were far more interesting than any improving lecture for some New Zealanders.

*New Zealand Observer* (NZO), 28 October 1905, p.12.

*Cadet (at the Drill Hall, after the pictures had been rung off for speeches): Get, boys, get! They think they've got us here to work off a Prohibition lecture on us. It's deadly*

adjuncts to moving pictures, some may have been more interested in the pictures than the sounds of these cinematic events. The cartoon also humorously illustrated that the message of temperance, as delivered through multimedia exhibitions of sound and moving vision, may have sometimes fallen on deaf ears.

It is difficult to know just how lecturers incorporated films into their presentations. Did they speak continuously over the films? Were the films before, after or during their speeches? Magic lantern slides could be held as long as needed to make a point but film images continuously flowed past the audience. The moving pictures could not be paused as the film might melt or burst into flame if stopped too long. This made long explanations about particular scenes or moments very difficult to manage while the film played.

The roles of lecturers and actors in narrating films in New Zealand and elsewhere seem to have died away by the early 1910s although the tradition became well established in other countries.<sup>36</sup> This decline may be attributed to the rise of intertitles and the increasingly sophisticated visual narratives employed by film-makers.<sup>37</sup> But an equally important factor was the music that was used to underpin, amplify and comment on the meanings of the pictures.

Some musical practices of the silent film era bridged the gap between musician and audience by including the film viewers in the music. Illustrated songs were one form of such acoustic inclusiveness. These had been popular since the mid-1890s and involved lantern slides of lyrics and suitable scenes illustrating songs.<sup>38</sup> Most film projectors had

attachments that allowed them to project slides so these songs were common features of the early film shows in New Zealand that were parts of variety acts.<sup>39</sup> Illustrated songs often involved audience participation at least during the chorus sections of the music. In 1905, Major Perry's Biorama Company attracted over a thousand people to Greymouth's Opera House with films, the Biorama Band and some singers. The songs included sentimental favourites such as *The Forger's Daughter* and *Please Mr Conductor Don't Put Me Off the Train*, and featured 'simply beautiful' illustrations with 'the chorus of each song thrown on the screen and the vast audience joined in the singing'.<sup>40</sup> The audience at New Plymouth's Opera House enjoyed the films of Richardson's Entertainers in 1908. This show also featured illustrated songs, 'a form of instructive entertainment that is growing in popularity', and the audience 'heartily joined in the chorus to *Red Wing* and *The Man Who Fights the Fire*'.<sup>41</sup> The slides were made in America and Britain and this occasionally undermined the effects of the songs when they were performed in New Zealand. One reviewer noted that 'soldier songs of the Goodbye, I'm-going-to-get-shot style are always illustrated in New Zealand with American soldier pictures which is a big mistake'.<sup>42</sup>

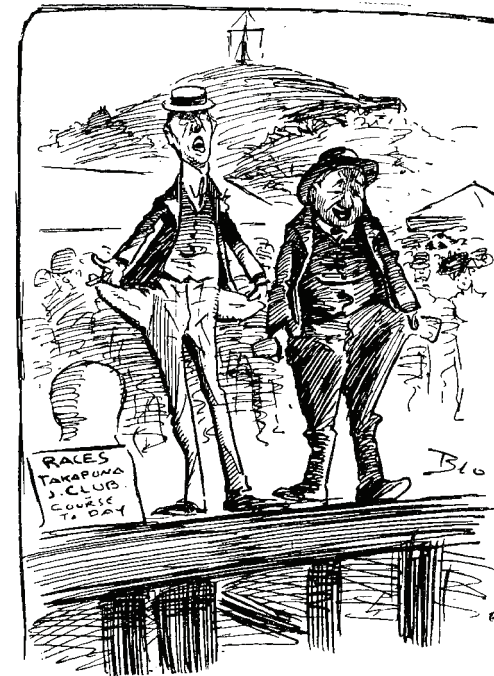


Figure 1.3: A cartoon that played on the popularity of illustrated songs. Two out of pocket but happily liquored racing punters sing as they wait for a ferry from Takapuna to Auckland. The song title referred to a contemporary comedic hit based on a sentimental traditional ballad.

*New Zealand Observer*, 7 December 1907, p.5.

MODERN SONGS ILLUSTRATED.

"We Parted on the Shore," as sung by distressed punters coming from the Takapuna races.

Despite this, the illustrated songs were popular in New Zealand. Illustration 1.3 shows a contemporary cartoon that played on their popularity.

