

Bus Projects;
Mar. 09–Apr. 10, 2021

Carly Fischer
AND Edwina Stevens
'Conversation Piece'

Bus Projects operates on the unceded sovereign land of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

The neve is the immediate surface of a lengthy process; a process of layering time, compression as a cycle. Where the process starts and ends isn't so easy to define; it's always shifting between states, like an oscillation. The snow falls above, compressing down into the glacier, pushing it forward. As the uppermost layers accumulate and compact, the underside melts and recedes. The balance is contingent on intersecting moments, a conversation between air, water, ice, rock and wind. If the circumstances shift, the balance could slip; it is ultimately precarious, like all moments.

Poor weather and eventual white-out left us stuck on the neve of Te Moeka o Tuawe glacier, Aotearoa for 3 days. Inverting more familiar perspectives of expansive snowfields and cascading glacial ice, the white-out completely obscured the surrounding environment, forcing us to abandon expectations, sit and wait. The loss of orientation, the visual obscurity, the intense cold and quiet meant that the environment was reduced to small sounds and details; water dripping outside the cabin as icicles melted on the roof, the crackling of the radio on the wall, the gas burner boiling water, ice cracking and snow drifts coming away, fragmentary glimpses of the neve shifting in and out of view. The possibilities of the environment were unregulatable; you were forced into a different conversation with the surroundings that was more unpredictable, intimate and fragmentary.

This shifted perspective resurfaced again at the start of the COVID lockdown in Melbourne. Restricted to my immediate environment, I was forced into a more intimate relationship with time and space that opened up different conversations with materiality. The glacial expanse of Te Moeka o Tuawe seemed a world away to Melbourne's COVID-imposed 5km radius and the limitations of my home shed. I had been meaning to re-learn how to throw clay on the wheel and the restrictions provided the time and space to focus on the material again. My grandmother was a ceramist and I grew up watching her hands and the dialogue they had with the clay as it cycled on the wheel. The motion of the wheel was like a vortex, where my hands learned to form and collapse clay over and over, without beginning or end. When you've worked with clay in

this intimate way before, your body carries the conversation in its muscle memory. Throwing clay on the wheel again, my body also became a conduit for the memory of my grandmother.

Ice has a memory and the colour of its memory is blue. This memory is formed in the particles of air trapped between snowflakes as they fall on the neve of a glacier. As more and more snow falls, the intricate structure of the snowflakes collapse under compression, forming ice, and the trapped air is squeezed into tiny air bubbles between crystals. As the larger air bubbles that give the ice its white colour decrease in size, the water molecules that are left appear blue, as large bodies of water appear blue. This is because water molecules absorb all the other colours more efficiently, reflecting only blue. As this ice compacts down into the glacier in layers, the tiny air bubbles form cursive loops. The memory carried in the air around the snowflake that fell half a million years ago is now stored in the layers of blue ice at the bottom of the glacier.¹

Clay has a memory. This memory is carried in the clay body through every stage of its formation. Working with clay is therefore a conversation piece between material and memory. In preparing clay for throwing on the wheel, its memory is transformed through wedging the clay over and over itself in a motion similar to waves. This process compresses the clay, squeezes out air bubbles and erases the clay's former memory, realigning and condensing its particles to be reformed again by throwing on the wheel. If you mark the clay while you're wedging it, you can see the mark spiral around on itself in a cycle, as it forms a new memory. As the wheel cycles, the clay forms a new memory through each rotation and constant pressure from the hands, pulling it up. When you reach the limit of its formation, it will start to wobble; this is the clay telling you that if you keep pulling it up it will eventually collapse.² When clay collapses or deforms, its memory is retained, and so the process cycles back to the start to begin again by reforming its memory for a new conversation.

As a glacier moves over the surface of mountains, due to a combination of surface slope, gravity and pressure, it transforms the rock in its path through compression. Many of the rocks around Te Moeka o Tuawe glacier are comprised



of Greywacke and Schist, alternate forms of compacted and hardened clay. Greywacke is a sedimentary mudstone, formed by the accumulation and cementation of small clay particles on the floor of oceans and rivers. Schist is a metamorphic rock, formed from clay mudstone that has been chemically transformed through heat and pressure. As the glacier moves over these rocky surfaces, fragments are lifted into the ice and form a kind of sandpaper, pulverising previously transformed rock into fine clay particles, which flow into the glacial streams to accumulate again as mudstone.³ As the glacier moves over the surface of the mountains, it therefore transforms the memory of the clay below it through compression, as it forms a new memory in the snow falling above.

