

# Surplus Reality

## Nova Paul

6 May – 11 June 2017

**THE PHYSICS ROOM** CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

as nomadic animal crosses the line, moving beyond those linear ‘boundary riders of thought’<sup>xii</sup>.

Attention to speeds and slownesses<sup>xiii</sup> is achieved by making ‘the camera a listener’<sup>xiv</sup> following the advice of Māori filmmaker and theorist the late Barry Barclay. Jacques Derrida’s portmanteau *différance* encourages that we differ *and* defer, taking our time, never quite arriving, but floating downstream towards a ‘possible that is presently impossible’, in a zone which he describes as ‘space’s becoming-temporal and time’s becoming-spatial’<sup>xv</sup>. Here, time itself ‘is expressed in terms of colour’<sup>xvi</sup>. By superimposing three exposures of the same subject the flow of time’s stream is tripled, creating a temporal heterogeneity or ‘thick data’ of glorious misregistrations, as a moving, morphing, technicolour evocation of life in the present moment; a present which is layered-up with past and future in a cosmic, pregnant unity.

Dr. Tessa Laird

Excerpts from “Decolonising Colour? Ontologies of Chromatic Violence”, Third Text, <http://www.thirdtext.org/decolonising-colour-forum>, May 2017

<sup>i</sup>Julia Kristeva, ‘Giotto’s Joy’, *Desire in Language*, translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, 221.

<sup>ii</sup>Craig Baldwin, *Spectres of the Spectrum*, Other Cinema, 1999.

<sup>iii</sup>Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, translated by Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis. Sydney: Power Publications, 1995, 83.

<sup>iv</sup>Michael Taussig, *What Colour is the Sacred?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, 70.

<sup>v</sup>Michael Taussig, ‘What Colour is the Sacred?’ *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Autumn 2006), 31.

<sup>vi</sup>Taussig, *What Colour is the Sacred?* 23, (italics in the original). Taussig is here talking of psychedelic posters from the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco in the 1960s, appropriate to the title of Paul’s film which is lifted from a psychedelic Beatles’ anthem.

<sup>vii</sup>Natasha Eaton, *Colour, art and empire: visual culture and the nomadism of representation*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 4. Eaton sets up a fascinating, troubled criss-crossing weave, between nomad colour and the sedentary tendencies of colonial British rule in India.

<sup>viii</sup>Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ‘Introduction: Ecology’s Rainbow’, *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013, xxix.

<sup>ix</sup>Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy*, Suffolk, Paladin, 1970.

<sup>x</sup>Arun Saldanha, *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, 6; 12.

<sup>xi</sup>David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, London: Reaktion, 2000, 61.

<sup>xii</sup>Taussig, *Critical Inquiry*, op. cit., 32.

<sup>xiii</sup>Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2009, 270.

<sup>xiv</sup>Barry Barclay, *Our own image*, Auckland: Longman Paul, 1990, 17.

<sup>xv</sup>Jacques Derrida, ‘Difference’, *Margins of Philosophy*, Trans. Allan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 278; 283.

<sup>xvi</sup>Arthur Cantrill, ‘Waterfall’, *Cantrill’s Filmnotes*, #45/46, October, 1984, 2-4.

The Physics Room and Nova Paul wish to thank Tessa Laird for allowing excerpts from *Dy(e)ing is Not-Dying: Nova Paul’s experimental colour film polemic* to be printed for this occasion.

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‘you’re apt now and then to get a bit of lime-green in with your rose’  
from Gravity’s Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon,

Colour can be thought of as light’s consciousness, its self-awareness via diffraction, a liberating natal violence that Julia Kristeva calls a ‘shattering of unity’<sup>i</sup>. Rainbows spilling from prisms and alchemical hues seeping from black coal tar both figure colour as differentiation and as return of the repressed: colour as hauntology, or, as the maverick of underground collage cinema Craig Baldwin once put it, ‘spectres of the spectrum’<sup>ii</sup>. The affective capacity of colour film to coax these shades out of hiding and into plain sight is the striking parlour trick of Māori artist Nova Paul (Ngāpuhi, Aotearoa).

