

TO LINGER IN POST-EARTHQUAKE CHRISTCHURCH:
THE RESPONSIBILITY OF WAITING

Josephine Carter¹

ABSTRACT

Following natural disasters in urban environments, those who remain are left not only to occupy an unfamiliar space but also to experience a painfully drawn out temporality: the time of waiting. A decade after earthquakes struck Christchurch city, some residents are still inhabiting a time of limbo, awaiting decisions on the fate of their homes and businesses. In this paper, I examine various creative projects that appeared in exposed and vacant sites in post-quake Christchurch. These projects turned such sites into dwelling spaces in which passers-by are encouraged to hesitate and linger. Such sites thus encourage people to experience the temporality of waiting, but in a different and, I argue, more enabling way. This paper examines the ethical possibilities that emerge from lingering before such sites. Drawing on the notion that ethics is not so much a normative procedure and more an impetus that opens up the space of the encounter, I argue that when Cantabrians tarry before such sites, they recognise a world which is not constituted by replaceable objects, but, instead, in their responsiveness, they experience a self that is constituted by its immersion in the world.

Keywords: natural disaster; waiting; temporality; Christchurch earthquakes; ethical responsiveness

INTRODUCTION

Waiting, waiting ... Christchurch has become 'the waiting place' from Dr Seuss' *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*
(Bex Davies, 'Quake – A Year On')

'Living on a knife edge'; 'caught in limbo'; 'in a constant state of alert'; 'left to wait and wait': these are just some of the phrases that Christchurch residents

have used to describe their experiences of inhabiting a city that has become a waiting place. This perception of Christchurch, the second most populous city in New Zealand, as a waiting place is a consequence of the aftermath of two unexpected earthquakes that caused the city and its surrounding environs to tremble. In September 2010, the Canterbury region was struck by an earthquake of magnitude 7.1, which, while not leading to any loss of life, caused widespread damage, including power outages, cracked road surfaces, broken sewers and water lines, and significant damage to public, commercial, and residential buildings. Less than six months later, in February 2011, Christchurch experienced a second earthquake of magnitude 6.3, which would claim 185 lives and severely damage the city's central business district and eastern suburbs. Following the earthquakes, those who live in the Canterbury region have been subjected to a variety of experiences of waiting. Some have experienced the agonising wait before discovering the fate of loved ones in the immediate aftermath of the second earthquake, and many have experienced the frustration of living in temporary accommodation, waiting to learn the outcome of assessments of their properties, while all have endured the whims of an unstable ground which has produced tens of thousands of aftershocks and been prone to surface flooding. The Cantabrian experience of post-quake waiting provides an extreme example of how the condition of waiting can permeate every aspect of a singular life as well as affect a wider community. Moreover, this experience was not confined to the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes: eleven years on from the disaster, 'many homeowners are still wrestling to work through unsettled [insurance] claims' (RNZ 2022). For Cantabrians, waiting is neither a momentary inconvenience nor a frustration that will quickly pass but, instead, has become a debilitating mode of existence that shapes their 'new normal' (Stevens 2013, 12).²

The experience of waiting, which has been catalysed by the aftermath of the earthquakes, is one of occupying a painfully prolonged present and, consequently, has induced Christchurch residents to feel disillusioned and disempowered. According to Harold Schweizer, the enforced passivity that attends the experience of waiting is because 'the person who waits is out of sync with time, outside of the "moral" and economic community of those whose time is productive and synchronized', and, as a result, he or she is 'expel[ed] from the community of productive citizens' (2008, 8). In his work on the debilitating experience of boredom felt by the homeless in Romania, Bruce O'Neill (2017) captures how when cut off from productive time, the homeless suffer from 'a feeling that time has slowed down and that one is stuck in place' (3), and they desire to reconnect with social worlds 'mediated by consumer practices' (5). Similarly, in order to regain a sense of agency, Christchurch residents felt (and,

in some cases, continue to feel) an urgent need for the experience of waiting to be resolved. However, in the three-year period that followed the earthquakes, many residents felt either excluded from, or unconvinced by, the various practical and ideological attempts to reinstate them into the community of productive citizens. In particular, these were residents who either continued to occupy a state of limbo due to ongoing delays in property settlements, and/or those who resisted absorbing the rhetoric of resilience and community resolve that was used to reframe the experience of waiting as one that is dependent on a heroic form of fortitude.

During this period when many residents were struggling with the ‘new normal’, the streets of Christchurch became hosts to a variety of creative projects that often sought to alleviate the stress that was induced by waiting. These projects were organised or created by grassroots organisations and individuals as a way of responding to Christchurch’s new normality. My specific interest is in the non-event projects that emerged during the three-year period after the earthquakes and which were often of a temporary nature, such as graffiti or stencil art sprayed on a crumbling wall, installations in vacant sites, and innovative uses of ruins, which, while less overtly interactive than event-type projects, encourage the interaction of passers-by through stalling their progress and arresting their gaze. Such visual sites respond to the ongoing effects of the earthquake by often invoking and inducing spatial and temporal disorientation. Moreover, somewhat surprisingly, they can act as spatial catalysts for the temporal experience which has perhaps been the greatest cause of stress and anxiety for Christchurch residents: the experience of waiting.

