Contact Zones: Edge in 'Portable Cities' and 'FragMental Storm

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This article offers reflections on two artworks shown in exhibitions of 'Asian' art in New Zealand galleries in 2004, Yin Xiuzhen's "Portable Cities" (2001-2004), seen in the *Concrete Horizons* exhibition at the Adam Art Gallery, and exonemo's "FragMental Storm" (2002), from the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's *Mediarena: Contemporary Art from Japan*. I write 'Asian', because there seems little sense in labelling these as works of Asian art, except in the rather obvious sense that the artists were born and work in Asian countries (Yin is Chinese and exonemo a collaboration between Japanese artists Yae Akaiwa and Kensuke Sembo). Like many of the other pieces seen in these exhibitions, there is a noticeable absence of anything that might be thought of as stereotypically 'Asian' about these works. This is not to say that the artists ignore or deny the local, just that any exclusive focus – which might limit or tie the work to a particular context – is avoided. The risks of fetishising or pigeonholing art from particular Asian countries were recognised by one Japanese critic who participated in Mediarena. Kentaro Ichihara suggested that the fascination with Japanese art overseas could signal a new exoticism in contemporary art. The risk of being so fixed or exoticised mean that I prefer to investigate frames for thinking about and responding to these works which go beyond their origins, hopefully also broadening the possible receptions of these works. Another reason is that these artists attend to interfaces between the local and the global, something which already imbues their work with a wide – though not universal – relevance. Of interest are the specific conditions created when contemporary technologies *order* the lives of human subjects, from international transportation routes to the internet (Heidegger 1977: 17). Yin Xiuzhen attends to complex relations to place in the face of global movements, while exonemo address the experience of linked information on the world wide web. In this article I address the performance or articulation by these artists of issues pertinent to what might be termed a contemporary "networked condition", common across those highly-technologized societies that are closely tied into global networks and systems of exchange. I reflect on Yin's work and the figures it offers for thinking about the points of contact between local and the global, and the place of memory and sensation in processes of cultural transmission. I borrow the figure of *edge* from a third, local example, NZ Edge, exploring and extending it and asking what it is to be at an *edge*.

One of my aims is to reconsider the ways in which cultural exchange and contact is conceptualised in a networked twenty-first century world, the ways in which the strangeness that is (literally) embodied in travel, for instance, inflects experience and memory. Another related aim is to review the ways in which classic modernist techniques of collage and juxtaposition, reworked through code in exonemo's "FragMental Storm", are again capable of producing encounters with strangeness, in the now relatively domesticated context of the world wide web. Both exonemo's and Yin's investigations into the still emergent possibilities and logics of global networks provides a much needed incitement to think and appraise the contemporary (post)human condition, in its specificity, rather than accepting those pervasive and largely pessimistic analyses which perceive only technology's alienating effects. These artists manage to crystallise aspects of the wider cultural and media sphere in their work. Contemporary networks do order and shape subjectivity in highly specific ways, but the potential for differential orderings – new edges – is also part of the

logic, the veritable glitches in the code that make it possible to think, and be, otherwise.

Portable Cities

Yin Xiuzhen is a Beijing artist whose installation "Portable Cities" was exhibited in Wellington from February 2004. Her 'suitcase cities' are constructed from found and donated objects and clothes, which are sewn together to produce three-dimensional miniature sculptures of cities, standing in otherwise ordinary suitcases. For the *Concrete Horizons* exhibition, Yin made three new cities: Wellington, Guangzhou, and San Francisco. The iconic landmarks of San Francisco (the Golden Gate bridge) and Wellington (the Beehive, the windmill) are immediately recognisable, with the blue and white striped Harbour of the latter even sporting miniature boats. As well as marvelling at the meticulous work involved, the materials also evoke delight, most particularly perhaps the socks that, stitched together, serve as the flyovers on the Guangzhou freeways. Viewers' attention is directed down 'funnels' – made from the gusset of a pair of tights, or the stretched neck of a skivvy – to the bottom of the cases where maps of the cities are positioned. At the Adam Art Gallery, the suitcase cities sat beneath threads spanning points on an improvised map of the world, hand drawn on the gallery wall. Collected sounds from the streets of these cities provided a background soundtrack for the installation.

