Veneers and Facades: A Re-evaluation of the Status and Meaning of Napier’s Art Deco

Franky Strachan

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Abstract

Napier’s 1931 rebuild marks an explicit aesthetic mutation of the city’s surfaces. The period architecture is borne of the post-disaster context but the evolution of its character is heavily influenced by imported British and American identities. “Veneers and Facades” is an interdisciplinary examination of the perceived value and social content of Napier’s Art Deco architecture. Nested in the third wave of Art Deco literature, this research approaches Napier’s Art Deco as an abstract concept, removing the ‘style’ from the static confines of architectural history, to frame it as an ongoing visual-cultural production. I ask: who are we that this is Napier? Why does Napier look like this, now? Art Deco is reviewed in terms of its spatiotemporal agency, the associative mechanics of its iconography, and its metonymical/metaphorical role in the narrative of the earthquake recovery — each with a view to urging more nuanced, sustainable expressions of the city’s heritage. I argue that Art Deco in all its guises occupies a temporalized space decorated with the semiotics of desire. I ask what imagery and ways of knowing are being harnessed and concretised in the cultivation of an ‘Art Deco atmosphere’ while challenging the assumption that modernism is the only language through which we might know and value this inherently affective post-disaster architecture. The poetic spaces associated with Napier’s Art Deco mobilise a collective, vicariously acquired, highly mediated nostalgic fantasy. This fantasy is revealed to be conservative, gendered, middle-class, predominantly Pākehā and often metamodern. Napier’s Art Deco culture does not represent racial, economic, gender, or body diversity because the imagery is drawn from an era of prejudiced class privilege. Further, I contend that sites of heritage aspire to conjure the twin notions of historical sensation and historical presence while distributing historical knowledge. Where the past is excessively simulated, visitors are less likely to be moved by the historical sensation. Yet when historical objects and sites are presented in their primary form their evocations tend to be more innately compelling. In presenting heritage, we must therefore preserve the metonym (the temporal and contextual otherness of historic artefacts) while selling the metaphor (the mediated experience).
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Glossary of Māori Terms.¹

Haere mai
Come here! Welcome! — a greeting.

Hīnaki
Eel trap, wicker eel basket, wire eel pot.

Ka pai
Good.

Kaumātua
Adult, elder, elderly man, elderly woman, old man - a person of status within the whānau.

Kōwhaiwhai
Painted scroll ornamentation - commonly used on meeting house rafters. Rafter paintings, lattice-work and tāniko have many symmetrical patterns.

Māoritanga
Māori culture, Māori practices and beliefs, Māoriness, Māori way of life.

Mana Whenua
Territorial rights, power from the land, authority over land or territory, jurisdiction over land or territory - power associated with possession and occupation of tribal land. The tribe's history and legends are based in the lands they have occupied over generations and the land provides the sustenance for the people and to provide hospitality for guests.

Ngāi Tahu
Tribal group of much of the South Island, sometimes called Kāi Tahu by the southern tribes.

Ngāti Kahungunu
Tribal group of the southern North Island east of the ranges from the area of Nūhaka and Wairoa to southern Wairarapa.

Tangata Whenua
Local people, hosts, indigenous people - people born of the whenua.

¹ Where more than one definition for a term exists, I have only presented the version appropriate to the present context. Unless otherwise specified, all definitions were sourced online and quoted directly from: John. C. Moorfield, “Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary,” accessed 13 October 2018, http://maoridictionary.co.nz.
**Taonga**
Treasure, anything prized - applied to anything considered to be of value including socially or culturally valuable objects, resources, phenomenon, ideas and techniques.

**Te Ao Māori**
The Māori World.

**Te Reo Māori**
The indigenous language of Aotearoa, New Zealand. It is one of three official languages of the nation. The language itself is central to Māori culture, identity and forms part of the heritage of our country.²

**Tikanga**
Correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner, rule, way, code, meaning, plan, practice, convention, protocol - the customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context.

**Toi**
Art, knowledge.

**Whānau**
Extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people - the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. In the modern context the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members.

**Whenua**
Country, land, nation, state.

Introduction

This project unwittingly began with an impromptu trip to Napier in which the circulation of Māoriland imagery and kitsch kiwiana was both striking and uncomfortable. Antiquated images of Māori Chiefs and Māori maidens in a fictitious South Pacific Wonderland were sold alongside illustrations of 1950s middle class white families arriving on cruise ships and having having picnics beneath palm trees and planes (figs. 1-6). Scenic New Zealand was advertised on postcards through the nostalgic imagery of ‘Tiki Tours’ while te reo phrases such as “ka pai” or “haere mai from Napier” were isolated as catchphrases. The art of early advertising — replete with women in aprons, middle class sports set in romanticized landscapes, idealised western white body archetypes — sat alongside imported European adverts for Pelican Cigarettes, Vermouth Bianco, Serodent and Soda Blitz. As I stood shaded beneath Hastings Street’s wide verandahs, I looked out to the hot sun beating down on the parched facades — it was as though I had crossed an invisible threshold. I stood in a liminal, temporalised urban space where the fact of architectural history spurred contemporary fantasies of our colonial past. The nonchalant presentation of racist and sexist imagery, and the incongruous selection of imported modernist iconography and reproductions of commercial ephemera, suggested that the Art Deco aesthetic mobilises much more than the simple enjoyment of a period style. It seemed to liberate and, worse still, reinvent uneasy mores and visual cultural traditions. Amidst this vintage fantasy there was a conspicuous gap between representations of the less stylised, pre-earthquake community of Napier and the distinctly modern inhabitants seen to be enjoying the fashionable lifestyles expressed by the New Napier iconography. Despite earthquake heritage signposting around the city, the lasting emotional impact of the disaster was lost to the discourse of optimism and ‘courage in the face of adversity’ that was initiated by the dramatic rebuild. The miraculous transformation of New Britons into New Americans is naturalised and mythologised, as if a lot more than a city collapsed on February 3, 1931. The disaster event is readily paired with the birth of a modern city, and the facades in preservation have become wholly symbolic of a city and a people reborn.

This apparent social and aesthetic mutation leads us straight to the heart of the following thesis, which seeks to answer, in its broadest form: Who are we that this is Napier? Why does Napier look like this, now? The following pages are an
interdisciplinary critique written in the midst of Napier city’s thriving Art Deco culture. As the title “Veneers and Facades: A re-evaluation of the status and meaning of Napier’s Art Deco” suggests, it is an examination of the perceived value and social content of Napier’s Art Deco architecture. But more than this, this thesis appraises the visual displays that distinguish the city as a site of heritage. By looking at the highly performative and spiralling visual culture that is flourishing in Napier, the Art Deco concept is removed from the static confines of architectural history to be framed as an ongoing cultural production occurring in the present. Art Deco is approached as a retrospectively forged idea, harnessed to give the city forms historical context, continuity and social content. Ultimately, the Art Deco aesthetic is reviewed and redefined in terms of its spatiotemporal agency, the associative mechanics of its iconography, and its metaphorical role in the narrative of the earthquake recovery — each with a view to urging more nuanced, contemporary expressions of the city’s heritage.

Existing Art Deco Literature

While the present study was spurred by art historical interests, it readily crosses the borders of related disciplines, working with concepts drawn from spatial theory, urban psychology, human geography, history, heritage tourism, toi Māori, anthropology, psychology, and memory studies. All of these fields include extensive literature pertinent to Art Deco and Napier. Given the scale of the topic and potential approaches, I had to narrow my focus to Art Deco as an international visual cultural concept and the ekphrastic expansions of Napier’s buildings under the Art Deco epithet. In order understand the visual history to which Napier City attaches itself, the visual cultural category of Art Deco requires examination. The term ‘Art Deco’ was first coined in 1968 by Bevis Hillier in his seminal publication *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s*. Hitherto, those decorative and streamlined artefacts which are now recognised as being of an Art Deco orientation were addressed in terms of their design, formal qualities, function or modes of production, rather than by a catch-all title which positioned them within the art world. At the time of their manufacture Art Deco works were not always identified as belonging to serious, which is to suggest intellectually accepted, artistic territory. For this reason, the indistinct sphere of mass-produced commercial items that proliferated in all facets of visual culture during the 1920s and
1930s seemed, to the prophets of modernism, like a formless mass of misguided and ill-educated tastelessness. Mechanical intervention was progressively infiltrating artistic production. On the one hand it was interpreted as being at variance with traditional handicraft, while on the other it was deemed the ‘correct’ mode of modern design.