Emerging as creative responses to post-earthquake Christchurch, these visually oriented sites invite people to linger but catalyse an experience of waiting that does not undermine the passer-by’s agency. Such sites, thus, invoke a radically different experience of waiting, whereby waiting is not simply to be endured and passed through, but instead may offer, as Schweizer describes it, ‘rewards’ (2008, 2). Such rewards can be political, social and economic. For unemployed young men in Northern India who pass the time (or ‘timepass’ as it is called in India), an abundance of time has provided the opportunity to mobilise politically (Jeffrey 2010). Similarly, male residents waiting to be evicted from a proposed urban zone in Vietnam, despite being out of sync with ‘the linear progress-oriented temporality of planning, finance and development’ (Harms 2013, 349), have managed to ‘transform waiting into an economically productive and surprisingly empowering form of social experience’ (347).

By contrast, the ‘rewards’ offered by Christchurch’s artistic sites that induce

'waiting' are less overtly tangible. By encouraging passers-by to pause and linger, these visually oriented sites, which became (and, in some cases, continue to be) part of the fabric of Christchurch, reveal the way in which people's acts of attention are products of a paradoxical passive form of agency. This is a form of agency that is not defined in relation to an understanding of the self as autonomous and discrete, but instead requires thinking of the self as first and foremost a site of responsiveness. Christchurch's sites of waiting invoke the responsiveness that underlies people's relations to others, things, and the environments that they inhabit. They reveal the fundamental interrelatedness that underpins living in a physical environment, such as a city, invoking what Tyson Vaughan (2021) describes as the 'wishy-washy intangibles' (209) that post-disaster communities often long for and which state-led recovery projects often overlook in a 'single-minded focus on rapidly rebuilding' (202). To dwell in Christchurch's creative sites of waiting allowed people to experience and become aware of human and non-human interdependency, disavowing the relentless drive by the then Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery to deem 'high productivity and export-driven economic growth' as the sole principles that should be used to guide Christchurch's future (Brownlee 2013, 7).³

A TALE OF TWO CITIES: THE RESILIENT AND THE MOANER

Following the second earthquake, Christchurch was thrown into a state that disaster theorists call 'transient dysfunction' (Norris *et al.* 2008, 132). Severe damage to roads, water lines, the sewerage system, and power system, as well as disturbances to the public transport infrastructure and the cordoning of the Central Business District, meant that the daily operations and routines of the city and its residents were thrown into disarray. Moreover, even though, as time would reveal, damage to personal property was not distributed equally in the Canterbury region, the loss of the hub of Christchurch city caused widespread dysfunction. In disaster theory, such a state of dysfunction is considered a 'normative result in the immediate aftermath of disasters' (130), and the stress that accompanies dysfunction is deemed 'a normal reaction to an abnormal event' (132). However, as its name implies, transient dysfunction is not a permanent state and is typically 'followed by a return to functioning' which, although not 'the qualitative equivalent of pre-event functioning', signals a positive trajectory of adaptation to an altered environment (132).

In the case of Christchurch, two significant narratives emerged that not only counteracted the distressing effects of occupying a transient dysfunctional state but also signalled that Christchurch was moving beyond it. These narratives, on the one hand, focused on community resolve and, on the other hand, presented

a trajectory that culminated in Christchurch's positive future, providing an antidote to waiting. For those Cantabrians dwelling in a temporal experience of waiting, their stress and anxiety are directly linked to a sense of self-failure, which, in turn, is the result of acceding to a specific temporal regime. Despite the fact that people experience a multitude of temporalities, the primary temporal framework for ordering and accounting for people's experience of time in the modern era has depended on an understanding of time as linear, uniform, and homogenous. The perception of waiting as undesirable or burdensome is the product of the institutionalisation of standardised homogenous clock time in modern societies and the enduring role that the myth of progress plays in human affairs.⁴ When we reduce time to a commodity and a linear scale for assessing 'achieving instrumental ends in the most "efficient" way possible' (Knights 2006, 256), we simultaneously activate an exclusionary dynamic. This dynamic is evident both in terms of how we classify people as productive or non-productive citizens, and in relation to how we evaluate experiences of time as either desirable and normal or undesirable and abnormal. If, as David Knights observes, 'the idea of unstructured time [...] is troublesome to us in modern society' (252), then waiting with its associations with passivity, non-productivity, and abnormality is perceived as requiring resolution and a return to normality. This perception was affirmed by the narratives produced about post-quake Canterbury by a range of different institutions, including the media and central and local government bodies, which presented waiting as a condition that could and would be traversed. Such narratives reassured Cantabrians that the period of limbo that immediately followed the second earthquake provided a unique opportunity to demonstrate the resilience of the Cantabrian community spirit, which, in turn, would assist in the birth of a new city. Without wishing in any way to undermine the very real examples of communal care, generosity and sharing which have occurred in the Canterbury region following the earthquakes, I suggest that as time has passed, Canterbury's narratives of resilience may have only served to intensify experiences of powerlessness and the sense of being cut off from the rest of society among those who wait.