Part tourist kitsch, "Portable Cities" reproduces the symbols for which these cities are famous, made portable in tourist commodities. On the one hand, they resemble naïve creations, their colour and softness reminiscent of stuffed toys. Beyond the simulacral, however, they gesture toward another level or way of knowing, perhaps represented by the lower level inside the suitcases themselves. As often happens when 'real' cities are traversed, the monuments recede from centre-stage, as attention is refocused on the everyday interactions and encounters that take place on the streets. There's a strong sense that the cities modelled in this work have not just been chosen at whim, but are ones that have been known by virtue of having been traversed, lingered or lived in, perhaps returned to repeatedly. The rendering of their landmarks in soft, 'domestic' materials communicates a powerful sense of attachment and affective investment, themes Yin depicts with elegance and economy. As sculptural objects, they entice us to draw near, their familiar materials speaking to our emotions; somehow they seem comforting.

The urban as place

That a city should be appealing in its "familiarity" and "softness" might sound odd, as they're not qualities usually identified with cities, particularly not in contemporary China. The current wave of urban development in China provided a good part of the impetus for the *Concrete Horizons* show, with the curator, Sophie McIntyre, noting the influence that China's rapid urbanisation has had on the artists exhibited. Of Beijing, she notes that as the city continues to expand, vertically and horizontally, urban-rural boundaries are re-drawn as agricultural villages are transformed into housing blocks and suburbs grow into new satellite cities. In this city, 'place' as a point of reference and as a site of belonging, is essentially devoid of meaning" (4). This is a clear reference to some of the other artworks in *Concrete Horizons*, most obviously perhaps Wang Wei's "Temporary Space" (2003). This work consists of a series of photographs in which labourers build a room inside another (gallery?) space, bricking up four walls until the builders themselves are enclosed within the walls, only to demolish the walls again. The photos chart their (futile) progress, and an adjacent video work tells of the actual market in recycled bricks in booming Chinese cities: that some men and women eke out a back-breaking living by cleaning (that is,

chipping the mortar off salvaged bricks, by hand), carting and then re-selling bricks to new building projects.

Tensions between place as a site of belonging and dis/connection are being explored here. In this vein, the notion that some spaces are *non-places* has become popular in recent years (Auge, Morse). Laura Marks is one of a number of critical media theorists to argue, however, that it is a subject's sense memories that help to create specific places. Marks contends that this is possible even in the midst of non-places (245). I don't think it is a coincidence that Marks makes this claim in a chapter entitled "The Portable Sensorium": one of the reasons that cities may be 'portable' is aesthetic, that is, the traces they leave on their inhabitants are sensory. Yin's cities seem thoroughly connected to the places they represent and their meanings, aware of the affective investments made in particular places. A comment by McIntyre that, "As an artist who regularly exhibits overseas, the suitcase has become a symbol of [Yin's] 'home'" (McIntyre 2004: 6), is revealing here. Though only three of Yin's suitcase cities were shown in the installation at the Adam, she has made others, and the webs of string stretching between other unrepresented cities gave the work the feel of a personal world-trajectory. Yin's suitcase cities get me thinking about connections to place and *em*placement in an era that we are used to thinking of as one of ubiquitous *dis*placement. "Portable Cities", then, speaks beyond "disorientation and displacement" (McIntyre 2004: 5) to a wider, contemporary condition of *movement*, in which practices of shifting and settling, and shifting again, have become commonplace, an assumed part of many peoples' professional and personal lives.

On the move

The types of movement of which I am thinking differ from that of forced migration or exile. Scholars in migration studies have noted how fraught the "where are you from?" question can be for new arrivals – particularly when the welcome they receive in a new country is less than warm – but knowledge workers whose skills are in demand can be in quite a different position. These workers' movements are more likely to be motivated by career advancement or economic considerations; others simply need to travel as job descriptions and the locus of work become increasingly globalised. For people in such situations, the destinations they move to may not be 'home', in either the traditional unitary or enduring senses of the term (Badani). Home has long been a mobile concept for some, those for whom making a living requires travel. As James Clifford puts it, "Everyone's on the move, and has been for centuries" (2). To the purposeful wandering of nomads and herders can be added the cohort of professional entertainers, musicians, politicians, airline attendants and sailors, as well as an array of seasonal workers – fishers, shearers, circus folk and 'showies'. Even those in professions where travel hasn't been a part of the job may increasingly be finding that there's an imperative to travel, as labour is expected to follow capital's mobility. For some, piecing together a full time income can entail long commutes or regular international travel. One of the realities of mobile labour is that people find themselves living across different towns or even straddling countries, a "dwelling-in-travel" (Clifford, 2) that shapes lives. On a recent visit to Germany, I met three 'mobile' individuals in as many days: the Swiss theatrical set designer, who, owing to a downturn in production budgets, must travel further afield in Europe to serve his clients; the mapmaker and artist, also resident in Berlin, who, returned from a period living in Sydney, now teaches intensively for blocks each semester at a London University; and the intellectual worker who, unable to secure a permanent university post, travels from one side of the country to the other for several days part-time work a week, maintaining rooms in both cities. While this is not common, it is

