

MY ONLY REQUEST IS
THAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE
A SENSE OF HUMOR.
FREEDOM DEMANDS
CONSTANT VIGILANCE
AGAINST THE DULL, THE
PRETENTIOUS AND THE
BAD LIAR. AT LEAST GOOD
LIARS HAVE AMUSEMENT
VALUE.

— RITA MAE BROWN, WRITER.

So the story goes. There was once a time when the park demonstrated more than it may appear to now. If you look into it, however, you may just be able to see the action of the past and re-enact it. To follow these imprints built into the soil of the place would be to take up the map lines that behaviour has drawn at this site. Recent history tells of the spill-over of radical gesture performed at the student quad during the time of anti-apartheid protest and nuclear-free awareness and the full stop to numerous marches up Queen Street which ended at the rotunda. Here at the band stand a speech would be delivered. The queen once spoke and so did a character from the happening events of post-'68 Jumping Sundays, waving a flag, red. Over 6,000 people attended the rotunda's opening ceremony on its completion in 1901. It rests on the ground of an erupted volcano. Up until 1840 the site housed a Maori village called Rangipuke including a defended pa site: Te Horotiu. The volcanic soil proved to be highly fertile; good ground for growing vegetables. In 1845 the land was co-opted for a European defence post and then became the Albert Barracks. The park's first public sculpture, L. M Boyd's *Love breaking the sword of bate* was installed in 1900. Prior to this and not far from where the rotunda would be erected, in 1882, the Gardener's cottage was built after the city council took custodianship of the land and began to shape it into an urban park. The cottage later became the home of the first city librarian, and now houses a clock museum. Along with time being stored at this site, two muzzle-loading guns have been installed at the park since 1905, after the disbandment of North Head, the city's harbour mouth battlement. For some time during WWII they were buried in



the ground in case Japanese pilots mistook them for modern weapons. The meteorological observatory is located at the highest point in the park. It has provided recordings of weather information since 1909. In the late 1960s city by-laws restricted free speech at the park in the name of protecting leisure. Disputed by the student community, the site of the band rotunda was claimed as a free zone momentarily in 1970. Propelled by clocks, the deciphering of weather patterns and combative love, this inventory of events attached to a timeline of dates enfolds a volatile and invisible colonial past into an equally mysterious and hopeful future. As its crossroad, the architectural relic of the band rotunda points to the past, through a language of ornamental civic pride; its platform – a concrete mass surrounded by seats, a dormant offering awaiting the arrival of the event. For today it will become a free zone again, determined by the inherent contradictions that inform this very proposition, particularly when a frame is provided for it. Aware of the difficulties in taking hold of the subject of free speech, it oscillates between an open indeterminate form and an acknowledgement that talk is determined by what is known. Even as it proves our desire for collusion, it puts the idea of the free in motion. The starting point for this project was the controversial Electoral Finance Act 2007, which restricted what could be said for or against a political party, and enforced fiscal restrictions on every campaign. In drawing attention to the shaky (volcanic) ground of free speech, the idea becomes all the more thickly

layered with shadows of nostalgia for when this term may have actually held. Unable to be pinned down, the concept subsists in the present, where the real and the lived resides. This site, in a state of development, is built by the sculptural element of time. A ticking form, a waiting place, it is consistently present yet inconsistently experienced, a construct slipping past and moving forward constantly. It is a place to meditate on presence, beyond Samuel Beckett's modernity where presence is understood as impossibility, an absence. Boredom. This site of today is a prospect for all the paradoxes that may occur within the here and now, where they can be rendered visible to generate relational forms – material, gestural – in the space of personal exchange. In being attentive, time becomes a material to work with rather than against. It becomes an arbitrary digit, an absurdity, free and public. The stage is set for the dispersion of points of view. These pointers may refer to the past ghosts of this site, leading towards the rallying crowds, or even further to the militant formations and the villagers defending and tending their crops. Or they may act as speculations on the potential for consciousness to take future effect and respond to this current climate of anticipation and expectant change. Here is a proposal for the possible. You may take hold of its suggestions and determine how to use it.

Laura Preston, March 2009

Image: Action on the band rotunda at Albert Park. Reproduced from Tim Shadbolt's book *Bullshit & Jellybeans*, published by Alistair Taylor, 1971.

Bik Van der Pol

Title: *1440 minutes towards the development of a site*

Date: Wednesday 8 April, 2009

Duration: 00.00 – 23.59

Site: Band rotunda, Albert Park, Auckland

Description: The transformation of a public site into a free zone for the duration of a full day, taking the passing of time as a basic sculptural element and incorporating the dissemination of a publication produced by students during a workshop on the freedom of speech.

Workshop participants:

- Julia Chiesa
- Ana Corbett
- Andreea Cristache
- Emily Grimston
- Yo Na Lee
- Louise Lever
- Anna McLeod
- Ryan Monro
- Tarquin Prince Pike
- A.D. Schierning
- Taarati Taiaroa-Smithies
- Sue-Li Tasker Yeo
- Deborah Teh
- Kristy Wilson

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