In a speech delivered at the Christchurch Earthquake Memorial Service, John Key (2011), then Prime Minister of New Zealand, spoke of the trauma and devastation that many Cantabrians had experienced, describing the 'scars that will never be erased from our land, or from our hearts'. Observing that many Cantabrians were subject to a 'time of great uncertainty', Key then paid tribute to Cantabrians' resilience and concluded by affirming that 'we are resolute. This city will be rebuilt'. While Key's speech acknowledged that 'disasters sometimes impair the quality of life in the community for quite some time' (Norris *et al.* 2008, 134), he also subtly implied that the aftermath of the earthquake has given

rise to communal traits that will best serve Christchurch's future. Key's speech implicitly evokes and reproduces an all too familiar 'Kiwi' narrative or mindset: the Kiwi resolve to get on with it, which was perhaps best epitomised by the mayor of Christchurch who frequently appeared and was photographed on the streets of Christchurch with his sleeves rolled up.⁵ Key identifies resilience, which had without question informed the altruistic responses of everyday Cantabrians to other people's plight after the earthquake, as a quality that defines the community spirit of Canterbury. In disaster theory, resilience is a 'process linking a set of adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation after a disturbance' (Norris *et al.* 2008, 130). The problem with Key's equation of resilience with Canterbury's communal identity is that it glosses over the very real differences between people's socioeconomic experiences of pre-and-post-earthquake life, which, in turn, will determine their respective abilities to demonstrate adaptive capacities. In Christchurch, not only were 'socioeconomically disadvantaged areas [...] disproportionately affected by the earthquakes, with damage and liquefaction more prevalent in low-lying areas', but post-earthquake surveys assessing mental wellbeing recovery in Christchurch residents have shown that low-income households, women aged between 35–49 years and those identifying as Māori have lower-mean wellbeing scores (Begg *et al.* 2021, 158). Narratives that align Canterbury's communal identity with adaptive capacities can implicitly disavow those groups who are most severely affected by the earthquakes and caught in the limbo of waiting, implicitly charging them with not only letting the community down but also with not being 'true' Cantabrians.

In the immediate aftermath of the February earthquake, Cantabrians' community spirit was evident in the variety of ways that people bonded together to help others in a time of need. Alongside offerings of practical assistance to others, the city's damaged surfaces became host to messages of support. In one case, ribbons were interwoven into the mesh of one of the wire-netting fences that became prominent markers of the boundaries of the central business district cordon, forming the words 'Kia Kaha', a Māori phrase meaning 'be strong'. In another case, the words 'they'll never shake me' were spray painted onto a brick wall, offering passers-by a stance of resistance that complemented the media's emerging tales of Cantabrian stoicism. Such impromptu and anonymous offerings respond to the experience of powerlessness induced by waiting by implicitly using a narrative model of making sense of an unfamiliar reality. The emphasis that these messages place on fortitude invokes a narrative of heroism, which renders waiting a temporal experience to be endured and traversed. They thus not only demonstrate the way in which a temporal regime can be 'internalized as a part of self' (Rutz 1992, 3) – in this particular case, the

temporal regime is determined by the dictates of clock time which renders waiting an undesirable experience – but also contribute to the construction of an imagined community.

Following natural disasters, when institutions and people construct and disseminate communal narratives, they can ‘give the experience shared meaning and purpose’, and, most importantly, as case studies have revealed, communities that produce such communal narratives have lower rates of post-traumatic stress than those who do not (Norris *et al.* 2008, 140). An editorial entitled ‘Our Resilient Spirit’, which was published in 2011 in the *Press*, Christchurch’s daily newspaper, identified the ‘heightened level of stress’ experienced by those Cantabrians who were facing an ‘uncertain and fatiguing future’, and it was argued that the best means to combat such stress was to foster a ‘spirit of resilience and focus on positive stories of survival’. However, as time passed and more information about the extent and distribution of the damage emerged, those people who still felt themselves to be waiting – such as the thousands who were waiting for the resolution of earthquake insurance claims – became impatient with the officially sanctioned narrative of resilience and heroism which came to re-present and speak for *their* new reality.

If following a natural disaster ‘victims who received high levels of help [...] were protected against salient erosion in their perceptions of belonging’ (Norris *et al.* 2008, 135), conversely it can be expected that victims who feel unsupported are more likely to feel cut off from the community and to have a negative perception of it.⁶ In the case of Christchurch, while in the immediate period after the earthquake people felt united by adversity, those who were still waiting a year later for decisions to be made on quake claims deviated from the officially sanctioned line of the unity of Cantabrians by voicing their discontent. Such criticisms not only clashed with the construction of Cantabrians as stoic but also played a role in highlighting the divisions within the community. An article published in the *Press* three years after the quakes provided names for these divisions, dividing the city’s inhabitants into four tribes: the angry, the disillusioned, the untouched, and the hopeful (Carville and Turner 2013). After three years, it had become increasingly clear that not all Cantabrians were experiencing the aftermath of the earthquakes in the same way, and to add insult to injury, those who still felt themselves to be waiting bore witness to those who had not only escaped the earthquakes relatively unscathed but were now benefiting from a booming economy.⁷ At the same point as clear winners and losers began to emerge from the aftermath of the earthquakes, narratives emerged in a variety of forums which stressed the positive trajectory of Christchurch’s recovery and rebuild process, providing the desired ‘sense of an ending’ that

would signal the traversal of waiting once and for all. Christchurch's positive future was not only projected and disseminated by both central and local government officials but was also written onto the city's physical spaces via graffiti, such as the spray painted message 'we will smile again' and the vibrant and colorful image of a phoenix rising from blue flames alongside the words 'Christchurch destined to rise again'.⁸ Those who offered a dissenting voice to this positive trajectory of Christchurch's progress were, in one specific instance, described as 'carping and moaning' by the Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery and, ultimately, left to wait.⁹