no longer as rare as it once was. It raises questions not only about moving and the strangeness that moves introduce into one's life, but also about what it is to move from a singular concept of 'home' to plural 'homes'. Furthermore, how do such mobile subjects accommodate or negotiate the different experiences (the rhythms, habits, cultural influences, practices, assumptions around locality, etc) to which they are and have been exposed, and how might we conceive of this? What traces do multiple places and moves leave? It's these questions I now turn to consider, reflecting both on Yin's art, as well as local New Zealand articulations of some of these issues.

Some people hate leaving home. Moving (house, countries, or just moving on) is for them a profoundly disturbing experience, no doubt because of the disruption it brings, but also – I suspect – because of the need to re-establish in a new space/place. This is the part I find exciting, if not the physical act of moving; there are real pleasures in discovering and responding to the rhythms of new places. In terms of estrangement, nothing beats it. It's a chance to confront habits formed in particular circumstances that may not work in new ones, to cut through sedimentations, and rid oneself of that which has become rusted on. However, as much as the unfamiliar and the strange can be lovely, it's clear that shedding all of one's habits and past is also, in part, a modernist dream. It's much messier when you actually try. The threads of Yin's installation that seem to beckon to new opportunities – stretching out like an airline route map, full of possibility – are also the ties that bind, or, alternately, the trails of stuff left in various places lived in. Elsewheres so encountered are not simply forgotten when they are no longer experienced: memories, particularly keenly felt sense memories, are portable and continue to inflect and shape subjectivity, reaching across geography and through time. Even when they no longer exist in material form, destroyed cities are remembered: pre-war Berlins or Dresdens continue to exist, subjectively, for many.

As a country that's literally antipodal to many major international centres, and a decent plane trip from its largest neighbour, the movement imperative is not unfamiliar to New Zealanders. If we think, however, about how relations between the 'here' of New Zealand and the 'there' of everywhere else are figured, it's often a cocktail that combines the tyranny of distance with a good shot of cultural cringe: leaving home is still (seen as) necessary to 'make it', with "OE" (overseas experience) enshrining the importance of escaping. For many younger educated Kiwis, the binary bases of this narrative are reinforced by economic necessity – the burden of their tertiary student loan is something they definitely don't want to come back to. This binary rendering – either you stay or you go – constructs a particular kind of boundary between the here and the there, in which crossing the threshold and not looking back is naturalised. It's the lack of this idea and the continuity of those threads of connection that I find compelling in Yin's installation. The element of thirdness (three suitcases) helps to destabilise the binary thinking that still informs thinking about 'homes': that is, that if you move, there is an 'old' one you leave in order to settle into the 'new' one. While this might have been the rhetoric of immigration (or escape) once upon a time, it is seldom so simple.

Brian Sweeney and Kevin Roberts, founders of the NZ Edge website, have adopted 'edge' as a new metaphor for New Zealanders, and it is from their website that I initially borrowed the figure. To give a very brief account of their project, the NZ Edge website is intended to appeal to and inspire New Zealanders everywhere (but particularly expatriates) giving them an alternate, slightly quirky cultural identity and encouraging them to develop or rekindle a newly passionate regard for their

homeland. It's clearly a response on some level to the view of New Zealand as a place that one must leave, and to highlight that not all exciting innovations occur at the 'centre'. The website's "edge proposal" is wide ranging, applied to landscape, location (New Zealand's place at the edge of the world, sometimes so edgy it gets left off maps), attitude (having an edge; inspiring an attitude of "radical optimism"), history (New Zealand's international achievers who've developed "world-changing ideas"), Maori and Pacific cultures (about which little is said[i]), character, and fringe innovation (the legendary resourcefulness). While the concept of the NZ Edge initially seems quite 'edgy', I wonder if it really does "[offer] a new way of thinking about our identity, people, stories, achievements and place in the world," "introduce metaphors and contemporary frameworks for NZers to articulate who we are", or internationalise New Zealanders' views of themselves, as its creators claim? Reading the messageboards, one could be forgiven for thinking it's just a handy way to activate patriotism and expat's homesickness. The message still seems to be one of an essential New Zealandness. It reminds me of a roadsign I passed heading North out of Wellington which entreats motorists to "hold onto the feel of the real New Zealand". Has the kitsch Kiwiana simply been replaced with more tasteful photographs of windswept vistas?