The scholarship which would initially affect the reception of Art Deco can be traced back to the nineteenth century in the writings of A.W.N. Pugin, John Ruskin, Owen Jones, Louis Sullivan and Otto Wagner.¹ It may be followed into the 20th century through authors such as Henry van de Velde, Andre Vera, Adolf Loos, Clive Bell Roger Fry and Le Corbusier, to name a few.² These writers on art and architecture constructed the discourses of morality, revivalism, truth, realism, historicism, progressiveness, ornamentation, formalism, aestheticism, and the role of art itself, which would initially frame the academic reception of Art Deco. Pugin, for example, introduced functionalist, rationalist and moral criteria into architectural discourse, and this was later used by Nikolaus Pevsner to argue, amongst other things, that Art Deco was an undesirable transgression from socially responsible architecture.³ Loos, having suggested that ornament could be ‘immoral’ and ‘degenerate,’ informed the works of such Modernists as Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, who would hugely devalue the role of the decorative arts within art theory. Bell, having posed that even “an absolutely exact copy of a work of art [could not] be as moving as the original,” endorsed a stance (initially held by Ruskin and William Morris) that represents the kind of thinking that cast enduring doubt over the integrity of mass-produced and

commercialized art and design. Although Vera’s “Le Nouveau Style” (1912) argued directly for the simplicity, symmetry, order and harmony that would soon become synonymous with Art Deco, these early texts cannot be said to describe Art Deco as we recognise it today. Nevertheless, they are included in this literature review because they shaped the style’s mixed reception from the 1920s through to the 1960s by prescribing ideologies that would be harnessed for the negative criticism of Art Deco. This disapproval extended to New Zealand, where modernist discourses saw Napier’s post-disaster architecture fall out of favour for forty years. The three waves of scholarship, defined below, however, are explicitly connected with Art Deco productions and provide the intellectual backdrop, still profoundly tied to modernism, that informs Napier’s claims to architectural eminence.

The first wave of writers to respond to Art Deco, yet unnamed, wrote against it. Norman Bel Geddes (Horizons, 1932), Le Corbusier (The Radiant City, 1935), Nikolaus Pevsner (Pioneers of Modern Design, 1937) and Clement Greenberg (“Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” 1939) wrote their influential texts during the international spread of Art Deco in the 1930s, and it is clear that they were preoccupied with the ability of art and design to capture and direct the Zeitgeist. These authors wrote essentialist commentaries in an era when the world was coping with unprecedented regimentation, totalitarian politics, mechanisation, economic depression, fear and anticipation. Artists and designers were constructing utopian models that attempted to transform society through works of art. In pursuing the tenets modernism, Art Deco falls short. Aspirations to universal design hold a moral high ground over built-in- obsolescence, renewed iconography appears hackneyed next to structural innovation, and the ubiquitous yet amorphous impact of mass production has no identity where the itemized politics of modernism are articulated in manifestos and published by academics. Pevsner, for instance, disregarded cinema architecture, one of the major sites of Art Deco expression, because he did not deem it progressive while

Greenberg’s support of abstraction dubbed decorated surfaces retrograde. Art Deco was perceived as unfashionably decorative, too accessible, regressive and commercial. This kind of censure is exactly what the authors of the second phase of literature on Art Deco were reacting against.

The second phase of Art Deco literature focuses on documenting, celebrating and categorising Art Deco. Much literature produced between the late-70s through to the mid-1990s focused on locating the sources and symbolic function of Art Deco iconography. In these writings there is an emphasis on the amalgamation of contradictory forms (a square cup or a streamlined coffin), eclectic styles (oxymoronic assemblages dubbed ‘modernized classicism’ or ‘decorative modernism’), and disparate cultural symbols (Egyptian patterning on a cinema in London or African masks on Parisian interiors) to renew the appearance of everyday objects. In the second phase many books dedicated exclusively to Art Deco focus on a single medium or artist.\(^7\) Publications are often inspired by a particular collection or collector’s taste, while others accompany specific exhibitions and arrive in the form of catalogues or visitor souvenirs.\(^8\) Those books which aim to be ‘complete guides’ are usually arranged either by medium (providing chapter by chapter accounts of architecture, sculpture, ceramics and so forth) or by theme, in which case one may find such headings as ‘US Deco,’ ‘The Politics of Decoration’ or ‘Diluted Deco.’\(^9\) Collectors’ literature generally provides visual guides to Art Deco ‘collectibles.’ Since the collectability of Art Deco only increases with time, such texts continue to be outmoded.

and revised, and are hence constantly reinventing themselves. All of these surveys are well-illustrated and present alluring examples of Art Deco for the eyes of collectors, period enthusiasts and, increasingly, scholars. Art Deco is consistently contextualised in terms of contemporary avant-garde movements and the advent of modernity, and it is always acknowledged that Art Deco was an emotional and commercial response to World War I, the Great Depression, changing gender roles, mass-production, and the intensifying conditions of European politics.

During this second phase of production, Art Deco is almost always listed in dictionaries and surveys of design as well as architectural surveys (usually in connection with, or in contrast to, modernism). However, it has often been neglected in art historical dictionaries and books that map art movements of the twentieth century. Nikos Stangos’ Concepts of Modern Art (1981) and The Phaidon Dictionary of Twentieth Century Art (1973) might serve as examples of overviews that do not acknowledge the existence of Art Deco at all, while Yann Le Pichon and Jean Louis Ferrier, Art of Our Century: The Chronicle of Western Art, 1900 to the Present (1989) can be taken as an example of those numerous texts that mention Art Deco but which convey it as a brief aberration from other more meaningful contributions in art. The greatest reason for the trivialisation of Art Deco in the academic sphere of art history is that it was not a unified movement with a prescriptive theory, and its uneasy relationship with modernism has made its classification especially contentious. Even Art Deco’s relationship to architecture is insecure and has not been awarded the merest fraction of that given to Le Corbusier or the Bauhaus.

The degree of variation in nomenclature reflects this. Patricia Frantz Kery in *Art Deco Graphics* (1986), the first book to concentrate solely on this subject, suggests that in its time Art Deco was called “the Style Chanel and Style Poiret…; Skyscraper Style, Vertical Style, and New York Style; Art Moderne or Modern…; Jazz Style; or simply modernism.”¹³ Petrine Archer Straw in *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (2000) uses Rosalind Krauss’s term ‘black deco’ to refer to a very specific type of Art Deco, while Julian Robinson, in *The Golden Age of Style: Art Deco Fashion Illustration* (1976), Simon Jervis in *Dictionary of Design and Designers* (1984) and Norbert Lynton in *The Story of Modern Art* (1980) each use the French phrase ‘Art Déco’.¹⁴ Significantly, the latter title is intended to convey the essential Frenchness of Art Deco rather than expressing its connections to modernity as is communicated in ‘the Style Moderne’ or ‘Zig Zag Moderne.’ Suzanne Tise’ subject entry in Oxford Art online asserts that the term Art Deco should “be applied only to French works and those from countries directly influenced by France,” implying that much of that which was produced outside of France after the 1925 exhibition is inauthentic and imitative or quite simply not Art Deco at all.¹⁵ This attitude pervades the writings of Battersby, Yvonne Brunhammer, Patricia Bayer, Ingrid Cranfield, Martin Eidelberg, Pile, Alain Lesieutre and Gabriele Crepaldi.¹⁶ These authors, mostly from the second phase, are only concerned with what is commonly known as ‘High’ Art Deco. This term is used to indicate luxury French designs made of costly materials which were “affordable to only the wealthy

but desired by all."

Because the second phase is about pulling Art Deco out from the commercial abyss that deepened as the styles left France and became ‘mechanised’ by America, there are tensions pertaining to the origins and boundaries of the style. These tensions are abandoned by third wave scholars who, in the wake of the second wave, have the luxury of saying that these stylistic boundaries matter less than the overarching social content and agency of now accepted visual cultural genre.

