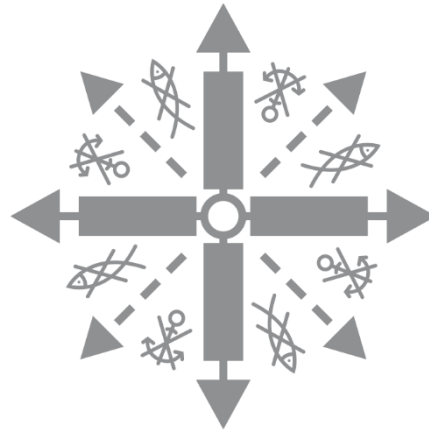


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The Southern Cross Cable: A Tour

Art, the internet and national identity
in Aotearoa-New Zealand

An exegesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Arts

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New Zealand

Bronwyn Holloway-Smith

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“The internet does not exist. maybe it did exist only a short time ago, but now it only remains as a blur, a cloud, a friend, a deadline, a redirect, or a 404. If it ever existed, we couldn’t see it. Because it has no shape. It has no face, just this name that describes everything and nothing at the same time.”¹

¹ Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood and Anton Vidokle, “Introduction,” in *E-Flux Journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*, eds, Aranda, Kuan Wood and Vidokle (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 9.



Abstract

This exegesis is the written analytical component of a studio-based Doctor of Philosophy that, as a whole, investigates the influence of international hegemony and power structures on popular notions of Aotearoa-New Zealand's national identity. Selected histories and locations of New Zealand's primary international internet connection, the Southern Cross Cable, have been taken and applied within a body of conceptually driven artworks that function as an effective metonymic vehicle to reveal unseen processes, conveyed over a specific infrastructural system, that are influential upon New Zealand's national identity.

The creative works in this thesis comprise the suite of artworks *The Southern Cross Cable: A Tour*, a multi-platform art project comprising two moving image works, a sculptural work, a published tour guide and its associated web-based work. These sit alongside, and in response to, a historic mid-twentieth century New Zealand mural: *Te Ika-a-Maui* [sic] by the artist E. Mervyn Taylor. Together, these works encourage public awareness of the jurisdictional limits of the internet, and illustrate ways in which an individual member of the public can respond to the supposedly 'intangible' internet in a physical manner.

By strategically subverting popular nationalist symbolism, the works raise questions about the relevance of nationalism in an era of expanding globalisation and suggest the internet is increasingly becoming a tool of digital colonialism. By distributing this knowledge in the public sphere, this study challenges and tests the assumption—often asserted and implied by those who control this infrastructure and obscure it from public awareness—that public knowledge is a threat to the cable. Instead, viewers are encouraged to explore what individual agency they do, or do not, have as New Zealand citizens in shaping this dominant influence on contemporary New Zealand culture.

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Finally, to my exceptional children Stella, Abel and Lane. I hope this in some small way helps keep the internet you inherit from being super freaky and creepy.

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