

***We are who we are***  
**Nova Paul**

Nova Paul's 16mm film *Pink and White Terraces*, reflects on the delicate construction of domestic environments and public places in the Tamaki Makaurau and Manukau cityscapes in Aotearoa New Zealand. Using a 'three-colour separation' optical process technique, the film makes visible several moments simultaneously. In red, green and blue layers, colour-coded auras hold records of time like geological accretions. The politics and poetics of these sites gently unfolds as the film moves in and out of phase, as actors and environment focus and fade, and filmic time is made palpable.

Cities are living entities. The density of communal living in urban space necessitates acts of creativity to individualise and shape the environment to make it a home that reflects you, your family and your network of friends. Like water, people find a route through the most complex or oblique channels to lead a self-determined life. The way we decorate our homes, choose to do business or spend our leisure time are all part of this process. Within a city, points of contact with others vary from the most fleeting of encounters to life-long friendships. How are these myriad of networks represented, or made tangible, how do they inform the way our cities look and change? How does the domestic influence the civic?

The film is comprised of a series of static shots where the same place or action has been recorded three times, making tangible that no location is static, that people move through space, and qualities of light and weather change. The film depicts fleeting moments; from barren trees in winter afternoon light, through to a hot summer day on a front porch with friends, washing dishes at night, or getting dressed to go out, shopping at a busy Sunday market, to popping in to the corner shop (which in Aotearoa is known as a dairy).

The title *Pink and White Terraces*, refers to an area of geothermal architecture which was located on the edges of Lake Rotomahana, near Rotorua in the central part of the North Island of Aotearoa. In the 1880s these eerie, fantastic land forms were a leading tourist attraction – at a time when the notion of 'tourism' was intrinsically linked to a fervent drive for European immigration by the new Colonial government. The area of Rotorua and Taupo was already home to the Te Arawa peoples, the Māori iwi (tribe) who had settled the area.

The Terraces were created from the overflow from geysers, rich in siliceous sinter that cascaded down a hill side. White silica deposits accrued, forming large pools and terraces. Similar forms exist within the geothermal areas of Yellowstone National Park, USA and at Pamukkale, Turkey. The White Terraces (Te Tarata - the tattooed rock), the larger of the two

configurations, covered three hectares and descended over thirty metres. The Pink Terraces (Otukupuarangi - fountain of the clouded sky) were the best bathing spot and the waters were deemed to have healing properties. On the 10 June 1886 neighbouring Mt Tarawera erupted, decimating the area. Several villages were buried, including the settlement of Te Wairoa, killing over 150 people. A crater over 100m deep encompassed the site of the former terraces, creating a new Lake Rotomahana and submerging the terraces forever.

The Pink and White Terraces loom large in the cultural memory of Aotearoa, largely through surviving photographs, prints and painted depictions. They have come to represent great loss: of life, of the settlements that were destroyed, and that of an incredible, errant natural form. It is also worth noting that between 1845 and 1872 a series of brutal armed conflicts between colonial troops and Maori, now known as the 'Land Wars', were being waged across the country. While Aotearoa is peppered with active volcanoes and has a tumultuous geothermal character, the land has also seen many battles over land, sovereignty and language, which continue to this day.

The way that the mineral rich geothermal waters were able, to forge a habitat of spectacular form and beauty - both because of and despite their site, is a telling metaphor for the way people create their own sense of place within dense urban settlements. In Paul's film she concentrates on intimate scenes and modest domestic architecture. The spaces in the film that seem 'public' are a mixture of private or commercial space (e.g. the container holding area of the Port of Auckland, Wah Lees Emporium, the Good Morning Dairy) and civic zones where people have freedom of passage, street intersections, city centres like Aotea Square in the CBD of Tamaki Makaurau (Auckland). Predominantly she eschews official landmarks or places deemed to be 'important' or of high status, and all sites are treated in the same delicate and perceptive manner, whether a fish shop or a street protest.

The soundtrack by Rachel Shearer uses atmospheric sound recorded during the shoot mixed with a palette of sounds derived from the colour presence on screen, uniting the abstract and the figurative. *Pink and White Terraces* traces little happenings, things we do without acknowledging them as 'significant', but which speak clearly about who we are individually and collectively.

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