In building upon the proliferation of surveys of the second phase, the third wave of scholarship conceptualisations the political substance of Art Deco. Acknowledging its emphasis on surfaces and its stylistic eclecticism, recent scholarship attempts to address Art Deco’s broader socio-historical position. A leading example is Ghislaine Wood and Charlotte and Tim Benton’s *Art Deco 1910-1939*, a catalogue for the Victoria and Albert Museum. This book is one of the most authoritative on the topic to date, not only because it accompanied a significant and comprehensive international exhibition but because it is gathered together a total of thirty-two contributors and forty essays. Since Art Deco had no proponents or leaders, indeed no definition, when the first phase of literature was produced, Modernist criticisms went largely unchallenged until the literature of the second phase emerged.

A major side effect of this ex post facto deconstruction of modernism was that the terminology of modernism - progress, eclecticism, cheapness, plagiarism, formalism, rationalism, constructivism and functionalism - was still being harnessed, even if to defend Art Deco. To provide an example, Streamline Moderne causes significant division in thought. It is characteristically Art Deco, visually it has something in common with Modernism, especially functionalism, and yet in practice it is both Modernism and functionalism’s antithesis. Hillier, Hanks and Hoy argue that streamlined products concealed function so as to romanticize technology and help make it user friendly, but then Darton is able to contend that streamline styles were not at all grounded in romanticism or ornamentation. That Streamline Deco can be both antithetical to functionalism and a class of it demonstrates attempts by scholars to

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understand the populist phenomena of Art Deco through criteria devised by the heavily theorized minority movements of modernism.  

Constructing a sense of Art Deco using terms from dismantled modernism reinscribes modernist ways of thinking about the patterned surface. Classifying and appraising Art Deco in terms outside of which it has developed is not a way of understanding it but rather a way of circumventing it. Such attempts to make it fit an established or accepted model are destined to fail. While it is useful explain the unique character of Art Deco by distinguishing it from other domains, this is an incomplete and somewhat blindsided approach to study only its relatable aspects. For explanations of Art Deco to be valid, they need to be applicable to all its permutations and not just select parts of it. Carla Breeze therefore interprets Art Deco as a mixture of several contemporary styles with traditional and popular undercurrents but, in terms of architecture, this author is hesitant in calling it a ‘style’ since it concerns ornament and facades rather than structural concerns. Patricia Frantz Kery has gone on to suggest that Deco was a mood, Adrian Tinniswood has argued it was an evolving network of tendencies and motifs, Archie-Straw has viewed it as a vehicle for fantasy, Ingrid Cranfield a mode of escapism, and most recently, Michael Windover argued that Art Deco is a mode of mobility.  

The idea that Art Deco faded out with World War II remains unanimous among scholars. The idea that the phenomenon had run its course and was no longer representative of or related to the desires of consumers and suppliers by the time war broke out is a near undisputed fact in Art Deco literature. Occasionally one will read that some tired ‘replicas’ or generic designs were churned out in the late 1940s and 1950s but these mentions are generally derogatory, conveying that the post-war output was meaningless. It seems audacious to suggest that Art Deco had a life beyond 1939, through Atomic Age art and design (from roughly 1940 to 1960), into the Pop Art of the 1960s, the post-modern art and fashion of the 1980s through to contemporary revivals and heritage projects. However Art Deco’s life and legacy beyond the interwar era for which it is renowned, is plainly observable. This brings us to the Art

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Deco content of Napier city, the literature about which lingers in the second phase of literature associated with formal definitions and iconographical explanations.

**Literature on Napier City**

Splayed along a sweeping bight in the North Island’s eastern coast, Napier and Hastings — only 18 kilometres apart — have come to be known as the ‘twin,’ ‘bay’ or ‘sister’ cities. With a combined population of an estimated 61,100 people they share a regional council, basic infrastructures and services and, to some extent, the same visions for commercial and touristic ventures. Of the twin cities, however, Napier tends to be viewed as the main centre owing to its proximity to both the seaport and airport and, despite its lesser number of buildings in the style, it is Napier rather than Hastings that is advertised as the ‘Art Deco Capital of the World.’ An “Art Deco Inventory” compiled by the Napier City Council and the Art Deco Trust, revised in 2003, lists 274 protected buildings across the central business district, Taradale and Port Ahuriri.\(^{21}\) The buildings are classed as either category one (places of outstanding historical, special or cultural heritage, significance or value) or category two (places of historical or cultural heritage, significance or value) according under the Historic Places Act 1993. The heritage precinct dealt with in this thesis, with the exception of Louis Hay’s tobacco building in Port Ahuriri, is located in the heart of the city and consists of approximately ten highly walkable interconnected streets.

Napier’s history is well documented in numerous colourful books that follow its development into a province from its lively pre-European roots and settler histories through its post-earthquake recovery to its present day status as an Art Deco summer holiday destination. Publications such as S. D. Waters’ *Richardsons of Napier*, H.K. Stevenson’s *Port and People: Century at the Port of Napier*, Alice Woodhouse’s *The Naming of Napier*, Sarah Semple’s *Charles Sorrell’s Edwardian Napier* and Kate Whittam’s *Napier: Our Pioneers’ Legacy* tell of ships, whalers, wine, wool, war and tobacco, bringing to mind the raw industry, anticipation and brazen confidence of

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settler cultures in New Zealand. In more recent years literature such as Beverley Dunlop and Kay Mooney’s *Profile of a Province: Hawkes Bay*, or Graham Stewart’s *Napier: Portrait of an Art Deco City* lures the reader in with increasingly vibrant imagery of the region’s bountiful vineyards, abundant stone-fruit production, iconic palm-lined streets and brightly decorated buildings shining proudly against their Mediterranean coastal backdrop. These books offer the reader a cumulative image of ‘times gone by’ while promoting the city as a naturally distinctive corner of New Zealand.

Such general works provide an historical foundation upon which specialist researchers have been able to build, and it is with the smell of soot and the hardness of moustached English settlers firmly in mind that more subject-specific publications further refine knowledge of local history. Of this kind, Laraine Knight’s *First Impressions: History of Printing in Hawkes Bay*, Des Harris and Don Millar’s *Napier’s Medicine Makers*, Peter Wells and Gail Pope’s *Somebody’s Darling*, L. Joan Roger’s *Napier and the 1893 Women’s Franchise Petition*, Ian Mills’ *The Streets of Napier*, and *One Hundred Years on the Napier-Taupo Rd* are popular examples. Kynan Gentry, author of *History, Heritage, and Colonialism: Historical Consciousness, Britishness, and Cultural Identity in New Zealand, 1870-1940* has added to my vocabulary the phrase “marshalling of memory” in reference to the


tendency of local historical societies to collect, record and publish data “connected with the early settlement of the colony.” While the books suggested here regard the history of a town rather than ‘the colony’ there is definitely a sense of civic duty in their record keeping and a functional ordering of ‘things to be remembered.’ With this type of cultural documentation comes the sense that an era is about to pass and certainly, as Gentry notes in her book, centennial celebrations often prompt such publications. In Napier’s case, 1974 marked one hundred years of provincial Napier, an event marked by a boom in documentary literature over the course of the susequent decade. Colin H MacDonald’s *The Story of the Napier Police District 1886-1986*, Harry Childs’ *Sixty Years Of Service: Rotary Club Of Napier 1924-1984*, Denis Revell’s *Napier Boys’ High School Centennial Historical Survey 1872-1972*, Kuni Jenkins and Kay Morris Mathews’ *Hukarere and the Politics of Māori Girls’ Schooling 1875-1995* and Joe Lorigan’s *The Park Sensations* bolster national records while giving an air of diligence to the standard of local record keeping.