Contact Zones

NZ Edge attempts to (re)kindle particular sorts of relation and attachment to place. The complexity of the migrant's or expat's attachments, however, are not simply that of recrossing a border (something that, in fairness, the site does seem to acknowledge). What sort of edge is it that people cross who move to a place with no expectation of staying permanently? This is not the same as migration and may be better thought of as a nomad condition, with its own relation to place. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "The nomads have a specificity that is too hastily reduced to its consequences, by including them in the empires or counting them among the migrants, assimilating them to one or the other…" (495-6).

My own experience of changing cities in the last year scuppered any exclusive or binary notions of home. Wellington is now home, but so is Sydney, and there are places internationally also where I feel very much 'at home'.[ii] When I was back in Sydney last year, I happened to pick up the catalogue for the 2004 Sydney Biennale, in which Yin's "Portable Cities" were also shown, along with another sewn work, "International Flight" (2001-2004). This time, the cities of Paris, Lisbon and Sydney were added. It seemed fitting that the artist's listing was organised so as to give two or more locations for each, that is, "(Artist's name), b. (year) (place). Lives and works in (place)". Ironically, given her subject matter, Yin's entry reads:

YIN XIUZHEN
b. 1963 Beijing, China
Lives and works in Beijing

In some ways edge does seem like an apt figure for describing these experiences of travel and translocation, with the ideas of threshold and limit (standing on the edge of something new) and the geographical borders that are literally crossed (the marked out edge of territory). However, as migration scholars have long observed, integration, assimilation and cultural transmission are complex processes. This is especially true when confronting serial movement. If edge were to be a useful figure for thinking about these practices then this would not be edge as a barrier, but as a membrane or filter, one that facilitates movement in more than one direction. This

sort of edge is a figure that approaches Clifford's notion of "contact zones". In his attempt to unpack some of the "complexities of travel and encounter", he borrows this term from Mary Louise Pratt, who has used it in writing of colonial encounters.[iii] For Pratt, a contact perspective foregrounds "the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A 'contact' perspective…[stresses] copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (cited in Clifford, 192). A contact perspective is useful for thinking about contemporary movement and translocation, which similarly generate zones of contact, where different perspectives and practices collide or are brought into tension. For individual subjects, the aesthetic and affective resonances of these might be internal and largely invisible to others, but the notion could also be used to articulate contact zones within and across societies. The edge here is permeable, allowing for intermingling and seepage in the process of contact, the contamination of the new with what is continuous, brought from elsewhere. The membrane-edge facilitates resonances and mixing between the old and new, between presence and memories of how it was, the latter perhaps coloured by the addition of more or less nostalgia, as the edge permits. Now, then, here and there may bleed into each other, as individual subjects work through those very personal local/local/…etc negotiations. "Portable Cities" gestures in positive terms towards what it is to have multiple points of reference, of the effects which many places exercise and how our memories and subjectivities might be shaped by multiple zones.

FragMental Storm

I move now to consider a more recognisable example of media art: "FragMental Storm" is a work of interactive net.art, consisting of a programme which itself acts as a medium or filter of sorts through which html code is passed, bringing users into contact with weird and wonderful visual displays. The work is based on that most familiar of functions, the web search. Visitors enter a word via a keyboard and this begins a search function. The programme then proceeds to display an edited version of the top ten or so sites harvested from the search results, turning these into a self-generating collage of images and text. By sampling from many webpages, the work goes beyond a desire to simply mess with the content or presentation of any one webpage (I had fun using exonemo's "Discoder" (1999) to do this to my bank's homepage, a harmless (and temporary) hack.) Instead of displaying sites as per normal, "FragMental Storm" 'deconstructs' the code so as to "display the data disjointedly", as exonemo's website puts it. Because the results depend on the search terms used and what the programme actually does to the html code, they vary, but the interventions generally seem to produce screens with abstracted images, often with lines of planar and spinning graphics moving toward the user in kaleidoscopic patterns. While images of much of their work can be seen at their website (www.exonemo.com), seeing "FragMental Storm" installed in a gallery is far preferable to viewing it on PC: a data projector enables you to sit back and marvel at the unfolding images at a larger size and in a communal setting.