Te Moeka o Tuawe is a temperate maritime glacier that was formed at the start of the Ice Age, half a million years ago. For half a million years, this maritime glacier has been in a precarious balance as liquid water co-exists with ice at melting point. For half a million years, warm, moist air travelling from Australia has been dropping snow in the higher elevations of these Southern Alps of Aotearoa, piling it up to form neves.⁴ As the snow compacts down, tiny air bubbles that stored the memory of the air that travelled are pushed down into the bottom of the glacier. If the circumstances shift, the balance could slip, pushing the glacier forward and melting the ice into water, in a feedback loop.

In Neve, photos from the white-out on Te Moeka o Tuawe cut in and out, building, receding and disappearing through fragmentary glimpses as the visibility of the neve comes and goes. Ice cracks and melts, the radio shifts in and out of reception, the white-out drones on. The work is not linear in terms of the perception of time, the transience of the moment is ever present. The ambiguity of the composition parallels the process present in the glacier, always contingent on chance encounters that happen at a particular moment and the conversation between these more intimate fragments. Where one thing starts and ends depends on from where you're listening and looking in a network of negotiations that might intersect or slip at any moment.

In conversation with this environment that seems so far away and so monumental in comparison to Melbourne under lockdown, yet intimately interconnected in its ecological implications, I form clay on the wheel. I think about how I can possibly respond to the enormity of the glacial environment of the Southern Alps from a suburban shed in Melbourne. In responding to the intimacy of Neve, through its more fragmentary and relational dialogues with the environment, the small sounds and glimpses of vision in amongst the white-out, I start to tune into the motion of the wheel and the feel of the clay in my hands. The clay cycling on the wheel as it forms and collapses, over and over again, seems to create a conversation piece with the neve. The clay forces me to be patient and create an intimate relationship with its material memory, forming and collapsing it with my hands, in oscillation with the wheel. Clay needs constant nurture through every stage of the process or somewhere along the way it will fight back, resist its formation and revert to some former memory of itself. Working with clay is therefore a symbiotic relationship between the maker and the material, through a process of slow compression and waiting patiently for the clay to take its time.

As my hands form and collapse the clay over and over again, the process is filmed as a conversation piece with Neve, seemingly more intimate in its parallel process and material memory to being there. The drone of the wheel is like the white noise of the snow and the silence outside the cabin on the neve, the sound of the ice cracking and melting merges with the water and slip on the clay as its formed on the wheel. Where one thing starts and ends isn't so easy to define. The sounds from the wheel and the neve are fed back into speakers embedded in the ceramic forms created in response, in a feedback loop. The conversation piece between the visual and audio fragments is constantly negotiating, overlapping, shifting and slipping in a precarious balance, like all moments.

Carly Fischer and Edwina Stevens
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supported by the City of Melbourne
COVID-19 Arts Grants





¹ Robert Macfarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*, Penguin Random House:UK, 2019, pp 337-9.

² Hsin-Chuen Lin, *Throwing a Cylinder Step-by-Step*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-3mBUtPlR4>, accessed 5/4/20.

³ Fergus Murray, *The Geomorphology of the Fox Glacier Region*, <https://www.fergusmurraysculpture.com/new-zealand/southern-alps-and-glaciers-9-pages/ii-the-geomorphology-of-the-fox-glacier-region/>, accessed 25/1/21.

⁴ Fergus Murray, *The Geomorphology of the Fox Glacier Region*, <https://www.fergusmurraysculpture.com/new-zealand/southern-alps-and-glaciers-9-pages/ii-the-geomorphology-of-the-fox-glacier-region/>, accessed 25/1/21.

