

Surplus Reality

Nova Paul

14 October – 19 November 2017

THE PHYSICS ROOM CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

A conversation between Nova Paul and Jamie Hanton

11 October 2017

Jamie Hanton: Perhaps we could start by talking about the genesis of this project and what you were thinking of producing after your exhibition here in May, and how that has changed...

Nova Paul: So this happened in the way that it has because I have recently been in an pretty serious accident and ended up sedentary with a lot of physical limitations: essentially I was stranded on my couch and people would visit me and they'd say, 'Oh you've got *Rear Window*, (the Hitchcock film) going on here!'

I've always been interested in how ways of looking are constructed through the processes of filming and its production and how that might reinforce a specific perspective. What Laura Mulvey identifies and writes about in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, is that for the most part, the whole construction of cinema, specifically in a film like *Rear Window* forces the viewer into identifying with a male gaze, and one that is ostensibly white, hetero-sexual, middle class, through the way that the camera frames up its subjects to the way that the viewer adopts the male point of view in the screening. So what is curious to me is to think how to work against that grain, bringing my subjectivities as a woman, as a Māori to try and resist the familiar, dominant, and powerful frameworks that image making can easily fall into.

JH: How did the limitations of your injury affect the creative process?

NP: Because of my situation I had an opportunity to spend a lot of time looking out my lounge window. Through the physical limits and pain I found myself sort of mapping a thought image into the skyline, my burnt leg echoed in the trees, the shifts in light against the intensity of pain and the effects of pain relief. The film that has been made feels very physical film to me, I think it carries the weight and heaviness of my body in the images, capturing the vulnerability and fragility and also the dullness. I observe how light changes forms and creates different registers and qualities; it's a very material process, light and time are materials and so is 16mm film. That's why I don't see my film making as grounded in documentary, it's really about using light and shaping time and working with transitions between light and time with all its textures.

JH: There are certain shots where you are completely in the world, you're out of the window, but then you're also brought back inside as well. So the window is framed, you're looking out and the body is rooted inside. There is something abstract going on, but connected. Are there areas of visual focus in this work that you wanted to explore, were there areas in the environment around you that you focused on? There seem to be repetitions within the work, you go back to certain places...

NP: No, not in any intentional way, I really try to get an even sense of looking and looking through things, I try to handle the edit and each shot equally. There are shots I didn't put in the film because they would have stood out and I was interested in creating an experience, in some ways it may seem indifferent. I was really trying to keep it quite even and work with light and colour and I didn't want one shot to eclipse another.

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Exhibition preview: 13 October 2017

Exhibition runs: 14 October – 19 November 2017

For her second exhibition at The Physics Room in 2017, Nova Paul has produced a new 16mm film, *The Week Before Spring*. Over the past 12 months, facilitated by The Physics Room's residency programme, Paul has engaged in an overarching research enquiry regarding self-determinacy and healing.

Paul's project initially focused on the now defunct addiction programme at Queen Mary Hospital in Hanmer Springs, North Canterbury. The successful treatment programme was based on a holistic approach to healthcare including the use of psychodrama, which focussed on accessing and activating the imagination as a vital aspect of the healing process.

Paul's relationship to this project changed dramatically after a serious accident earlier this year. The personal became inextricably entangled with the political as she navigated her way through the neoliberal healthcare system she was initially critiquing.

The Week Before Spring includes sound composed, produced, and played by Bic Runga and Kody Nielson.

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.

Also showing:

Dossier: A working archival exhibition celebrating two decades of The Physics Room

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JH: And in doing that, I think the light does create a rhythm throughout - it becomes a cadence for the film...

NP: That's important, light creates form and is connected to time and those elements are essential in film making. Through the edit I am interested in how flat planes might be edited together in such a way, so that rooftops might then move against a tree - where you can get a sense of three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional frame is quite important to me.

JH: And that ties back to your exhibition in May - the windowsill, those planes of light, and the passing of time...

NP: The window has become a motif: looking in and looking out: how we look and what's constructed in front of us - this is not a film that would ever be made without an accident, without being immobilised, and without being stranded on the couch for three weeks - this is not a work that would have emerged in any other circumstance.

JH: There's a tension between the constructed parameters of looking and the ways that we are allowed to look, or are encouraged to look, which necessarily reflect the body doing the looking... And this of course feeds back into your original interest in Queen Mary hospital and the vulnerabilities of the people that went through that programme and the neoliberal structures that suppress and submit people to those vulnerabilities...

NP: I'm critical of structures that have a one size fits all model for the need for healing - who is to say the ways that people will find healing, who's to say the ways that people will find some form of self-determinacy. What happens under a neoliberal structure is that things get compartmentalised and turned into production lines and there's a centralisation of resources and a decentering of community and connectivity. Hospitalisation is treated like a business. Healthcare is not business as usual, when you have to access healthcare through a hospital it's fair to say things are no longer business as usual.

Neoliberalism as an ideology that turns into a system of administration also asks you to sit within a preconceived timeframe and my work has always been resistant to the constructed time of a traditional filmmaking practice.

JH: And I think your work captures those alternate and non-dominant timescales - the way you experience time in your work is disrupted so you're outside the bounds of the "normality". Do you want to talk about the sound component at all? Why did you approach Bic Runga to compose the soundtrack?

NP: Well, Bic crafts sounds and she is very astute and precise at observing the world and channelling an experience into music. She saw me in quite a state after the injury, so her response is in relation to witnessing this. The specific relationship between sound and image in the work is really important. The image anchors you, and the sound transports you, but I think the sound takes you deeper into the image, not to some other place.