Edge of understanding

To me, "exonemo" sort of rhymes with "Geronimo" (at least in English), the call that people supposedly yell as they're doing a parachute jump. Leaving aside its paratrooper origins, as a call "Geronimo" is also understood to reference metaphorical leaps into the unknown, which is precisely what this work invites audiences to take. "FragMental Storm" uses the linked results generated by a search engine in a completely unorthodox way, presenting an emerging collage of the sites returned.

The lovely thing about this is that there is usually no connection apparent between the search term/s and what is displayed, making for a fascinating demonstration of semiotic rupture: signification is thrown into disarray as the chains linking signifiers with signifieds – one of language's most basic sense-giving properties – are broken. The work invites users to sit back and enjoy the unfolding show. However, once the simplicity of the piece is discovered – utilising the internet's links to question taken-for-granted links between word and thing – it also becomes something that you want to *play* with: a machine for un-making sense/making nonsense between word and image.

But which word to enter? Recalling a story that the most frequent search term on Google was 'cricket' in the aftermath of a locust plague, my first (slightly disappointing) search brought up the spinning green image of a cricket pitch, amongst lots of match results. Attempting something a little more obscure, 'Uluru' generated a pleasing sequence of the ubiquitous sunset photos of the famous rock, as out of place – in a Japanese media art work showing in a New Zealand regional gallery – as I felt at that time. A colleague told me that she entered her name, and sat back to enjoy the warping of the university webpages' references to her, a very personal estrangement. 'Blue' brought back a screen with several delightful quirks, including the Blue Mountain car company, and something that asked whether I wasn't "tired of being treated like a criminal for sharing music online?" Given its ability, however, for destabilising the self-evident ('blue'), the most interesting use of this toy, I decided, would come from words whose meanings I was hazy on. 'Chthonic' was my final search term. The collaged images and text suggested a number of associations – with monsters, the occult and rock music – that weren't exactly antithetical to the word's meaning, and which made *a kind of* sense. It is this quality of the work that I find most interesting: that it takes users to the edge of understanding, showing up the limits of their existing apprehensions and encouraging them to new, less orthodox ones. Because the visuals displayed from the search are so disjointedly displayed, they frustrate attempts to immediately recognise the connections between word and images. In the absence of 'logical' connection, however, users may go on to perceive connections that are less direct, strange.

That this should come from a search engine is refreshing. How often do we find something surprising when we search the web? Extrapolating from my own usage, I would guess that many people search to confirm what they already know or at least suspect, the prototypical "navigator" who steers the technology. By contrast, "FragMental Storm" gives users a freed-up sense of what searching can be, beyond instrumentally finding a site that is already known, or that is urgently desired, with no surprises (for instance, the hotel with affordable accommodation for that conference trip). The work defunctionalises the web search, and invites users to take pleasure in the temporal unfolding of the results. Word/image connections are sensed, perceived aesthetically, rather than known in advance and simply recognised. No longer needing to be in control, users can enjoy the buffeting of this semiotic storm, in on the joke of the associative play. It reminds that the act of searching need not be reduced to a function, that searching remains an act that is pregnant with possibility, which can go past the *edge* and open onto something else, something strange.

The obliqueness of the connections in "FragMental Storm" between the word input and the images the search engine returns contrast nicely with more pedestrian uses of automated searching online. Recently, I have been fascinated by the advertising on newspaper sites, specifically the Google ads on smh.com.au, the online version of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. It is not the ads themselves, so much as the literality of the

machine approach to searching the article text, which in turn generates the advertisements, which is peculiar. An agent apparently runs through the content of an article, in an attempt to provide some targeting of advertising for the reader. Results are then returned in small boxes at the top and somewhere in the middle of the webpage, so they are difficult to avoid. A recent article told of a by-election candidate who took a cocktail of drugs for a headache and had to be rushed to hospital, two days prior to the election (AAP). The story was accompanied by no less than six ads for drug and alcohol abuse and rehabilitation services, including "**Secrets To Stop Addiction** New Breakthrough Stops Addiction In 7 Days Or Less. Plus It's Fun!". I read of the ex-Guantanamo Bay detainee, Mamdouh Habib, who was held without charge by the U.S. for more than two years, addressing an anti- Iraq war rally (Marriner). Incredibly, above his photograph was an ad for: "**Hotel Guantanamo**. Find Hotels, Compare Rates, Read Reviews & More. Try TripAdvisor!" Finally, a report on the political scandal in which the West Australian Senator Ross Lightfoot was said to have smuggled money to Kurdish groups on behalf of Woodside Petroleum, had generated multiple ads for companies bearing the name that the Senator would no doubt prefer people forgot, at least in relation to him (Brown). While the results returned by "FragMental Storm" are charming because there is no human understanding informing their selection, these google ads are hilarious for precisely the same reason. In this case, however, these results are so perverse that they expose an underside to the news stories which they purport to accompany, so that it becomes impossible to read these as anything but farce.