The song *We Parted on the Shore* was a traditional ballad that the popular comic singer Harry Lauder made into a hit by adding to it a large slab of faux Scottish patter and outrageously rolled rrrrrr's at every chance. Lauder released sheet music versions, recordings and even made a short synchronised sound Chronophone film of the song.<sup>43</sup> *We Parted on the Shore* had also been part of the *Mother Goose* show in 1907 that had been very popular in New Zealand. It used slides to illustrate the song.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the cartoon played on the sentimental nature of many illustrated songs. Parting lovers, orphaned children and family life were favourite topics for many illustrated songs; the titles mentioned above all fall into one of these categories. Even the comedy songs tended not to feature racing and drinking as their topics. The songs were generally 'familiar, sentimental nostalgic, patriotic'.<sup>45</sup> The cartoon undermined this by reframing a local scene involving drink and gambling as an illustrated song. Both the choice of song title and mention of 'modern songs illustrated' played on the cartoon's viewers' familiarity with both contemporary technology, and the latest hit music, while at the same time gently satirising both.

Illustrated songs encouraged audience participation and noise. This was controlled participation. The singers on stage took the lead with the audience usually joining in the chorus. The words heard were those that were projected on the screen. However, not all audience noises could be controlled so easily.

An article by Reynold Ayers of Wanganui that appeared in a New Zealand film magazine in 1921 listed some 'don'ts for movie goers'. Many of these prohibitions were to do with noise. The article's author enjoined people not to talk too loudly, whistle, stamp their feet when the projector broke down, hiss or jeer villains, eat sweets noisily, shriek with laughter, pass remarks if a child cried in the theatre, and finally, not to argue with their neighbour about an actor's abilities and clothes.<sup>46</sup> Ayers' article, while light hearted, indicated that audience noise could be a problem during silent films. By the time the article was written, most films were being seen in dedicated cinemas, and the protocols that had applied to audience behaviour at variety shows in theatres no longer applied. In fact, the behaviour suggested in the article was more appropriate to a concert of classical music or a 'serious' play rather than the vaudeville milieu of early film viewing in New Zealand.

It is hard to recover the sounds made by New Zealand film audience members before the Talkies.<sup>47</sup> Applause, laughter, whistles, and uproar when projection equipment broke down seem to have been just some of the elements involved. Mark Griffen remembered silent films in Foxton as noisy affairs with heroes cheered and villains 'soundly hooted' to the point where the manager would stop the show whereupon the 'return to quietness was instantaneous'.<sup>48</sup> Film screenings at Kawhia included people singing all through the films and abuse aimed at anyone who blocked the screen.<sup>49</sup> Children's matinees were often very noisy from start to finish and the cinema pianist Henry Shirley used them mainly as opportunities to practice the piano.<sup>50</sup> Silent film audiences were sometimes very noisy. But this depended on the context.

New Zealand audiences who watched films of the South African War in 1900 tended to be quite vocal. Audience members at these screenings often reacted loudly to the images with 'young patriots distinguishing themselves by their expressions of approval of friends and disapproval of their enemies'.<sup>51</sup> Cheers, boos, applause, catcalls and singing were often part of these shows.<sup>52</sup> Just 16 years later, films of the fighting during the Battle of the Somme were shown in New Zealand to audiences who seem to have sat in silence. The British audiences who saw the films about the Battle of the Somme observed an uncharacteristic silence for much of it although some scenes provoked some cheering.<sup>53</sup> It is clear that music was heard during New Zealand screenings of the films but there is little evidence to suggest how loud or quiet local audiences were when they saw these films.<sup>54</sup> Given that the First World War lasted much longer than the South African War and that New Zealand sustained very high casualties, it may be that the vaunted realism of the Somme films led to them being watched in a sort of respectful silence similar to that observed by British audiences. Another factor that might lead to such an assessment is that by 1916, films were mainly seen in dedicated cinemas rather than in variety theatres or halls. A 1915 account of a New Zealand cinema described the audience following 'the drama with breathless interest'.<sup>55</sup>

By the early 1920s it seems that silence on the part of cinema audiences may have been expected. However, the need for Ayers to draw attention to this, even with a light tone, indicates that this was not always observed. Whether it was music, sound effects, lectures or the people around them, New Zealand filmgoers during the silent era had much to listen to. There was a wide variety of sounds produced in a wide variety of ways and these were often different from one screening

to another. Improvisation often produced the sounds of silent cinema. In one sense, this means that musicians like Henry Shirley and countless other cinema pianists played without a score as they improvised to the images on the screen. Even if there was a score orchestras would often have to modify it to suit their musical resources. But improvisation was also part of the experience as films became part of everyday life. Should audience members make sounds? When? Should sounds by the musicians be applauded? How were the sounds related to the moving images? These are just some of the questions raised by the sounds of the silent cinemas.

This exploration of just one area of the extremely varied soundscape of early cinema is intended to question the writing of local film history as a triumphant progress from flawed, primitive, silent beginnings to a sophisticated and perfected present with the advent of the talkies positioned as a revolutionary lynchpin. The human voice is just one strand from the rich polyphony of New Zealand's cinematic history and there remains much more yet to be hearkened to.

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