Napier’s architectural distinction is not featured in related books until 1982, when Heather Ives was commissioned by the Ministry of Works and Development to produce *The Art Deco Architecture of Napier*. This publication marks a seminal moment in both Napier’s published and lived history in that, hitherto, the city was in fact considered a place entirely without architectural heritage. The prevailing idea from the 1950s through to the early 1980s was that the great earthquake of 1931, which had obliterated much of the Victorian and Edwardian architecture the town had previously identified with, marked the death of Napier’s architectural heritage. In

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Nielson Wright’s essay “Art Deco Generation in Aotearoa: An Essay in Cultural History” we are pointed towards 1980s mayor Alan Dick’s pamphlet “Destination Napier,” in which Dick is said to have written: “As the capital of this province [Hawke’s Bay] Napier is renowned for its sunshine.” A recreational destination advertised more as a health resort and sunny retreat than a region for tourists of architecture, Napier has longer sold itself through scenery and sunshine than it has its history. In the category of post-earthquake but ‘pre-Deco’ publications, one can turn to John McDermott’s How to get Lost and Found in New Zealand, Geoff Conly’s The Shock of ’31 and Hawke’s Bay “Before” and “After”: The Great Earthquake of 1931, An Historical Record alongside Matthew Wright’s Quake, for an impression of Napier which was partly in mourning, partly forging a romantic Edwardian memory and partly in mid-applause over its civic stoicism in response to the epic disaster. Books printed before Heather Ives’ significant Art Deco publication focused more on preserving the memories of earthquake survivors, most of whom were still looking towards a new Napier while coping with the sudden and traumatic loss of the old. Of course, stress on a Victorian and Edwardian pre-earthquake Napier does continue after 1982 but the city’s more recent Art Deco facelift has led to a deliberate shift in historical emphasis — namely, to the rapidly built, highly modern, reputedly unified and perhaps unique post-earthquake architecture, the emergence of which began almost immediately in 1931 and the completion of which was celebrated in carnival style by 1933 (though in reality, as most literature points out, work continued into the late 1930s).

In literature produced from the mid 1980s onwards, Napier’s history is almost unanimously divided into three chapters: the settler era, earthquake and recuperation, and the Art Deco City. The earthquake serves therefore to chapterize both local history and local memory. Visualisations of Napier in the popular imagination are split

30 A book which demonstrates this well is John Paston’s Postcards of Hawke’s Bay New Zealand (Bayview: Paston & ‘Safari’, 2014).
between old world colonial and modern times. This kind of temporal axis points to an epochal identity change with the vision of a new Napier marking the emergence of progressive attitudes. Visually, the devastation of the earthquake is aligned with a revised sense of time and place on the streets of Napier. This has been approached pictorially within Michael Fowler’s *From Disaster to Recovery: The Hastings CBD 1931-1935* which is supported by archival photographs, and also in Colin Milner’s *Historic Napier* and Colin Wilkinson’s *1931-1981: Out of the Ruins: Drawings and Photographs of Earthquake Damage and 50 Years After*, which present personal recollections in illustrated format (additional works of the latter kind can be found, unpublished, in the archives of the Hawkes Bay Museum).  

Key authors and thinkers on Napier’s Art Deco include Robert McGregor, Ian Lochhead, Paul Walker, Peter Shaw, Peter Wells, Mathew Wright, Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, Mark Stocker, and Linda Tyler. Their literature demonstrates, quite

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logically, that most of the published research on Napier’s Art Deco is indeed architecturally informed, with architects, architectural historians and architectural draughtsmen, typically male, making up a large portion of related authors. Linda Tyler is a prominent exception, as was Heather Ives (though Ives’ input appears to have ended after her singular 1982 publication, while Tyler has continued to publish and curate extensively). Other female scholars have contributed to our understandings of decorative aspects of Art Deco (Justine Olsen, Ann McKewan, Anne Watson), but it appears that the collective value of the city in published literature is predominantly assessed and defined by men. The most stringent academic interest in Napier’s architecture tends to come from architectural historians concerned with either modernism or engineering innovations. The first category focuses on the organisation and manner of the rebuild, the influences in architectural style, the logistics of such rapid reconstruction, and the classification and taxonomy of the buildings. The second category harnesses Napier as an example of architectural response to seismic activity, with the new legislations introduced after the 1931 earthquake setting guidelines that

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35 Te Papa, Substance and Essence.
remain in place today. The 1931 Hawkes Bay earthquake still stands as New Zealand’s worst natural disaster in terms of lives lost and seismic magnitude thus it represents an historical moment when the need to rethink basic architectural values became imperative. Napier’s rebuild serves as a firm example of post-disaster architecture and makes an extraordinary case for the impact of architecture on provincial, if not personal identity. One of the recurrent themes in reading about the earthquake and subsequent rebuild is the new spirit which is perceived to have been instilled within the city. This is reflected in the dialogue of the earthquake survivors (expressed in Earthquake: Life on the Edge: Survivors’ Stories) and in the personal memoirs archived at the museum.

This ‘spirit’ however, does not appear to have been recognised as part of the architectural character until the 1980s, before which its status had dwindled to mean very little. It is connoted, particularly by the Art Deco Trust, that this spirit, perhaps more plainly considered as civic pride, is embodied within the city’s architecture with the period facades acting like cultural glue; they are contemporary destinations in their own right while being living memorials of the city’s tumultuous past. Civic pride in Napier thereby exists within the rhetoric of survival and endurance. These qualities are echoed throughout the city’s plentiful memorials with statues, sun dials, gateways, and plaques dedicated to those who helped clear the streets in the earthquake’s aftermath and to those whose lives were lost ‘too soon’. This notion of ‘coping in the face of adversity’ is prerequisite to most publications by the Art Deco Trust and is part of

\[36\] This thesis is mostly concerned with the first category but in seeking articles relating to the second one might look to Kevin Walsh and Jason Ingham of Auckland University for contemporary insights: Kevin Walsh, Ken Elwood and Jason Ken Ingham, “Seismic Considerations for the Art Deco Interwar Reinforced-Concrete Buildings of Napier, New Zealand,” Natural Hazards Review 16, no. 4 (2015); Kevin Walsh and J.M. Ingham, “Provisional Seismic Assessment and Improvement of Napier’s Art Deco Buildings” (paper presented at the NZSEE Conference, University of Auckland, 2013).

\[37\] A short article from the 1930s addressing the rebuild at this historically significant moment was written by a key architect: Stanley Natusch “The Rebuilding of Napier,” Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects (April 1933): 20-22.

\[38\] For more information on this sculpture and other memorials, the Napier City Council’s website provides a comprehensive overview: http://www.napier.govt.nz/napier; Gaylene Preston, Earthquake Life on the Edge: Survivors' Stories (Wellington: Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust, 2006).

Napier’s branding in the sphere of tourism. It is the foundation of meaning and the sentiment behind Napier’s preservation movement and it is the human side of the buildings’ character but it is never mentioned without follow-up commentaries about the city’s remarkable recovery.

Art Deco Napier is a subject where highly visual and anecdotal publications have taken precedence over scholarly analysis, and formal architectural categorisation moreso than theoretical inquiry has held significant public interest and commercial sway. For thirty-three years, the residents of Napier have celebrated their city’s unique character and architectural ties to Art Deco. Authors and enthusiasts have kept records and presented surveys of the individual buildings, their history, ownership, and their stylistic features under the epithet of Art Deco. The Council and the Art Deco Trust have taken legal measures to ensure their original features are not removed, altered, or too drastically undermined by new builds. Scholars and curators have acknowledged the city’s notable impact on earthquake-proof construction and have gathered all the ephemera and personal accounts of the earthquake experience from the survivors. Looking ahead, heritage tourism has set in play a socioeconomic trajectory that relies on the income generated by tourism while the upkeep of the city’s formal clarity as an Art Deco City has become paramount. Thus, much more than a decorative style of the 1930s, Art Deco is a brand and heritage product. Having established its origins, lauded its rebirth and celebrated its appearances, and having reached a point of visual cultural saturation, it is now time to discuss how our knowledge and understanding of this socially significant site continues to evolve in its highly performative capacity as social heritage.

Locating this Thesis

This research contributes to the third wave Art Deco literature. This third wave of writing approaches Art Deco as an agent of culture that operates far beyond its formal features and stylistic categorisations. The bulk of existing literature on Napier’s Art Deco belongs to the second wave. Established authors have thoroughly exhausted the category of architectural surveys and explorations of the city’s strength (or not) regarding the tenets of modernism. Aside from the Art Deco Trust’s quarterly magazine, however, there is little published on the non-architectural performance of style as a culturally active visual language for heritage. There is insubstantial literature
critically assessing the social performance of Art Deco in the city space. The hesitation of authors to publish on this topic may be due to the openly light-hearted and historically inaccurate nature of the city’s Art Deco culture, which is ostensibly unworthy of scholarly attention. This perspective aligns with historical modernist attitudes to Art Deco. It may be that Art Deco is a problematic category at the best of times, and it is near impossible to summarise all the activity that the period aesthetic has spurred in Napier. Alternately, scholars may be wary of the public backlashes that may result from critical assessment of a well-loved and popular institution.

Where the boundaries of heritage are imparted on a living city, however, it is absolutely necessary to pause periodically and assess how cultures are evolving in response. Hence, this thesis asks: what imagery and ways of knowing are being harnessed and concretised in the deliberate cultivation of an ‘Art Deco atmosphere’? Christian Borch, author of *Architectural Atmospheres: Architecture, Power and the Senses* (2014), notes that “design is not merely a matter of producing, say, comfortable or exciting spaces, but also about conditioning experiences and rendering some behaviours more likely than others.” This resonated with my initial impressions of a culturally skewed Art Deco and neatly articulates the idea that a city might present a surface that is simultaneously a mode of mobility to one individual and a mode of suppression to another.

In its most ambitious step away from existing literature, this thesis makes a case for the Art Deco City as an abstract and metaphorical concept. It ‘releases’ the facades from their built form in order conceive of their arguably much greater life across reproducible media. There are two lines of investigation running in parallel within this thesis: the representational nature of Art Deco as an international style, and the mechanics of the visual culture associated with Art Deco that is underway in Napier. It is argued that Art Deco in all its guises occupies a temporalized space decorated with the semiotics of desire. Rather than being a static architectural category, Art Deco is viewed as an ongoing cultural production. I move away from the idea of an historical Art Deco to conceive of its production in the present. The style is presented as an art of referentiality, concealment and distraction: striking decorative surfaces that mask unsettled conditions and relations, and renew mundane objects by

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connecting them to visions of progress. Here, I also depart from architectural literature by drawing upon my art historical background. The facades are a site of representation and their echo across media operates through iconography and discourses already well established in descriptions and dissections of twentieth century art. I challenge the assumption that modernism is the only language through which we might know this architecture by considering its semiotic role in the post disaster context.

In present-day Napier, the pool of imagery associated with the Art Deco vision is imported from America and Britain, and it mobilises a collective, vicariously acquired, nostalgic fantasy. Social content is communicated contiguously, and iconography is understood metaphorically. Moreover, as a conduit to a very specific invented past Art Deco has spatiotemporal agency that, wittingly or otherwise, has colonial roots. Existing literature does not directly acknowledge the fact that Art Deco is, at least historically, a Pākehā phenomenon. The integration of Māori motifs in the Art Deco idiom is frequently discussed (Sarah Lukins produced a master’s thesis on the use of Māori designs in Napier’s historic buildings in 1996), but literature does not extend to the spatial impact of this intercultural exchange or lack thereof. Following this observation, it is uncertain whether the kitsch imagery that now informs it is recontextualised or simply recirculating unrevised. In either case, the unchallenged Art Deco narrative habitually eases the dramatic social and aesthetic disruptions caused by the earthquake, while significant shifts in civic consciousness are absorbed into a discourse predominantly bound to the introduction of modernism to New Zealand.

While this research explores the imagery and vicariously experienced nostalgia that transpires from the idea of Art Deco in Napier city, analyses remain rooted in physical objects. Napier’s Art Deco culture begins with the buildings and becomes increasingly abstracted and refracted throughout the city as a method of informing beholders of the historical space. Art Deco tourism is therefore located as an example of a ‘heritage experience’ and dissected in examination of the trifold communicative duty of heritage sites in general. This thesis contends that sites of heritage aspire to conjure the twin notions of historical sensation and historical presence while distributing historical knowledge. Where the past is excessively represented, visitors are less likely to be moved by the historical sensation. Yet when historical objects and sites are presented in their primary form, alluded to without full recreation or indeed presented as anomalous to their surrounds, their evocations tend to be more innately compelling. Napier’s period facades are no longer discontinuous with the surrounding
landscape and culture because they have been so completely accommodated by complementary Art Deco symbols and furnishings. In a move to pry Napier’s period facades away from the ambitions and standards of modernist literature—which ultimately reduce Napier’s facades to humble derivative examples—this research aspires to reclaim their inherent, local significance as post-disaster architecture. The city’s once hauntingly odd and wonderfully peculiar facades are beautifully maintained but, despite their bright paint, their historical presence is diminished. As the streetscapes fall in line with imported ideologies, they develop a look that is expected of them and a faux-past overwrites this otherwise wholly authentic heritage of disaster.

This criticism should not be negatively received. The success of the city’s Art Deco culture speaks for itself, and people are free to celebrate their architecture, history, heritage, or fantasies in whatever manner they please. It is by placing confidence in Napier’s facades as authentic and innately compelling historical artefacts that the city’s Art Deco culture can be momentarily destabilised. This research has been driven by the scholarship associated with the ‘spatial turn.’ French scholars such as Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, and Michel Foucault, while not directly cited in the chapters that follow have profoundly influenced my own conceptions of what might be summed up as ‘the symbolic landscape.’ It is their redefinitions of space, time, power and culture, and the impact of geographies associated with class and capitalism, that directed my recognition of Napier’s aestheticised landscape as an agent of culture. This abstracted perspective of the city space is developed within more recent scholarship on the intersection between history and the built space. Known as the ‘social turn’ this approach to the urban space is heavily influenced by the work of anthropologist and urban geographer David Harvey on social justice, and the work of postmodern political geographer and urban theorist Edward Soja on the crisis of

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architectural subject matter. The social turn is about pausing to look back on how cultures, social relations, territories and agents of power are articulated and empowered/disempowered in the formulation of social spaces. Soja and Harvey’s emphasis on power and space both anchored and fuelled my initial observations about the visual articulations of local heritage. It became clear that as we preserve Napier city’s facades we also preserve a social space.

This research focuses on Napier’s visual culture with a view to understanding and sustaining its position as heritage. How do printed images and urban semiotics connect with the actual buildings? — How do we make sense of the city space through this imagery? Why is this the manner of ‘sense-making’ employed, given that the lived history of the city is entirely different to that on display? Shedding light on these issues is my first ambition. The second ambition, perhaps frustratingly, is to initiate a discussion on the spatial agency of the period aesthetic that shapes the city space. The claim here is that all scholars and enthusiasts of Art Deco, let alone the residents of Napier city, should be much less certain of the Art Deco they claim to know. As a genre, style, mood, or idiom that was retrospectively defined and remains active in the present, Art Deco is in need of redefinition. On the one hand it is light-hearted, on the other, it distributes a distorted sense of the past and enormous cultural agency. This is as true of London and New York as it is of Napier.

Methodology

Investigations into the facades’ representation across media concerned four distinct phases of the city’s development since its settlement in 1851: pre-earthquake Napier, the New Napier (1933), Art Deco Napier (1982), and present day Napier. These phases emerged from the above literature review as I gained a general understanding of the city’s geography, pre-European occupation, settlement, industries, disaster history, recovery, and rebirth as an Art Deco Centre. The oldest primary source materials sought to bolster this reading were found at the Hocken

Collections, where promotional materials that depicted the built city before the earthquake are neatly archived. During the city's Edwardian period, adverts and pamphlets showed the city as a health resort, a sunny destination for those travelling through from Taupo.

In a move to understand Art Deco in its original context, I searched the archives at the Architecture and Planning Library at the University of Auckland. Here, I spent many hours documenting the language, imagery and discourses evident in contemporary British and American architectural journals. I was trying to decipher how that which we now recognise as Art Deco was known during the interwar period. I also wanted to gain a sense of the kinds of spaces the style occupied, for whom they were designed, the pool of iconography in circulation, and what themes were in promotion through their use. With a growing sense of the international fashions, I could then switch back to Napier to examine the original plans for the individual constructions, and archival materials concerning the rebuild. How was the language of the modern styles translated during the rebuild? Hours passed in the archives room at the MTG Hawkes Bay reading the Napier Reconstruction Committee minutes, newspapers, images, and letters sent in 1931 following the earthquake. As my research chronologically moved into enquiries concerning a post-earthquake but pre-Deco Napier (roughly 1940-1980) the new buildings went uncharacterised. Promotional materials, texts and newspapers published during this period are plentiful, especially since the centenary in 1974 prompted authors to reflect on the rebuilt city without the yet to be introduced trajectory of Art Deco as heritage. The extent to which the buildings did not contribute to the city’s character at this point, was plain.

