

## Analogue sourcecode

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Evolving out of location and architecture like one of Billy Apple's floorplan installations. Creeping like geometric ivy up walls and into locked rooms, cupboards, and other implied spaces where like Egyptian or Mayan tomb inscriptions the public will never see them. A code suggesting a syntax just out of reach like some kind of logographic, asemic script supplied by aesthetic intuition. Shannon Novak's tape work *Deep Concinnity* is a psychogeographical, Situationist visual/spatial score written for Te Tuhi, Auckland. Shape and colour punctuate and accent specific, often overlooked sites and utilitarian features (not unlike the Brutalist movement in architecture) around the building, playfully taunting the curated spaces and their intimations of inviolable white cube *cordon sanitaire*. The work negotiates the etiquette of institutional space as much as it does the boundaries of sound and vision.

"Concinnity" is a critical term referring to the studied and harmonious arrangement or fitting together of the different parts of a literary or artistic undertaking. We can take that as a cue to see the relationship between the tape patterns and the building as analogous to Opera composer Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* – the total, universal work of art, with Te Tuhi as an holistic gestalt of parts; a living, organic thing animated by the unexperienced sensory information that the codes on the walls represents. As T. S. Eliot puts it in his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", 'as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen'. Parallels may be drawn with Charles K. Bliss' Blissymbolics or Sematography still used to teach communication to profoundly disabled children today, or perhaps we may consider these patterns a kind of analogue version of "augmented reality" with its digital overlays of data enrichment.

Novak is a synesthete, perceiving shapes as sounds, aligning him with artists like Hieronymus Bosch (for whom Hell was a place of musical instruments as torture devices), Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Theo Schoon (moving between visual rhythms and those of his Balinese drums), Michael Smither (a painter and composer), Wosene Worke Kosrof, and Timothy C. Ely in creating a visual iteration of other sensory experiences in the way that that musical notation does. It's reoccurrence in visual arts perhaps suggests that it isn't as uncommon as might be supposed. Russian composer Alexander Scriabin was particularly interested in the psychological effects of sound and colour experienced simultaneously to create 'a powerful psychological resonator for the listener'. To that end Novak strives to be the complete artist as much as possible.

Novak's elegant, enigmatic sigils in tape reiterate the music that the space sings to him in a holistic, immersive, simultaneous, epiphanic experience. Plato in the *Symposium* describes synesthesia as the penultimate step before the complete and absolute gnosis of total Beauty in all its multiplicity, and immaterial, non-verbal, abstract beauty. Novak seems to be trying to find a way of conveying that totality, or at the very least short-circuiting Ludwig Wittgenstein's observation that it is impossible for one person to communicate their inner state, their inscape, to another person. Wittgenstein was no stranger to architectural space himself, having been heavily involved in the design of his sister's house in Vienna. When the house was nearly finished he caused vast expense and delay by insisting that a ceiling be raised thirty millimetres so the room had the exact proportions he wanted.

The theoretical component of *Deep Concinnity* draws heavily on Richard Artschwager's exploration of the problems of the perception of space, time and movement, particularly his "blps" (a term he had heard used in reference to the phosphor dots on a military submarine's sonar screen) – the cartouche-like objects he installed as punctuation around public spaces to draw attention to the structural elements, the objects, and locations that the public tended to overlook. There is also a resonance with the name "Te Tuhi" conferred on the centre by the Ngai Tai Iwi, referring to the Maori explorer-ancestor Manawatere. Landing before the Tainui waka at Cockle Bay in Howick, Manawatere made his mark ("tuhi") in red ochre ("karamea") on the trunk of a pohutukawa tree as a sign for the Polynesian settlers to follow. Likewise Novak is making his own mark for others to see and know the lay of the land.

Ultimately *Deep Concinnity* is a dialogue (or perhaps "duet" is a better word) with the viewer. The philosopher and essayist Michel de Montaigne compared the act of conversation with a tennis match, lobbing the ball to your partner and them smashing it back. This is interactive art in analogue, the problem being that we, the viewer, are not perfectly tuned in to the frequency being transmitted. The audience perceives a syntax and meaning in *Deep Concinnity*, but like Marfisa at the Fountain of Merlin in the *Orlando furioso*, is unable to comprehend it. The connoisseur will adopt the philosopher Richard Rorty's stance of the Ironic Pragmatist; whether or not there is an actual absolute Truth is irrelevant because the really interesting thing is the processes that thinkers adopt to try and get there. But are we looking at Te Tuhi or is Te Tuhi looking at us? Who is reading who?

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Andrew Paul Wood (BAhon Otago, PGDipMusStud Massey, MA merit Cant, PhD Cant.) is an art and cultural historian, writer, educator, broadcaster, and translator. His areas of speciality are contemporary New Zealand and Asia-Pacific art, photography, architecture, design, and the cultural contribution of European immigrants to New Zealand. He has written for *The Press*, the *New Zealand Listener*, *Urbis*, *Architecture New Zealand*, *Landfall*, the *Sydney Review of Books* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. His recent books have included *Under New Stars: Poems of the New Zealand Exile* (2012) and *To the Germans* (2013), translations of German-Jewish refugee poet Karl Wolfskehl with Friedrich Voit of Auckland University; and *Quietus: observations of an altered city*, a psycho-geography of post-quake Christchurch (with photographer Doc Ross). He is currently working on a collected works of Wolfskehl, a book on the still life photographs of Fiona Pardington, a biography of the Indo-Dutch émigré artist Theo Schoon, and a media project on the history of the pavlova.