Carly and Edwina began collaborating in 2018 through a shared interest in investigating the hidden histories and peripheral dialogues of places, through similar sculptural and audio-visual methodologies, focusing on encounters, excavations, fragments, traces and ghosts. Based in Melbourne, Australia but also drawing on Edwina's past and ongoing connections to Aotearoa, their investigations are particularly focused on the political importance of smaller details and local narratives in Australia and New Zealand.

Carly Fischer Lives and works in Melbourne

Carly Fischer is a sculptural and audio installation artist from Melbourne, Australia. Her work explores the smaller details, peripheral zones and hidden histories of places, creating alternate narratives that question broader cultural and colonial perspectives. Engaging with environments through a fragmentary and meandering process of encountered objects, materials, sounds and histories, her sculptural and sonic reconstructions reflect on places as complex and shifting sites of accumulation, interaction and negotiation.

Carly has exhibited widely in Australia, Germany, Austria, The Netherlands, Scotland, Japan and the US through solo, group and collaborative projects and residencies, including recent exhibitions at Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, Melbourne, The Art Gallery of Ballarat, Warrnambool Art Gallery, Watch This Space, Alice Springs, Gippsland Art Gallery, KWADRAT and REH Kunst, Germany and MU Artspace, the Netherlands. Her sculptural and sound installations often include collaborations with sound artists.

Her recent collaboration with audiovisual artist Edwina Stevens 'I feel the earth move under my feet', created in response to a residency at Melbourne's Living Museum of the West and exhibited at Incinerator Gallery in 2019, was included in Radiophrenia, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow and is also upcoming at La Trobe Art Institute, Bendigo. Carly has also been a finalist in prizes such as The 2017 Guirguis New Art Prize, The Art Gallery of Ballarat and The 2018 Incinerator Art Award with her work 'Creating False Memories for a Place That Never Was', in collaboration with sound artist Mieko Suzuki. She has been the recipient of several Australia Council Art Grants as well as an Australian Postgraduate Award for her MFA research at Monash University focusing on some of the problems of site-specific practice in a contemporary context.

Edwina Stevens Lives and works in Melbourne

Edwina Stevens (Dunedin, Aotearoa/Melbourne) is an audiovisual artist working across composition, installation and live performance focusing on synthesized sound, field recordings, found acoustic elements/instruments and obsolete media. Her work investigates audiovisual processes of engaging with places that are collaborative, improvisational and serendipitous, exploring entanglements of the temporal, material and experiential through chance encounters, tangential processes and unanticipated outcomes.

Edwina's audiovisual practice has been exhibited as part of group shows and collaborations, through installations, radio pieces and screenings, such as at Incinerator Gallery (Melbourne 2019), Radiophrenia (Centre of Contemporary Art, Glasgow 2019), Radia Network (commissioned radio piece, European network 2018), ABC Spotlight Audible Women (Melbourne 2017), Melbourne Environmental Film Festival (Melbourne 2015), Blue Oyster Gallery (Dunedin, 2011), Artspace (Auckland, 2010), HSP (Christchurch, 2010), None Gallery (Dunedin), The Anteroom (Dunedin). Her recent sound collaboration with Carly Fischer was included as part of Radiophrenia 2019 at Glasgow Centre for Contemporary Art, after being exhibited as part of a multi-channel sound and sculptural installation at Incinerator Gallery. Aside from her audiovisual installation practice, Edwina has played under the moniker of 'eves' since 2011 performing live visual and sound works across New Zealand and Australia (FFFFFF, eves). She has played in collaborative and self-structured events and tours such as Lines of Flight Festival Dunedin 2019, Ladyz In Noyz Australia 2017, Sisters Akousmatica Liquid Architecture/Next Wave Festival, Signal 2016, Nowhere Festival Auckland 2014 and Make It Up Club Melbourne, recorded and released 4 albums and was nominated for The Age Music Victoria Awards/Best Experimental-Avante Garde Act for 2015.

IMAGES

i., ii., iii., iv.: Carly Fischer & Edwina Stevens 'Conversation Piece' 2021

Pine, stoneware clay and glazes, adhesives, acrylic paint, speakers, projectors, cables, videos and audio sound scape. Dimensions variable

Bus Projects acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate: the Wurundjeri people and Elders past and present of the Kulin nations.

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OPENING HOURS
Tue–Fri 12–6pm
Sat 12–4pm