The Art Deco Trust then became the font of much knowledge as their own history is perfectly entwined with Napier’s aesthetic revolution. Source materials pertaining to the city’s Art Deco inception from the 1980s onward are readily available to the public via exhibitions, films, documentaries archival photographs, and artworks on permanent display. These historical sources were then supplemented by my own collection of modern ephemera during my five years as a Napier resident. During this time I attended the Art Deco festivals, frequented the Art Deco Trust shop, participated in heritage tours, lectures and observed the rythms and posture of people passing through the themed city. I collected documents that promote history but which are not yet historical: business cards, napkins, pamphlets, newspapers, postcards, stamps, posters and film. The ability to freely return to the primary resources in discussion —
the sculptures, street furnishings, graves, monuments, murals, shops and signage — across the seasons and over the course of years was corroborative. Observing the city operate during the off-season allowed me to witness the buildings exhibiting their inherent gravitas, current utility, and identity through use. Watching Napier move through its annual rhythms revealed the way the Art Deco ‘mood’ can be switched on and off according to the activities of retailers, tourists, and even the weather.

The five Art Deco Festivals I attended were particularly revealing in terms of the priorities and preoccupations of the people participating. Deck chairs and picnics under parasols propped against the Boer War Memorial Statue contrasted with the reverential military atmosphere just a few blocks down at the annual ceremonial installation of the Veronica Bell (from the H.M.S. Veronica, whose sailors assisted Napier when the earthquake hit). Antique stalls and Deco merchandise obscured the heritage signs, and Model T Fords were parked beside pennyfarthings. I was able to compare present day interpretations and understandings of Art Deco through live performances, graphic renditions, architectural details, tours, and conversations, with that which was circulating in the period journals that were influential to Napier during the rebuild. I recognised postures, behaviours, and language from the postcards, films and the imagery that pervaded my literature review, and I heard the city’s proposed modernism being seamlessly absorbed into international Art Deco picture. I recognised the enormous contrast between these imported ideas and the historical reality. ‘Art Deco water’ was on sale and ‘Art Deco planes’ were flying. People enjoyed ‘Art Deco picnics’ and pop-up stalls selling vintage travel posters with Māoriland imagery and ‘Art Deco souvenirs.’ Temporal distance from the earthquake event plainly aligned with developments in civic identity, and the changing social content and aesthetic shifts of the city space were clearly imbued with the values of a select present-day society. While the Art Deco festival is, without doubt, a vivid display of the extent to which the idiom can be contorted to fit one’s own needs, the present study does not scrutinize its performances. It is not historical and the Art DecoTrust make no claims to reenactment or historical accuracy. The festival is harnessed only to explain the extent to which the facades provide a period setting, and to demonstrate the sheer popularity and sway the vintage cultures have in contemporary society.

Some pertinent exhibitions serendipitously arose during the production of this research. Particularly useful in terms of proximity to source materials was California Design 1930-1965: Living in a Modern Way (2013) at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
Tāmaki, the tourism poster exhibition *Selling the Dream* (2015), and *Speedlines and Ziggurats* (2016), an exhibition of architectural photos at MTG Hawkes Bay Tai Ahuriri. A permanent exhibition about the earthquake at MTG Hawkes Bay features ample footage and information regarding the natural disaster, while the Art Deco Trust Shop across the road is filled with books and merchandise of a vintage nature.

This thesis privileges graphic and performative representations of Art Deco over the established histories of architecture itself. My art historical lens focused on the nature and mechanics of representation, instead of enquiry into the buildings’ construction or more conventional architectural theory. The representation of the completed facades in other media meant that the building process itself was irrelevant. New Zealand is not short of architectural historians and information about the channels through which Napier’s styles arrived to the country are increasingly available. The ambition was to add nonvocational knowledge about the architecture — the appearance of the buildings, their influence on the urban setting, and the cultural content that arises from them. I also decided to exclude Hastings, a nearby city that was also destroyed in the earthquake and similarly rebuilt in a modern style. It is Napier that has the peculiar visual culture derived from its architecture, and it is Napier that continues to construct a conspicuous *lieux-de-mémoire*. Further, content pertaining to the operation of metamodernism and kitsch in Napier’s Art Deco culture had to be reduced to a few paragraphs. The politics of kitsch introduce an entirely different set of issues that could not be adequately explored in this study. The present study had to remain focused on the Art Deco phenomena derived from the sudden mutation of the city’s surfaces in the post-disaster context, so as to underscore Napier’s decomposition of rigid ‘fact’ in the creation of its visual cultural heritage.

**Chapter Outline**

The thesis is comprised of five chapters, which begin with the concrete fact of the buildings and move increasingly into the abstract effects of representation. Chapter One introduces the event of the 1931 earthquake and the origins of Napier as the Art Deco City. It begins with the trauma endured by the people of Napier and briefly moves through the city’s recovery and reconstruction. The focus turns to contemporary Napier, with observation of the various appearances of the heritage precinct. Its iconography and ecclecticism is noted, and the extent to which it represents American
and British influences is called into question. This discussion will provide the reader with a general sense of the Art Deco that is scrutinised in the the rest of the thesis — its appearance, scale, design and concrete presence. Far from being limitations, the unique and enduring character of New Zealand permutations of modern styles is attributed to the economic strain of their earthquake savvy, depression-era construction. Since Art Deco authors consistently account for the style’s semiotic chaos by writing it off as ‘eclectic,’ it is useful to consider those things that are absent from its wild iconographical inclusions. The suggestion here is that Art Deco might insightfully be defined by that which it is not. This approach is applied to Napier before discussing the more hardened themes of architectural indigineity, modernism and nationalism in Napier’s Art Deco — areas that architectural historians tend to dwell on in a search for heritage value.

Chapter Two addresses Art Deco in terms of its ongoing production and performance the Art Deco idea in its entirety. The quotidian Napier in operation behind Art Deco is considered, and the blurred geography of cultural identities highlights the ambiguity of historical references and representational intentions. Here we are met with fantasy, not only the Napier myth, but also the mirage of cultural otherness and exoticism. A major argument in this chapter pertains to the endurance of Art Deco; namely, that it has remained relevant as a style since its inception in Paris and by way of mutation has never really left the creative palette. The style’s responsiveness to changing generational outlooks is corroborated by a brief summary of literature on international Art Deco followed by examination into the perceived value of Napier’s Art Deco as heritage. Ian Lochhead’s assessment of Napier for the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List (2011) gives body to this enquiry and their architectural integrity is held up against the criterion for World Heritage Status. This chapter does not provide thorough or independent assessment of heritage value, as Lochhead has already competently performed that task. Rather, it examines the non-architectural influences of the period facades. The requirement to incessantly promote the buildings’ relevance emerges as the bottom line for their continued protection as heritage while the all-encompassing operation of time in Art Deco comes into view.

The third chapter politicizes Napier’s Art Deco. The site of the city’s reconstruction is inherently meaningful and was not a *tabula rasa* for the ‘modernist’s dream,’ as was often stated at the time of the rebuild. The facades’ metonymical and metaphorical capacities are introduced and our abstract understanding of Art Deco is
thereby recognised. For instance, iconography that displays one thing but expresses another (as with the zig-zag’s connotation of mechanisation) has to do with the historical contexts we associate with the style. The style’s temporalisation of human cultures via the vocabularies and hierarchies of modernism is pinpointed before introducing the role of Māori (or lack thereof) in the New Napier design. A key argument here pertains to the difference between Pākehā and Māori temporality, with Western spatialisations of time being inherent to Art Deco. Following this discussion the reconceptualisation of space is examined. The idea that space is not a surface for display but an array of trajectories operating simultaneously in different directions is paramount. Finally, this chapter considers the generational processing of trauma; namely, that communities often begin by creating positive mythologies in order to cope, before moving into more accurate and affecting/distressing representations. It is argued that although Napier’s facades do not explicitly refer to the earthquake they deal in the semiotics of disaster.

Chapter Four shifts to consider the poetic space of Napier’s Art Deco heritage; the buildings are ‘released’ from their built form and projected into the world of refracted imagery and preconception. The mechanics of the visual imagery associated with Art Deco are considered in terms of contiguity, likeness, pastiche, and vicarious memory. It is argued that imagery is evoked to bolster a narrative that makes sense of discontinuity: we are not souveniring or restoring the vanished landscape but reinforcing the present one with replicas. This draws us into the operation of time in Napier’s Art Deco. Time operates in a twofold manner in the Art Deco city, insofar as iconography pertaining to time exists on the facades while simultaneously the heritage space within which they reside telescopes backwards. Both ideas are dually focussed on the past tense while operating in the present. This creates a fictive historical space that places us, as contemporary viewers, existentially. The assumption that time operates in a unidirectional manner is an interpretation belonging to Western modernity and is vivid in the production of local heritage. The idea that the earthquake was something of a blessing often crops up in reflection of the disaster and the toil and trauma of the recovery frequently located as place-affirming process.

Chapter Five applies the concepts of the poetic space and the mechanics of the visual image to the heritage subject. Contiguous imagery, metaphor, metonym, and the notion of metamodernity are used to explain why it is that some heritage experiences are more affecting than others. Historical sensation, historical presence, and historical
knowledge are defined and distinguished. Metonymical artefacts are pinpointed as the greater source with regard to the evocation of historicity, while metaphor, in being more thoroughly mediated, is more closely bound to the rational distribution of historical knowledge. As a metaphor, Napier’s facades are informed by chains of semblance that mask difference while highlighting continuity. Art Deco is thus considered as a mask that strongly features the white ideal of modernism; the stucco styles looked like recovery, and their perpetual disregard for the varied histories evolving in and around them, both past and present, locates the stylised surfaces as sites of tension. This mask-like tension is explored on-screen as the facades are observed in their 1980s postmodern revival and more recently in their metamodern interpretations. Lastly, it is noted that as our perspective lengthens, The Art Deco City is becoming increasingly populated with figures from the past. If the architectural set somehow falls short of expressive value, the old inhabitants are returning to articulate their character. Stylised veneers become calcified shells and the Art Deco City is needlessly reduced to caricature. Excitement about Art Deco is not unwarranted, but it is important to recognise that the city which stands as a discontinuous patchwork — one that fits no precise architectural category and avoided acknowledging trauma as a method of recovering from it — is equally valuable, if not more affecting, than the pervasive Art Deco invention.

A Note to the Reader
This thesis employs Māori terminology. A glossary of Māori terms is provided for the reader on page xviii.
Chapter 1

Napier’s Earthquake and the Art Deco Style

Suddenly, the floor heaved upwards. I was instantly awake and more aware than I ever had been in my life. The building began to rock and tremble violently. Jasper was thrown against the blackboard with his arms outstretched and a look of pure horror on his face.

“The world has come to an end in an acme of destruction,” I thought with a peculiar calmness. “We’re all going to die.”

So thought a young Bill Garnham who on the third of February 1931 rode to school on his new bicycle. It was the first day back after the Christmas holidays. He had great plans for the remaining summer, none of which involved removing a piece of sheet iron from his classmate’s broken neck or high school ‘beauties’ being thrust to their death through newly-fractured walls. Nor did his plans involve any sort of blinding dust, deadly rubble or limb contortion, but this is precisely what lay before this unsuspecting schoolboy and many others like him. No one had planned for the arrival such a natural disaster, particularly one of this scale, and certainly no one awoke that morning preparing for a day that would change their lives in such a gut-wrenching manner.

The main mid-morning earthquake was 7.8 magnitude, a shock so severe that “pianos were thrown about like matchboxes.” It killed 258 people. The whole of Napier was tilted upwards and twenty-two square kilometres were raised to sea level (fig. 7). A whole new suburb was formed, while the inner city was completely devastated (fig. 8). Fires rapidly spread throughout the town, whose water supplies had been cut off with the rising seabed and damaged pipelines, leading to two days of intensive burning (fig. 9). A temporary morgue was set up in the courthouse on Marine Parade and the identification of crushed and charred remains soon began (fig.10).

Those living near the central business district (CBD) became familiar with “the sweetish smell of death which could not be masked by the lime scattered among the

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ruins,” while those confined to the camps became accustomed to mosquitoes, soot, chloride of lime, and tree-bucket showers. ⁴ The backcountry “for miles” was covered with cracks in the earth “some too wide for a man to jump,” while conversations urgently circled around search and rescue, demolition, coffin-making, and evacuation. Telephone lines were down and lying at extreme angles across roads – tangled, with debris hanging from them (fig. 11). ⁵ Access to Napier by land was cut off from the Port Ahuriri side owing to a landslide on one face of Bluff Hill and no less than 525 aftershocks were counted in the fortnight that followed the main event.

In 1980, the newspaper journalist Geoff Conly wrote: “The horror of the earthquake dazed and shocked most people, and paralysed some” and he linked the devastation to “that of a World War I shell-shocked village.” He reports that old soldiers, of whom there were plenty present “dwelt on the resemblance.” Adding to this picture he recorded that there were people gashed and bleeding or sitting on the kerb nursing an injured limb, some weeping, some hobbling, some open-mouthed, and gibbering – lost temporarily to the world. An arm protruding from the debris here, a boot ownerless there, a car near to squashed into two parts there. And the screaming, high-pitched, urgent, desperate; the calls for help and the knowledge that people had died and were dying. ⁶

It is important to remember that in 1931 the science behind earthquakes was not common knowledge and that in the absence of explanation, seismicity might seem wholly apocalyptic. Letters written to loved ones, now archived at the local museum, recount innumerable near misses and fateful moments shared between family, friends and workmates who were soon gathered at temporary camps set up at the centrally located Nelson Park or, if lucky, situated in some less affected neighbour’s house for the coming months of adjustment to a new post-earthquake reality. In these personal accounts, relief is married to disbelief as authors note where they were when floors

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⁴ Geoff Conly covers the event in substantial detail in his book *The Shock of ’31*. This text will provide the reader with a readable mix of anecdotal and factual information and appears to be the go-to for subsequent authors in search of a comprehensive overview: Geoff Conly, *The Shock of ’31: The Hawkes Bay Earthquake* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, 1980), 115.


“convulsed” and ceilings fell. Many were at work and dashed onto the streets, where crumbling brickwork and black smoke from rapidly spreading fires quickly became a very real danger. Others were on their farms where the ground had opened up to the dismay of livestock or at school, like young Bill, quoted above, who among the many grim fates he witnessed saw a class mate climb out from beneath his desk only to be struck and killed by a falling concrete column. In a similar twist of fate, Nola Scott, reminiscing on this particular school day eighty years later, recalled how the boy next to her had put his hand on top of the desk in a first move after the shock when a brick came down and cut his fingers off. She could still see the fingers lying there eight decades later.

Ghastly imagery was privately absorbed during the earthquake and stories of heroism are attached to moments of intense fear. Robert Semple, the union leader and future Minister of Public Works, reported after visiting the devastated areas that doctors had crawled under the wreckage of St John’s Cathedral in order to chloroform people before they were burnt alive. A horrifying tale often told includes the death of a lady who was pinned beneath the ruins and could not be rescued in time. A doctor in this case administered a lethal overdose of morphine before himself being put at risk by further collapses caused by aftershocks. Indeed many rescuers were killed during their valiant dashes into buildings still falling. As the dismay continued, panic set in. Garnham wrote:

Children separated from their parents stood in the street and sobbed with fright. Someone ran past shouting about a tidal wave. People didn’t seem to know where to go or what to do. I felt the same. Now and then the earth would tremble. I felt that the street could open up and swallow us all."