Web of habit

exonemo seem fascinated by the possibilities and significance of the search engine in contemporary network societies (they recently sold a large painting of a google screen, to Google.) Beyond the apparent futility of painting huge canvases of digitally generated search screens, and showing up the arbitrariness of signification, "FragMental Storm" (and alternate browsers like it) also helps users see the arbitrariness of the display of the web. An agent running a processing task in the background unmakes the known (the easy, 'intuitive' display of the Graphical User Interface), the habitual form of the web that most of us are thoroughly familiar with (through browsers such as Explorer and Netscape). Arie Altena, in an article "The Browser is Dead", points to the commercial and design imperatives that governed the development of standardised browsers, and discusses the range of browser options which provide quite different experiences of 'the' web, from out of date browsers, to text only, to image generators similar to "FragMental Storm". Altena explains that as the Net is only a stream of data, it can be made visible, legible, and navigable in various ways. Of alternative browsers, Altena writes:

> *Webstalker* and *Lynx* are browsers for protestant text lovers, code-eaters who, fed by code, make images in their own heads. *Ambulator* is the browser for people who make up stories and wish to be fed by images without being disturbed by text. For the *Lynx* user the Web is what it always was: a library, an architecture of text and links – without GUI – and a hypertext in optima forma. For the *Webstalker* user the Web is an empty universe where star systems appear. And for those who use *Ambulator*, it is an accumulation of unrelated images, a reason to start imagining.

"FragMental Storm" demands that audiences sense "things as they are perceived" rather than as they are already known, which the Russian Formalist critic Victor Schlovsky pronounced to be the purpose of art (12). By highlighting the arbitrariness of how code is made perceptible, the work enables visitors to see and experience first

hand how different the experience can be, and perhaps to realise how quickly the expectations of a new technology become fixed, its uses habitual.

"Portable Cities" and "FragMental Storm" are very different artworks, though the elegance and conceptual force of each derives from the artists' attention to the instabilities of meaning around their respective themes. I have tried to draw out how each offers new ways of thinking contemporary practices of movement/translocation and internet searching, both common in technologised, highly networked societies. I introduced the notion of *edge* into the discussion in part because, having discovered the NZ Edge website while I was reflecting on these artists' work, I wanted to identify what it was that I found 'edgy' in each, as well as to question whether edge really does offer a new metaphor for New Zealanders, as the NZ Edge project claims. Coming up with any detailed response to the latter is well beyond the scope of this article. I will, however, offer some concluding thoughts on the productivity of *edge* as a figure, as I have developed it in this discussion.

The complexity of contemporary global movements is an under-theorised area. So while "Portable Cities" initially evoked for me notions of estrangement and of being caught in-between *two* cultures, the binary basis this seems to presume is in the end not adequate for theorising more complex life itineraries. This subject is both analogous to the work of cultural studies of migration yet also distinct; the nomads belong neither to the empires nor amongst the migrants, as Deleuze and Guattari observe. Where do the contact zones lie in contemporary New Zealand? Does biculturalism constitute a contact zone in the sense expounded by Clifford and Pratt? Where do the ongoing encounters with difference, amongst various others, occur today? In the public sphere it is interesting to note how limited debate on immigration remains. Those vocal in these debates, for instance, show little interest in the working nomads currently in this country. The debate typically revolves around a few painfully simple narratives: that of the 'brain drain/gain'; whether expats will return home; the 'good' migrant (new taxpayers with desired skills); and the unpopularity of immigration with some sectors of the population. Perhaps because of the bureaucratic difficulties of gaining visas and work permits, the number of nomads living and working in New Zealand is not as large as in the European Union, for instance, but the ease with which Australians can enter and work in New Zealand means there are quite a few of us.