CREATIVE RESPONSES TO WAITING

In response to the severe sense of spatial and temporal disorientation that ensued in the aftermath of the earthquakes, a range of grassroots organizations and individuals took to the streets, undertaking a variety of projects that sought to ease the symptoms of 'quake brain', a condition which left many Cantabrians unable to concentrate and subject to a constant sense of unease. These projects varied greatly, including one-off events, such as poetry readings and outdoor movie screenings; the creation of interactive makeshift sites that offered the public the opportunity to participate in lawn bowls, mini-golf, and dancing; and the production of visually oriented sites, such as murals, graffiti, and installation-styled arrangements. Such projects have demonstrated innovative and unexpected uses of the ruins, vacant sites, and gaps that have emerged in the city following the earthquakes. A bricolage-style method of using materials that happen to be readily available inspires many of these projects, as demonstrated by Gap Filler, an urban regeneration initiative, whose purpose and name exemplifies the process of using the city's gaps as both inspiration and sites for creative responses to post-earthquake Christchurch.

The creation of congregation sites and the organisation of event-based activities accede to the perception that waiting is undesirable. The construction of a pallet pavilion on the old Crowne Plaza Hotel site offered Cantabrians a site to congregate and created a space for live music and community events. Such sites foster a sense of community and thus contribute to a temporal narrative that projects the Cantabrian community spirit and resolve as an antidote to waiting. Similarly, the range of events that have been organized around the city, from dances, poetry readings, concerts, and movie screenings to the construction of temporary bowling greens and mini-golf courses, do not contest a temporal regime that constructs waiting as an undesirable state to be responded to with the offering of momentary distractions.

Alongside projects that attempted to ‘distract’ Cantabrians from their post-earthquake reality, however, were a variety of creative responses to the earthquakes that did not gloss over the fact that for many Cantabrians their time was out of joint. Such responses play with the idea that Cantabrians are inhabiting a topsy-turvy world where they might find brightly coloured pianos on the street, or pop down the road to the local refrigerator which contains books, or experience a confusion of sensory perceptions as brick walls become textured by painted-on knit patterns.¹⁰ These projects are inherently playful, offering a temporary balm for the demoralising experience of waiting. Moreover, this playfulness does not exclude foregrounding the devastating effects that occurred when the earthquakes severely disrupted people’s experience of space and time. Appearing on the footpath of Peterborough Street, a message spray painted on the asphalt uses both its wonky form and content to highlight the plight of Christchurch’s residents:

On
Peterborough
Street the
houses are
wonky.
The ground
has been
pulled out
from
underneath
them.
The trick
worked and
the houses
stayed up,
but they are
wonky.
If you
lived in them
you might
become
wonky too.

This anonymous offering signifies how, following a natural disaster, changes to a built and once familiar environment profoundly affect people, causing an ongoing sense of displacement.¹¹

WAITING AS A FORM OF RESPONSIBILITY

My primary interest is in those artistic responses to the earthquake that can respond in kind or, in other words, those that respond to waiting through inducing the experience of waiting. They demonstrate that in some cases waiting is not always a condition to be shunned and quickly traversed, but can also provide the opportunity to dwell, linger, and attend to the physical environments which people inhabit. Such responses constitute in Homi Bhabha's terms a repetition that is 'almost the same, but not quite' (1994, 86); they invoke the experience of waiting, focusing not on 'how we *pass through* waiting but how we *are* in it, not in the expectation of the end of waiting but in the *quality* of waiting as such' (Schweizer 2008, 11). Moreover, as is the case of colonial mimicry, these experiences of waiting play an important role in exposing the fractures or 'strategic limitation[s] [...] *within* the authoritative discourse' (Bhabha 1994, 86). In this particular case, the discourse is one that pertains to the autonomous subject and how we all-too-readily conflate responsibility with issues of culpability and accountability. These discourses limit how we perceive people's relationships to the physical environments in which they dwell, obscuring, as Rosalyn Diprose argues, 'the central role that things and other non-human elements of built and living environments play in human dwelling' (2013, 186). In doing so, these discourses not only delimit the human experience of time and space but also foreclose the ambit of our responsibility.

Of all the creative projects to emerge in Christchurch, the project that perhaps best exemplifies the potential of waiting to foreground people's responsibility towards the environments that they inhabit are the photographic installations that Mike Hewson created for Cranmer Court. The installations were superimposed onto the boarded faces of Cranmer Court's exposed interior spaces. Cranmer Court, the former Christchurch Normal School but which had more recently been converted into apartments and a restaurant, was constructed between 1873 and 1876; in 1991 it was identified as a valuable historic building and registered as a historic site. Critically damaged by the earthquakes, Cranmer Court was demolished in October 2012. Based on a gothic design, Cranmer Court was made from grey stonework, which was ornamented with white stonework that marked the edges of the building and window frames; it possessed a grey slate triangular roof and multiple spires. Following the earthquakes, 'emergency repair work to secure the building left large areas, including window and door frames, boarded up with plywood [and] these void spaces were used as the "canvas" for Hewson's installations, resulting in the images being neatly framed by the damaged stonework' (Bennett, Boidi, and Boles 2012, 30). Hewson's installations provide life-sized three-dimensional

photographic images of the building's imaginary interior (Figure 1). On the bottom level of the building, a large exposed window frame houses the image of an artist's studio, and to its left, in the exposed triangular frame of a doorway, another photographic image shows a man talking on a phone emerging from a doorway. The largest of Hewson's installations is located on the second floor of the Court and positioned across the boarded perpendicular faces of the upper story; the image presents a man riding a bicycle across wooden floors in a large unfurnished studio room. These installations play with the notion that Cantabrians are occupying a topsy-turvy world in which inside and outside, and past and present become confused. They cause the passer-by to linger and tarry, as they become arrested in a form of attention that dwells in the time of waiting.