Paul challenges documentary norms via colour, embedding her politics in what Laura U. Marks has called the ‘skin’ of the film, (a skin can refer to any membranous surface, but the French for celluloid, *pellicule*, also literally means skin). By choosing to focus on an extra-ocular sensorium, Marks recalls Félix Guattari’s ‘worldly complexion’<sup>iii</sup> – a complex of senses including skin and colour, and a complex of surfaces in, on, and through which this world comes into being – in this case, the skin of the film.

Michael Taussig wrote that coloured film is an alchemical process engendering magical results, and colour is an entity with its own volition. When discussing the ‘colour walks’ of William Burroughs and Bryon Gysin, he suggests that it is colour *itself* that walks. Perhaps influenced by Walter Benjamin’s assertion that ‘red is a butterfly’<sup>iv</sup> that alights on objects, Taussig declares that ‘colour is an animal’<sup>v</sup>, and it is ‘thanks to colour’ and its pigmental peregrinations, that *‘form undoes itself’*<sup>vi</sup>. Similarly, in her book about colour during British colonial rule in India, Natasha Eaton argues that colour is nomadic<sup>vii</sup>, so it follows that any examination of colour necessitates an understanding of place, movement, and relation.

Ironically, Paul creates life through *dyeing*: her film is a chromatic re-worlding, since, given the right care and attention, ‘Every hue, real or imagined, bodes a world’<sup>viii</sup>. Her work does not portray, but *enacts* a site of cultural resistance, in a purposeful psychedelics. Extrapolating on what Timothy Leary once referred to as a politics of ecstasy,<sup>ix</sup> Arun Saldanha proposes psychedelics in the plural as a branch of knowledge, like economics or aesthetics, as an ‘active (as opposed to reactive) “spiritual politics by other means”’<sup>x</sup>. It is perhaps no coincidence that for Māori, Uenuku is not just the rainbow god, but also a god of war.

In addition to the Australian experimental film legends Arthur and Corrine Cantrill, Paul cites as key influences the colour separations of Len Lye’s early experimental films, particularly his *Rainbow Dance* of 1936, as well as Warhol’s misregistration of line and colour. As David Batchelor puts it, ‘Warhol’s failure to keep colour in line – his failure to contain and corral his vivid pinks, oranges, reds, yellows and turquoises within the discipline of a contour – is one of his greatest successes’<sup>xi</sup>. In Warhol’s prints, colour

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**Surplus Reality**  
Nova Paul

Exhibition preview: 5 May 2017

Exhibition runs: 6 May – 11 June 2017

*Surplus Reality* draws on two distinct spaces of encounter: the space opened by mana wahine through the karanga in the pōwhiri and the warming up phase in psychodrama therapy where trust and rapport are established between participants. Both of these rituals function as temporal and spatial openings for the experience of wairua.

Paul has taken the karanga as a moment of exchange, intent and connection and produced a vocal piece that calls the viewer into the space. Accompanying this sound work is the moving image element of *Surplus Reality*, which utilises three filters of red, green, and blue to create a technicolour effect. Taking the changing light of the interior spaces of The Physics Room as its subject, this work shifts chromatic registration to consider how a film can open up new ways of encountering the everyday.

This exhibition draws on a key principle in psychodrama therapy whereby participants are freed from ordinary conventions and constraints of their everyday reality in therapy sessions and encouraged to work with and in a ‘Surplus Reality’, in order to imagine new possibilities for themselves.

*Surplus Reality* is the first of two exhibitions of Paul’s work at The Physics Room in 2017. The second exhibition will occur in October and will further develop the lines of enquiry begun here.

**Nova Paul** teaches studio moving image and art theory in the Visual Arts Department at AUT. Recent exhibitions and screenings include *Props and Gesture* (2017) at The Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, *Te Wai o Te Ora* in ‘All Lines Converge’ (2016) at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, and *Still Light* (2015) shown at London Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2016). Her film-making practice draws from early cinema, experimental film histories and fourth wave film discourse to consider the poetics and politics of place, self-determinacy and the image and the role of story telling in talking back to neo-liberal hegemonies. Nova Paul is of Te Uriroro and Te Parawhau /Ngāpuhi descent. She lives in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland.