

Attention: Ash Kilmartin
Subject: *Variables and Binaries* at The Physics Room
Date: 30 August - 12 October 2014

Dear Ash,

The weather is warmer now than when you were here a month ago. On the day of your caterpillar tour through the Botanic Gardens there was a high of 11°C and a low of 7°C. The high was slightly below the historical average of 13°C however the low was in line with the historical average of 7°C. Today there is a predicted high of 18°C and a low of 8°C. There is to be 0.0mm of rainfall and a peak wind of 35 km/h.

With you in mind I am doing my readings today. I walk from my house on the north west side of the city to your exhibition in the central city. I frequently walk from home into the city, although today I deviate my path in order to pass by the points where your vinyl text works were placed. I walk through Little Hagley Park, across Harper Avenue and instead of heading south between the golf course and the playing fields I turn right passing your text work 'In a revolutionary calendar, there are three hundred and sixty-six individually-named days (*A differential, limited slip*),' (*The Park I*). I have brought with me my compass, notepad and pen in the hope that their mechanical and conceptual attributes will cover these slippages. I find the spot and visualise reading 'Over what other state,' (*The Park V*) where I take a measurement and think about whose voice this is.

Heading south I walk down the path, across a footbridge and continue on up the path that passes '*Gravitational perturbation*,' (*The Park IV*). I then do the reverse walking forwards; down the path, across the footbridge and up the path. What was up just became down, across remained the same and down became up. I think about my compass and its own pull to magnetic north and wonder what will happen to direction when the magnetic poles begin to swap places. 'In the sole of my shoe I smuggle the gravel from this city into another. (*Leap a year*),' (*The Park II*). The last reversal was about 780,000 years ago. Such shifts usually take thousands of years, but some believe that this can happen more rapidly. In cases of rapid shifts, the reversed polarity was short and temporary. The text works operate like poems and will remain in Hagley Park for 14 days.

Inside the gallery 'This walk is becoming tangential, hyperbolic (astronomically speaking)' (*The Park III*), and I watch your dual-channel video *Variables and binaries* three times with a growing understanding of what observation looks like. Your research is slow and measured, as your voice weaves a narrative of notes, recordings and thoughts through a series of still and moving images. There is the Cosmic Ray Hut and Gravity Base Station in Hagley Park and the Mt John Observatory at Lake Tekapo that sits 1000m above sea level; The Christchurch Climatological Station measuring rainfall, temperature and visibility; Gravity Base Station that was designed to study the origin of earth's magnetic fields, which to this day remain unknown; and The Mt John Observatory that used to track satellites and now records the stars. There are interesting shifts in scale as the geo and astro physicists tools appear minute in comparison to the spaces they record and the vinyl text work that sat far below the trees in Hagley Park has grown astronomically large inside the gallery.

The workshops host the tools of observation, and as the buildings take on new purposes so too, do the tools. The hand painted sign of The Workshop is all that survived of the Magnetic Observatory. We are taken inside the satellite tracking equipment where the astrograph used to map the stars. The Seismic Hut is now closed and the darkroom stores boxes of files. There is a photograph of two men kneeling on the floor of the Gravity Base Station calibrating equipment in order to find the gravitational base. Back in the studio, I start to move around the room, looking, re-looking and feeling.

Trying to observe these objects through the association of another as you did in your video. It feels stuffy in here. I open the window. The light is difficult. There's a seagull flying behind me reflected in the computer screen, when I turn around to see it through the window it's no longer there. I am starting to feel this fog that you speak of. I try sitting on the floor to see if the atmosphere is less dense there. I can feel it too.

The air felt clear in the park when you sat with yourself and read an excerpt of Robert Ashley's *The Park* to us around that tree. I walk home through the botanic gardens criss-crossing from the path of the caterpillar tour to the edges of the park so that I can be sure to capture any movement. I don't have time for the whole trip this afternoon as I've got to be home by 5 o'clock, so I pass the Climatological Workshop and Gravity Base Station, turn out onto State Highway One and quickly exit the city as you did that day. The Mackenzie country is unchanging in its vastness, the Fairlie memorial trees stand tall and the air is clear once again.

I can see that language has been the most accurate tool in seeing thus far. You said yourself of the sundials that, 'This one is accurate, this one serves a different purpose. This one used to be here, now this one's here and that one is there,' (*Variables and binaries*) so I know that we're talking about something bigger than accuracy here. I observe that this one says that 'to obtain New Zealand Standard Time 29 1/2 minutes should be added to time shown by this dial.' I go to find the sundial with the different purpose, but where I thought it was is now a limestone ruin. Perhaps this is the one that got replaced? Since your being here this park has become astronomically larger in mass, differing upon when I measure it and from what position I am in. Figures are distance in miles as the crow flies.

I collect up my tools and cross Harper Avenue, walking north towards home. The temperature sits just below its predicted high at 15°C. My sunglasses protect my eyes from the 35 km/h wind gusts. I get the sense of something that I can't place and wonder what will happen to the bubble in the glass that you speak of when the magnetic poles shift again. What will be the physical impact on that bubble when these poles start to move at a far greater speed of acceleration? If this thing is doing as you say and is moving around by the point of a compass, all the while accumulating material, gaining momentum, growing, then perhaps the bubble will separate from its familiar glass of water and begin its own journey. You are right in saying that we 'can only estimate by what and where it is not.'

I read your video as an invitation to participate in these ideas of observation as this way of seeing makes a lot of sense to me. 'The sky and park are both museums,' (*Variables and binaries*) and I have collected a large amount of data today using an array of tools. You use your tools very deliberately in your work, methods of questioning take on power and are responsible for creating the amorphous structure from which I've stood to gain a better view of observation, today. I imagine that you will be excited by the prospect of more data as your work seems to operate very successfully in that liminal and foggy space between question and answer.

If you ever return to Christchurch please get in touch as I would be eager to participate in future readings.

From a city in blossom,

Emma Fitts

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New Zealand