Entitled 'Homage to the Lost Spaces', Hewson's installations not only offer a site for people to pause and commemorate historic buildings but also, quite simply, invoke a temporal experience that attends to loss. According to *Christchurch: The Transitional City*, a book which provides a catalogue of the range of projects which have occurred in Christchurch following the earthquakes, 'Hewson's series of photographic installations references the artistic community of pre-earthquake Christchurch who lost studios and seeks to draw attention to and pay final respects to the beauty contributed by many of the city's old buildings' (Bennett, Boidi, and Boles 2012, 30). Moreover, due to the temporary nature of Hewson's installations, which were removed when Cranmer Court was demolished, the installations themselves stand for fragility, impermanence, and the inevitability of loss. Encouraging shake-shattered people to linger, Hewson's installations allowed them both to feel their loss but also to experience tenderness towards what they had lost; they invited people to linger in the temporal experiences which are either disavowed or seen as states to be overcome by rhetoric that privileges the future and projects of rebuilding. The invocation to attend that is catalysed by pausing before installations such as Hewson's foregrounds, as Diprose has persuasively argued in another context, the fundamental interrelatedness that underpins people's dwelling. According to Diprose, 'the reason we need to count, within corporeal interdependence, our interrelations with land, buildings, animals, and other non-human elements of our world is that, in the wake of flood, fire, earthquake, or storm, it is not just for loss of human life that we grieve' (2013, 190). Hewson's installations act as catalysts; they induce passers-by to pause and linger, stimulating the unpredictable and diverse nature of encounters between people and the built environment, which are overshadowed when we treat built structures as interchangeable and replaceable commodities.



Figure 1. Mike Hewson's 'Homage to the Lost Spaces,' 2012. (Photo by Andrew Hewson). *Canterbury Earthquake Digital Archive*.
<https://quakestudies.canterbury.ac.nz/store/object/307715>

In waiting before Hewson's installations, the passer-by experiences a form of passivity that does not originate from a self-critique of one's failures and shortcomings – as occurs in the case of the waiter who internalises the need to treat time as a commodity. Hewson's installations catalyse a mode of waiting that is 'almost the same, but not quite' because they induce a form of attention that is turned outwards rather than inwards; they implicitly refute the ability of the self to act as the sole determinant of our relationships with external reality. Making a distinction between the average personal attention which would be performed within the parameters of the self's expectations, and an attention that is pure waiting, Maurice Blanchot argues that 'it is not the self that is attentive in attention; rather, with an extreme delicacy and through insensible, constant contacts, attention has always already detached me from myself, freeing me for the attention that I for an instant become' (1993, 121). At an abstract level, Blanchot undermines a philosophical tradition of constructing and understanding the self as the primary dwelling site for determining and defining our interactions with external reality. He implicitly responds to a Cartesian model of the self which privileges the 'I' that thinks, synthesises, and treats external reality as a construct of its own making. In doing so, he is able to examine an attention which is not so much the product of the self but

rather produced by the self's immersion in the world. Challenging the 'entire epistemological construal of the relation of thought to things and mind to world', Simon Critchley proposes that 'the world does not first and foremost show itself as an "object" contemplatively and disinterestedly represented by a "subject". Rather, the world shows itself as a place in which we are completely immersed and from which we do not radically distinguish ourselves' (2005, 29). Inviting passers-by to dwell and linger, the building could be said to be the catalyst for breaking through the self's assumed mastery over the world it inhabits and exposing it to the world in which the self is first and foremost immersed.

Hewson's installations thus do not fall neatly into the category of realist aesthetics because they do not so much transmit a graspable content or message but rather produce the conditions for an affective engagement between passers-by and their built environment. Produced as a response to the earthquakes, the installations are an example of trauma-related art, which, according to Jill Bennett, 'is best understood as *transactive* rather than *communicative* [because] it often touches us, but it does not necessarily communicate the "secret" of personal experience'. Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze, Bennett argues that trauma-related art frequently acts as an 'encountered sign' which is a 'sign that is felt, rather than recognized or perceived through cognition' (2005, 7). Hewson's installations produce a pure form of attention that originates beyond intentional thought, positioning the self as a site of contact, which is subject to its affective encounters. It is not possible to regard how passers-by experience waiting, in a Hegelian sense, as an example of a productive undergoing that would result in the self's transcendence to a higher level of self-awareness. Such a recuperative and inherently progress-infused teleology continues to presuppose the self (and self-consciousness or intentional thought) as the unilateral vehicle for our engagement with the world. Explaining the limitations of 'the teleology of intentionality', Paul Harrison argues that it

incessantly cover[s] up the idea that sensibility may take place as a relation with an exterior, may be composed from the outside, through and as a passive exposure which inspires, holds, and binds the subject in relations which it does not and did not choose and which lie before and beyond any of its abilities to comprehend, conceptualise, or represent. (2008, 430)

As encountered signs, Hewson's installations induce the self to wait and to attend, revealing a self that is subject to and indeed constituted by its immersion in the world.

Pausing before Hewson's installations, the passer-by waits, attends, and is rendered a site of affective and pre-reflective encounters. Despite being rendered vulnerable, the passer-by does not wait 'for something that would validate, cancel or fulfil waiting' (Schweizer 2008, 12). Instead, such vulnerability re-figures the experience of waiting as a form of human responsibility towards the environments that we inhabit, revealing the way that 'ethics is *lived* in the sensibility of an embodied exposure to another' (Critchley 2002, 21). However, before I turn to the mode of responsibility that underpins waiting, it is necessary to acknowledge that to see vulnerability as fundamental to how we experience being in the world can also be accused of foreclosing responsibility. Examining the significant contributions that a range of theorists have made in overturning the Cartesian construction of the self, David Wood argues that 'what we think of as the displacement or deconstruction of the subject is the attempt to come to terms with the *failure* of that cultural formation – the autonomous individual – and to establish in its place a mode of being in the world that would recognize suffering, passivity, paradox and loss'. Moreover, Wood warns that 'there is a danger in this, that of replacing one ideological or cultural formation (the autonomous individual) by another (the traumatized individual)' (2002, 116). Wood implicitly recognises that what is at stake in the works of theorists who displace the dominating imperialism of the self is a desire to ensure that ethical responsibility is brought to the fore in our era.¹² However, he is equally concerned that this ethical turn is undermining what, in another context, Judith Butler describes as 'the dreary business of quantifying and comparing oppressions' (2004, 14). To put it crudely, Wood sees the demise of the autonomous individual as leading to a situation where we are all victims, both perpetrator and actual victim, both the politically oppressed and those suffering from the trauma of being rendered passive in waiting.¹³

Wood's concern that a unilateral claim to regard all humans as inherently vulnerable forecloses the ambit of responsibility depends on conceding to a specific 'ideology of responsibility'. According to François Raffoul, this ideology is 'often accompanied by a singular neglect of genuine reflection [...] on what it means to *be* responsible [and as a result] responsibility is simply assumed to mean the accountability of the free agent' (2010, 6). In turn, he argues that it is necessary to rethink ethical responsibility beyond an ideology of subjectivity, will, and power, in order to capture the 'original sense of responsibility as *responsiveness*' (9; emphasis added). To view responsibility as conditioned on responsiveness does not foreclose the necessary inquiries that follow the event of a natural disaster into how we can address and prevent failures in infrastructure and weaknesses in building structures. Rather, it recognises that not all experiences of human existence abide by the anthropocentric assumption that

we can position humans as ‘the incontestable *author* of an event or of an object’ (Sartre 1992, 707). Moreover, to bring to the fore a notion of responsibility which focuses on how people’s relationships with their lived environments are formed through a series of affective encounters, as well as instrumental transactions, may be a necessary step in extending sympathy towards, not judgment of, those Cantabrians who struggled (and arguably are still struggling) to adjust to post-earthquake life.

An ethical impetus underpins the passivity that is induced by tarrying in Christchurch’s sites of waiting, such as Hewson’s Cranmer Court installations, and represents a ‘notion of responsibility articulated in terms of phenomenological responsiveness’ (Raffoul 2010, 5). The experience of phenomenological responsiveness that occurs in waiting opens a space for human relations in the city to be experienced in a similar way. It provides a model for ethical relations that is not about accountability or the batted-about judgements of fault and blame, but instead is based on recognition of people’s responsiveness to and ultimate interdependence on the world that they inhabit. Such responsiveness may then be channelled into specific responses, such as rebuilding a city or assessing culpability, but there is something of value in the simple acknowledgment that our existence and indeed sense of selfhood is constituted by our reflective and affective interactions with both human and non-human elements. Moreover, in the drive to rebuild there is a naïve assumption that we are the masters of the environments that we inhabit, which not only comes crashing down with the occurrence of a natural disaster but also belies human experience. The image that is included in *Christchurch: The Transitional City* of Hewson’s installations illustrates the interdependent nature of human experience and existence (Figure 1). The image shows a man attaching one of the installations to the ruined frame of Cranmer Court. This man is watched by a passer-by who, with neck craned upwards, has paused on the pavement to gaze upon the installations. In turn, a man in overalls, who stands to his side, gazes upon the passer-by. This photograph captures a series of encounters between people and the built environment which reveal how waiting is in itself a form of responsiveness and thus an experience that foregrounds the fundamental interrelatedness that marks human existence.

Following the earthquakes, many commentators have observed that Christchurch’s liminal state ‘offer[s] an extraordinary opportunity to embrace this impermanence and find original, economic, and appropriate solutions to the very real challenges we all face’ (Parker and Bennett 2012, 5). One such opportunity, as I have argued, may rest in regarding responsiveness as the cornerstone of responsibility, which, in turn, suggests the ability to extend ethical regard be-

yond the human world to the actual world that we experience: ‘a world of the co-exposure of the human and the non-human’ (Raffoul 2010, 15), in which things, as Rita Felski puts it, are ‘our dogged companions from cradle to grave’ (2008, 102). It is easy to object that an acknowledgment of people’s responsiveness to non-human elements may appear to lead to a situation in which things are valued over and above human life. This is perhaps one of the concerns that underpins objections to the costly restoration of the severely damaged Anglican Christ Church Cathedral, which is positioned in the centre of Christchurch and regarded as an emblem of the city’s identity. However, as Silvia Benso persuasively argues in *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics*, to recognize an ethics of things does not invert the hierarchy between humans and non-humans but, instead, acknowledges their mutual interdependence. Benso emphasises that such an acknowledgment is necessary if we are ‘to avoid the environmental catastrophe to which technological rationality seems to have consigned the age of postmodernity’, adding that ‘it seems therefore necessary to explore and espouse, ways of relating to things that do not reduce them to objects, but rather recognize in them the possibility of their own signification, of their own difference, of their own alterity’ (2000, xxxiv–xxxv). It would seem that everyday Cantabrians who pause, linger, and attend to projects such as Hewson’s are exhibiting a way of relating to things that does not reduce them to objects. In their responsiveness, in waiting and experiencing their exposure to things, a radical form of hospitality is occurring in these sites. Such hospitality constitutes an extension of responsibility and indebtedness to the world of non-humans, welcoming a self that is constituted by interdependence. If, as Harrison has poignantly observed, when ‘we stay by the one who is dying just as we watch the child sleep, [...] these instances are meaningful in and of themselves’ (2008, 425), then perhaps Christchurch’s sites of waiting also reveal the possibility of affording our acts of lingering alongside things the same significance.

NOTES

- 1 Josephine Carter lectures and tutors in the Department of English at the University of Otago. Her research and teaching interests include contemporary, post-colonial and New Zealand literature, and the ethical interventions of literature. Her articles have been published in a range of interdisciplinary journals: *Mosaic*, *Interventions: Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Textual Practice* and *Angelaki*.
- 2 The idea that a ‘new normal’ emerges following the experience of a natural disaster or a communal tragedy is not unique to the Canterbury earthquakes. Accord-

- ing to Norris and colleagues, ‘the phrase “new normal” was heard often in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks’ (2008, 132).
- 3 Gerry Brownlee was the Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery from 2011 to 2017.
 - 4 For a discussion of the institutionalisation of clock time in modern societies, see Thompson (1967).
 - 5 ‘Kiwi’ is an informal term for a New Zealander. The culturally constructed myth of the Kiwi resolve to get on with it has its roots in New Zealand’s history as a settler colonial nation. Historian Michael King’s account of the prevailing attitude amongst the Pākehā settlers in the nineteenth century, that they ‘were in combat with nature, and [that] their ultimate mission was to turn as much of New Zealand as possible into an agricultural landscape’, exemplifies the resilient stance of the Pākehā settlers to their new home (2003, 435). Conversely, resilience also characterised and was called upon in the Māori resistance to colonisation.
 - 6 Post-Katrina New Orleans offers a devastating example of how inadequate government support caused the poorest residents of New Orleans to be framed as threats to public security, leading to the ‘government-authorized eviction of the poor’ to “clean up” the city and help it recover once and for all’ (Adams *et al.* 2009, 626).
 - 7 The Mayor of Christchurch, Bob Parker, was openly critical of the significant increases in rent prices which occurred after the earthquakes, describing the practice as ‘looting by another name’. See Press (2011a).
 - 8 A photograph of the colourful phoenix was selected to sit alongside the foreword to *A City Recovers*, a book produced by the *Press* newspaper to document Christchurch’s recovery process in a range of diverse spheres. Significantly, the author of this foreword was Gerry Brownlee (2013), who, in his position as the Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery, had a vested interest in promoting and projecting Christchurch’s positive future.
 - 9 Although Brownlee would later apologise for his insensitive comments, he ‘has regularly launched withering attacks on anyone challenging his version of the recovery’ (Cairns 2013, 69). For an account of Brownlee’s ‘attacks’, see Cairns (2013).
 - 10 Many of the creative responses to the earthquakes deliberately blurred the lines between inside and outside, private and public space through taking household

items such as pianos and domestic refrigerators and relocating them on the street. Dislocated from their normal domains, these objects were repurposed with refrigerators becoming small communal libraries.

- 11 Cantabrians' ongoing sense of unease chimes with the diagnosis of Vincanne Adams and colleagues that post-Katrina New Orleanians suffer from chronic disaster syndrome, which, unlike post-traumatic stress disorder, does not solely pertain to a past trauma, but instead subjects them to a chronic condition of distress caused by ongoing emotional, familial and physical experiences of displacement (Adams *et al.* 2008, 13).
- 12 Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of the ethical impetus that underpins the asymmetrical relationship between the self and the other, whereby the self is first and foremost a site of pre-intentional responsiveness, is positioned as a response to the limitations of understanding ethical responsibility as dependent on the self's autonomy. For a discussion of Levinas's response to the limitations of Western humanism, see his essays 'No Identity' and 'Humanism and An-archy' in Levinas (1987).
- 13 The historian Dominick LaCapra has made similar objections to the conflation of specific historical losses with the absence felt in modern societies due to the demise of belief in foundational narratives of making meaning. LaCapra argues that 'when absence and loss are conflated [...] the significance or force of particular historical losses (for example, those of apartheid or the Shoah) may be obfuscated or rashly generalized', adding, moreover, that 'as a consequence one encounters the dubious ideas that everyone (including perpetrators or collaborators) is a victim, that all history is trauma, or that we all share a pathological public sphere' (1991, 712).

REFERENCES

- Adams, Vincanne, Taslim Van Hattum, and Diana English. 2009. 'Chronic Disaster Syndrome: Displacement, Disaster Capitalism and the Eviction of the Poor from New Orleans.' *American Ethnologist* 36(4): 615–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2009.01199.x>
- Begg, Annabel, Lucy D'Aeth, Emma Kenagy, Chris Ambrose, Hongfang Dong, and Philip J. Schluter. 2021. 'Wellbeing Recovery Inequity following the 2010/2011 Canterbury Earthquake Sequence: Repeated Cross-sectional Studies.' *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 45(2): 158–64. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.13054>

- Bennett, Barnaby, Eugenio Boidi, and Irene Boles, eds. 2012. *Christchurch: The Transitional City Part IV*. Christchurch: Freerange Press.
- Bennett, Jill. 2005. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Benso, Silvia. 2000. *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Blanchot, Maurice. 1993. *The Infinite Conversation*. Translated by Susan Hanson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Brownlee, Gerry. 2013. Foreword to *A City Recovers: Christchurch Two Years after the Quakes*, 3–7. Auckland: Random House.
- Butler, Judith. 2004. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- Cairns, Lois. 2013. 'Governance: The Changing Political Landscape.' In *A City Recovers: Christchurch Two Years after the Quake*, 62–81. Auckland: Random House.
- Carville, Olivia, and Anna Turner. 2013. 'The Tribes that Bind Christchurch.' *Stuff*. September 7. <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/news/christchurch-earthquake-2011/9136868/The-tribes-that-bind-Christchurch>
- Critchley, Simon. 2002. Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, 1–32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2005. *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*. London: Routledge.
- Davies, Bex. 2012. 'Quake – A Year On: Christchurch is “the waiting place”.' *New Zealand Herald*, February 21. Accessed November 27, 2017. http://www.nz-herald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10786760
- Diprose, Rosalyn. 2013. 'Corporeal Interdependence: From Vulnerability to Dwelling in Ethical Community.' *SubStance* 42(3):185–204. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2013.0035>

- Felski, Rita. 2008. *Uses of Literature*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Harms, Erik. 2013. 'Eviction Time in the New Saigon: Temporalities of Displacement in the Rubble of Development.' *Cultural Anthropology* 28(2): 344–368. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cuan.12007>
- Harrison, Paul. 2008. 'Corporeal Remains: Vulnerability, Proximity, and Living on after the End of the World.' *Environment and Planning* 40(2): 423–45. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a391>
- Jeffrey, Craig. 2010. *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Key, John. 2011. 'Transcript: John Key's Memorial Speech.' *New Zealand Herald*, March 18. Accessed November 27, 2017. http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1 &objectid=10713388
- King, Michael. 2003. *The Penguin History of New Zealand*. Auckland: Penguin.
- Knights, David. 2006. 'Passing the Time in Pastimes, Professionalism and Politics: Reflecting on the Ethics and Epistemology of Time Studies.' *Time and Society* 15(2–3): 251–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X06061783>
- LaCapra, Dominick. 1991. 'Trauma, Absence, Loss.' *Critical Inquiry* 25(4): 696–727. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448943>
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1987. *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Norris, Fran, Susan Stevens, Betty Pfefferbaum, Karen Wyche, and Rose Pfefferbaum. 2008. 'Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness.' *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41: 127–50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-007-9156-6>
- O'Neill, Bruce. 2017. *The Space of Boredom: Homelessness in the Slowing Global Order*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Parker, Gregory, and Barnaby Bennett. 2012. Introduction to *Christchurch: The Transitional City Part IV*, edited by Barnaby Bennett, Eugenio Boidi, and Irene Boles, 4–5. Christchurch: Freerange Press.

- Press. 2011a. 'Post Christchurch Earthquake Rent Hikes "looting by another name"' *Stuff*. March 10. <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/news/christchurch-earthquake-2011/4751369/Post-Christchurch-earthquake-rent-hikes-looting-by-another-name>
- . 2011b. 'Our Resilient Spirit.' *Stuff*. August 23. <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/opinion/editorials/5488429/Our-resilient-spirit>
- Raffoul, François. 2010. *The Origins of Responsibility*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- RNZ. 2022. 'Christchurch Earthquake Anniversary: Homeowners wrestle with unsettled claims 11 years on.' *RNZ*. February 22. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/462023/christchurch-earthquake-anniversary-homeowners-wrestle-with-unsettled-claims-11-years-on>.
- Rutz, Henry. 1992. 'Introduction: The Idea of a Politics of Time.' In *The Politics of Time*, edited by Henry Rutz, 1–17. Washington: American Anthropological Association.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1992. *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Schweizer, Harold. 2008. *On Waiting*. London: Routledge.
- Stevens, Ric. 2013. 'Introduction: The New Normal.' In *A City Recovers: Christchurch Two Years after the Quakes*, 10–22. Auckland: Random House.
- Thompson, E.P. 1967. 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism.' *Past and Present* 38(1):56–97. <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/38.1.56>
- Vaughan, Tyson. 2021. 'Re-mooring: Rethinking Recovery and Resilience in the Anthropocene.' In *Disastrous Times: Beyond Environmental Crisis in Urbanizing Asia*, edited by Eli Elinoff and Tyson Vaughan, 196–214. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Wood, David. 2002. 'The Experience of the Ethical.' In *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Continental Philosophy*, edited by Mark Dooley and Richard Kearney, 105–19. London: Routledge.