Stemming from this figure of nomadic movement, the notion of edge has theoretical efficacy as well as practical descriptive power. Edge, figured as a membrane, a contact zone, might offer an alternative figure for describing processes of cultural transmission and identity construction, supplanting or complexifying terms currently in use, such as 'hybridity'. It may facilitate a non-determined discussion about contact that is respecting of difference, without some of the problematic resonances that hybridity carries, primarily the concern with origins (Haraway, 192-3).

By contrast, the edges which interest me about "FragMental Storm" are the edges of understanding it shows up and gestures beyond. Taking apart the word-image connections that are so naturalised opens a zone of virtuality, in which other imaginings can be had, meanings made. Consonant with an understanding that it is one of art's roles to offer audiences new understandings, the recognition of it as codework adds extra dimensions to exonemo's edginess. It orders the network differently. Appropriated for artistic ends, the technology is no longer productivity tool and the user is able to play around and sense how things might be otherwise. The technical media here mediate code, the computer language, for visitors, but in a different way to what they normally do. In the process, visitors are brought into

contact and given a chance to get creative with code, more intimate with – and less insulated from – it than the ordinary computer user. The typical user knows next to nothing about what goes on behind the colourful 'windows' of a display. As Dylan Evans asks: "…would you know what to do if all those pretty little icons in your browser disappeared and, instead of Windows, you were left staring at lines of letters and numbers of HTML, the language in which web pages are written?" "FragMental Storm" mediates code for users, highlighting the arbitrariness of its display and making it perceptible in another way. While it does defamiliarise display conventions, in one sense making these *strange*, paradoxically this is also a *making accessible* of the otherwise inaccessible. It's an encounter that makes visitors more aware of how computers think. The installation creates a zone where they make contact with animated computer code, and, though this is not quite on the computer's terms, nor is it entirely on the users'.

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McIntyre Sophie (2004) China Re-constructed *Concrete Horizons: Contemporary Art from China* (exhibition catalogue) Adam Art Gallery Te Pataka Toi Wellington: 4-8

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[i] The ongoing movements of Pacific Islander peoples – frequently including New Zealand – present an example of a quite different view of New Zealand's place relative to elsewheres.

[ii] Moreover, electronic communications offer opportunities to be elsewhere while logged in, effectively 'at home'.

[iii] Clifford details some of the "tangled cultural experiences", examples of encounter and exchange, such as the reciprocity that is required of staff at the Portland Museum of Art, when Tlingit elders, expert in items held in the museum's Rasmussen Collection, come for planning discussions around the Collection's reinstallation. The stories and performances that the objects inspire blended into current political struggles, bringing with them difficult decisions for museum staff working in the context of a museum of 'art'. The museum became, Clifford writes, a contact zone; the disruptive history that had been performed could not simply be treated as *context* for the objects; the collecting museum and curator were called intoa new relationship, which was to be ongoing (194)
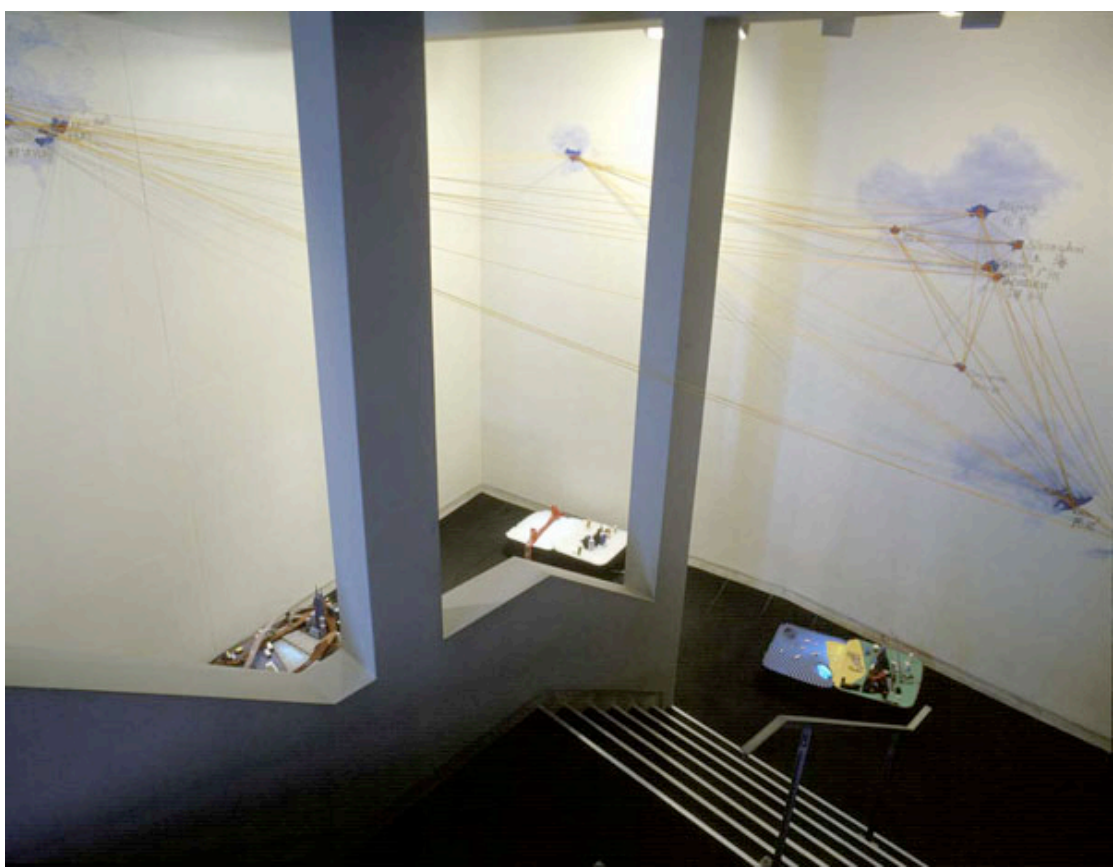
Portable Cities, 2001- 2004: suitcases, textiles, sampled sound
Collection of the artist
Dimensions Variable
Photograph: Robert Cross
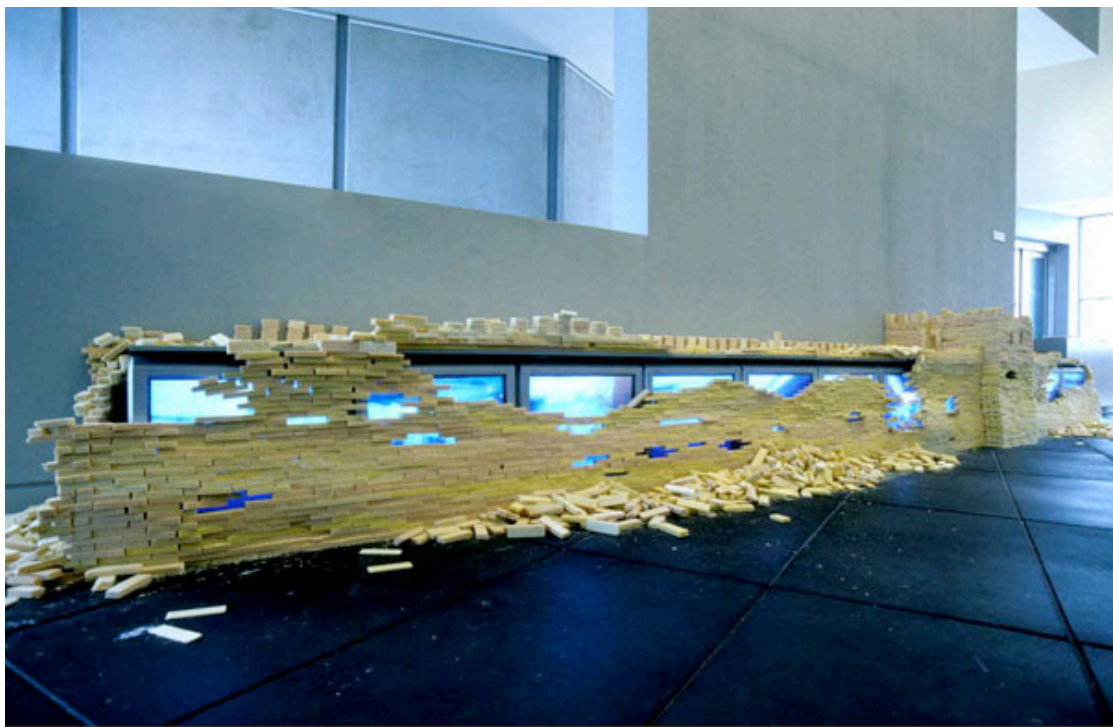
Song Dong
Eating the Great Wall, 2003-2004
video installation (12 TV Monitors, wafer biscuits)
Collection of the Artist

photograph Robert Cross

Eating the Great Wall, 2003: 12 video works, cake
Collection of the artist
Dimensions Variable
Photograph: Robert Cross