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## COVER IMAGE

Leafa Wilson/Olga Krause *Ich Heisse Olga Krause, Deutsche Kuenstlerin* 2005  
Poster print (detail). Image reproduced in full below.



The life-long work of performance artist Leafa Wilson/Olga Krause began in 2005. These propagandist poster-styled works are loosely based around the Russian Constructivist design aesthetic adopted by the German band 'Kraftwerk'. With both Samoan and German ancestry, the artist reconciles their past and present by creating utopic race relations in the site of their body: I am Olga Krause, German artist (Ich Heisse Olga Krause, Deutsche Kuenstlerin)

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# ‘Once More, With Feeling: An Enquiry into the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa’s Exhibition *Gallipoli: The Scale of Our War*’, MA Thesis, Massey University, 2016

## In summary

Nicholas Haig.

In my MA thesis, ‘Once More, With Feeling: An Enquiry into the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa’s Exhibition *Gallipoli: The Scale of Our War*’, I inquired into what *Gallipoli* might reveal about how Te Papa interprets and performs its public role. I examined the political, economic and cultural contexts that shape Te Papa; the epistemes and policy objectives informing the exhibition’s development; and the cultural conventions it promulgates. That is, I examined what Te Papa *does*: the realities and relationships it reflects and produces. The research revealed a series of tensions and contradictions, calling the founding principles of Te Papa into question. Employing qualitative methodologies, ‘Once More, With Feeling’ is marked by a discursive engagement with critical museology.

Created in partnership with special effects company Weta Workshop, *Gallipoli* — which was the central showpiece in Aotearoa New Zealand’s First World War centennial commemorations — was intended to be an emotional journey that would take you back to Gallipoli. Although developed during a time of institutional ‘commotion’ at the Museum, *Gallipoli* has gone on to become the most visited exhibition in Te Papa’s history. A chronologically unfurling tale of Aotearoa New Zealand’s Gallipoli campaign, the exhibition is comprised of six darkened circular spaces containing hyperreal giant model figures of Aotearoa New Zealand service people and five more conventionally conceived exhibitionary spaces. Marked by a distinctive institutional voice, the exhibition also features a ground-up historiographical method.

‘Once More, With Feeling’ analyses the implications of an ‘affective public pedagogy’ as used by Te Papa in *Gallipoli*. Affective and participatory encounters now occupy a privileged position in museological practice and I see *Gallipoli* as part of this new wave, encouraging empathetic encounters with the past. In my thesis I ask whether the emancipatory potential such affective and participatory encounters have been afforded is a mirage and whether such practices in fact signify a (theorised) return to earlier museological agendas. Another essential concern of the research was with how practices of memorialisation are employed as, firstly, pedagogical and therapeutic catalysts and, secondly, devices of ‘governmentality’ in the Foucauldian sense.<sup>1</sup> With regard to the latter, ‘there is nothing new in the suggestion that museums are usefully viewed as machineries that are implicated in the shaping of civic

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<sup>1</sup> See Nikolas Rose, ‘The death of the social? Re-figuring the territory of government,’ *Economy & Society* 25, 3, (1996), pp. 327–356.

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capacities'.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, a perception that museums have changed considerably in recent times. Since the 1980s, and in response to postmodern and post-colonial critiques, museums have been distinguished by discourses of democratisation while also having to adapt to neoliberal agendas and the corporatisation of public services, with funding bodies now expecting them to be 'accountable in both capitalist and in social terms'.<sup>3</sup> Te Papa is typically identified as an exemplar in this respect.

In my thesis I examined the divergences and correspondences between Te Papa's public remit, its institutional rhetoric and its actual representational strategies, and concluded that it was marked by a series of tensions and disjunctions: for instance, between its messianic new corporate vision of 'changing hearts, changing minds, changing lives' and its responsibility to act as 'a forum for the nation' as set out in the Te Papa Act.<sup>4</sup> Further to this, my thesis demonstrates that Te Papa's imbrication with neoliberalism has a decisive influence on its facility to fulfil its public remit, with the necessity of commercial positivity meaning that surface change — for example, the hunt for and production of new products and audiences — is endemic. What this suggests is that if crisis is the normative state, then the Museum is compelled to continually reaffirm its legitimacy. This is a slippery dialectic. Apropos Weta's involvement, such practices of corporate 'distributed co-creation' — as discovered in my research — impede both endogenous and exogenous inquiry and critique.

*Gallipoli* was also perceived to be characterised by a series of collisions. For instance, between its overtly didactic agenda ('lest we forget'); its pedagogy premised on 'affect' ('just feel'); and its philosophy of authorial dispersal ('you decide' on the one hand and 'let them decide' (Weta, that is) on the other). Further to this, my contention is that the exhibition indulges visitor expectations rather than challenging them, and it may be seen as Pavlovian in the sense of being a trigger for the *affective idea* of Gallipoli within Aotearoa

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Bennett, 'Civic Laboratories: Museums, Cultural Objecthood and the Governance of the Social', *Cultural Studies*, 19, 5 (2005), p. 522.

<sup>3</sup> Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> For the corporate vision see Te Papa, *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Statement of Intent 2014 – 2018*. Retrieved from <<https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/about/what-we-do/annual-reports-and-key-documents>>. For the Te Papa Act: New Zealand Legislation see <<http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1992/0019/latest/whole.html#d1m260204>>.

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New Zealand's national imaginary. Additionally, *Gallipoli* does not simply confirm conventional understandings of Aotearoa New Zealand's involvement in the Gallipoli campaign: it tells a story — hyper-detailed, hypertrophied, bloody and believable — which raises the stakes with regard to Aotearoa New Zealand's 'history of trauma', while simultaneously and perhaps counterintuitively functioning to further distance the nation from its colonial origins. The desire to make *Gallipoli* an emotional journey is, I maintain, as much a political imperative as it is a pedagogical one.

Furthermore, *Gallipoli* utilises many of the tropes of testimonial culture while maintaining the primacy of a traditional historiographical method, and is indicative of the trend to recuperate the 'epic in the register of the humdrum'.<sup>5</sup> In other words, an array of colloquial voices does not mean the history on display is any less authoritative, and to uncritically align affective and testimonial approaches with post-hegemonic aspirations would seem erroneous. Although visitors are afforded opportunity for heuristic learning experiences just as they are able to perform rituals of catharsis, *Gallipoli's* labyrinthine spatial design, fantastical-realist aesthetics and carefully choreographed soundscape combine to create a 'sacred–real' affective environment from which it is difficult to maintain a distance. *Gallipoli's* embodied commemorative politics are, and despite bearing the countenance of the counter-hegemonical, disciplinary.

Within the exhibition there is a laudable particularising of traumatic human history, though by omitting the wider contexts and consequences of the violence the suffering is depoliticized. Meanwhile, despite there being many voices, *Gallipoli's* 'choir' is polyphonic rather than dissonant: there is no indeterminacy in the telling of the tale. In my thesis I conclude that this lack of conflict and discord — things which 'do not ruin the democratic public sphere, [but] are conditions of its existence' — demonstrates Te Papa's current inability to fulfil its legislative responsibility to be a 'forum for the nation'.<sup>6</sup> To refashion a Foucauldian formulation, it is hoped that my research stimulates

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<sup>5</sup> Colin Burrow, 'You've Listened Long Enough', *London Review of Books*, 38, 8 (2016), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, ed. by Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 176.

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further scrutiny of the particular forms of ‘violence’ that Te Papa continues to exercise (somewhat) obscurely.<sup>7</sup>

Based in Nelson, Nicholas completed an MA in Museum Studies in 2016 and is currently a Massey University doctoral candidate. Haig’s Marxist and psychoanalytically oriented research focuses on contemporary memorial formations and the social and political functions of museums.

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<sup>7</sup> Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky – Foucault Debate: On Human Nature* (New York: The New Press, 2006) p. 41.