Fatefully, the HMS Veronica was docked in Napier’s harbour and readily came to assist the city “in her hour of need.” The sailors witnessed the contorting city from the water and radioed Auckland for assistance (figs. 12-13). HMS Diomede and Dunedin

8 Dunlop, “The Day a School Died,” 70.
later arrived carrying doctors, nurses and emergency equipment. Undoubtedly, the military presence gave resounding hope to the nervous residents as they helped haul survivors from the wreckage and set to work on clearing and securing debris. As assistance arrived, a camp of tents enough to house 2,500 people was set up and makeshift hospitals were established at the racecourse, where doctors operated in the open air (fig. 14). Food and hot drink were available within five hours of the shock while “transport to deal with water supplies, urgent matters in connection with sanitation, and … medical and nursing help for the injured” were all speedily arranged.\textsuperscript{11}

Owing to fear of disease in the stricken areas women and children were encouraged to evacuate the town, and it was recorded that 1030 refugees had reported to the Auckland Town Hall in February.\textsuperscript{12} There, care was soon underway in the form of parcels of clothing and orders for food and transport, and 800 of the displaced persons had been “fully or partially clothed [with] nearly 1000 orders for supplies of groceries, meat, bread and milk” having been issued.\textsuperscript{13} The Post and Telegraph departments worked around the clock to get communications out and were said to have “done all that [was] possible for human beings to do.” By February 5, two days after the earthquake, the Wellington-Hastings railway line was in repair to begin evacuations from Napier. While sewerage remained a major problem, the city was receiving electricity just one week after the earthquake.\textsuperscript{14}

Recovery thus began immediately and urgently, and without hesitation the arduous clean up of debris commenced. Three days after the earthquake, the Christchurch morning newspaper, \textit{The Press}, described Napier as “a town that has been wiped off the map.” It was a “smouldering heap of ruins – the sepulchre of a prosperous port and the gaunt remains of a seaside town.”\textsuperscript{15} It is easy to imagine how the city appeared completely ruined, with its skyline flattened and its contents burnt. However in what was, presumably, a direct response to \textit{The Press}’s report, Mayor Vigor-Brown of Napier publicly asserted that “Napier is not wiped out...as soon as the

\textsuperscript{11} “Napier’s Gratitude,” \textit{New Zealand Herald}, February 9, 1941.
\textsuperscript{13} “Refugees in Auckland,” \textit{New Zealand Herald}, February 28, 1931.
\textsuperscript{15} “Earthquake in Hawkes Bay,” \textit{Press}, February 6, 1931.
debris which is considerable, is removed, buildings will be gone on with. Napier will soon be rebuilt.”\textsuperscript{16} This signals the remarkably early turn towards a new Napier. The city was not to be abandoned. While the town presented as a “reeking mass of ruins,” it is consistently recorded that the townspeople displayed “a fortitude born of extreme adversity” and the emergence of a forward-looking attitude that was soon to become integral to the earthquake memory.\textsuperscript{17}

In the name of reconstruction, four architectural practices that were usually found in a state of professional opposition, worked in unison to rebuild the city. They designed individually, and personal preferences are clearly evident in the final results. Nonetheless, they shared a sweeping vision for the city — a vision most neatly defined by that which \textit{did not want} to see in their new city. They worked as a subcommittee, called The Associated Architects, under the guidance of the two commissioners appointed by the Government as overseers of the city’s reconstruction: the magistrate J. S. Barton and the engineer L. B. Campbell. Prior to the earthquake Commissioner Barton, chairman of the Committee of Management of town planning in the Napier borough, had reported that the old city, alongside some finer traits, expressed “crowded areas, [a] faulty lay-out, narrow thoroughfares, and dangerous intersections, many monuments to short-sightedness, ignorance, and individualistic outlook.” He said: “When the town was rebuilt—as rebuilt it surely must be—there would be a glorious opportunity to correct the errors of the past and to have a well-laid-out town.”\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, while beautification was always a question, the opportunity to take the rebuild to the town-planning level was not overlooked. The need to revamp the face of Napier arrived with an opportunity to modernize how it functioned and, with an eye on what would become a fresh-looking Napier, the passing of new by-laws came to fruition. Legislation was set in place regarding height restrictions on city buildings and residential fences, new standards for swimwear were articulated, and earthquake safety regulations for the construction industry (many of which are still in place today). These changes altered public behaviours and the aesthetic treatment of the new landscape while activating a renewed sense of spatial awareness.

\textsuperscript{16} “Napier’s Gratitude,” \textit{New Zealand Herald}, February 9, 1941.
\textsuperscript{17} “Earthquake in Hawkes Bay,” \textit{Press}, February 6, 1931.
The top priorities were the services that the buildings were to provide (utility), the strength of their construction (safety), beauty (aesthetics), and cost (economy). Corners on buildings were splayed, streets were widened, boundaries were adjusted and service lanes added. Height restrictions were set, new building materials recommended, and verandah posts removed. Power poles and telephone lines were placed underground because the water table had dropped, and a new residential suburb, Marewa (meaning “gift from the sea”), was named. Incidentally, Napier had been a town struggling with expansion owing to the complication of being largely waterlocked. The earthquake solved this by lifting the land where the inner harbour had previously been, thereby negating the need for manual land reclamation – one of many blessings that would be counted by townsfolk.

The new by-laws, the seemingly unanimous goal for practical improvement, as well as the call for beautification demonstrates a strategic shift away from what had been the status quo. Even though it is widely reported that the people of Napier only wished to rebuild rather than reimagine their city, it seems that the city’s rehabilitation was intrinsically bound to processes of modernization. So while on an individual level life went on in an unbroken stream of sensory memory and self-awareness, quite possibly accompanied by desire to return to the stability and familiarity of life pre-quake, it seems that progress was being sought at an externalised community level. This desire for betterment spurred the conception of a new spirit that was said to manifest in the practical terms of a speedy reconstruction.

A carnival was held in 1933 to celebrate “a city reborn” (fig. 15). Immediately language began to personify the city. It can be gleaned from contemporary newspaper reports that the carnival was a celebration of efficiency in reconstruction as much as it was a celebration of the city’s rebirth, or return to function. Emphasis was definitely not on the architectural style, though modern it was recognised to be; it was not by any stretch a celebration of the yet unnamed genre of Art Deco. Napier’s ‘Art Deco story’ emerged later, in the 1980s, as a tale of optimism and triumph in the face of adversity. The New Napier boasts an entirely new aesthetic and this moment of victorious recovery is heralded as the genesis of the Art Deco City. There are some bold assumptions retrospectively made about whom and what the new

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facades represented. Beyond the noise of the big bands and the swinging tassels of the flappers’ dresses, however, there is a silence from the people in mourning. History observes the trauma of loss but does not linger on its sadness. Resilience and optimism nullify despair and the heritage of disaster is a concrete product.

This chapter examines the origins of Napier as the Art Deco City. Having noted the initial trauma of the collapsed city, the research in the pages that follow should carry a baseline of human anguish appropriate to the post-disaster context of the city’s construction. The first section observes the city as it stands today in order to provide the reader with a sense of its appearance, scale, design and concrete presence. It becomes clear that the Art Deco of Napier blurs the boundaries of style but that the stricken city’s social and financial limitations directly shaped the distinctive centre that exists today. The second section of this chapter defines Napier’s Art Deco by highlighting that which it is not. Often perceived as eclectic and inclusive, Art Deco can seem like semiotic chaos, an aesthetic whirlwind in which depictions are rarely literal and highly allusive. It can be more useful, therefore, to behold all the ‘Decos’ that were available to Napier’s constructions and yet which have been rejected, in order to decipher its representational nature. The final section takes these observations and asks whether or not Art Deco Napier is a New Zealand style. This section gives an initial shape to the discourses of modernism, national identity and cultural agency — three major themes running through the rest of this thesis.

Observations and Influences: An Examination of Art Deco Napier

The term Art Deco, used as a description of Napier as "the Art Deco City", is a generic one, not just because Art Deco is the predominant style in the city, but because it conveys its character, the period and the mood. But Art Deco is only one of the architectural styles seen here, and journalists who use the term to describe buildings which are emphatically not Art Deco will lose credibility when read by architecturally knowledgeable people.

Robert McGregor, 2000

I knew Napier before the earthquake and soon after the earthquake…and to see it today as a modern city, with wide streets,

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classical buildings and beautiful shops with a selection of goods displayed with great taste under perfect artificial lighting conditions was a great revelation to me. It speaks volumes for the pluck and determination of the New Zealanders to create out of ruins a city such as Napier.

Edward Hirst, 1934

The above quotes address two of the most fundamental aspects of Napier’s architecture. Firstly, Robert McGregor points out that Art Deco is a catchall phrase that must be taken lightly in terms of its categorical accuracy. It is a term that conveys the phenomenon that has been triggered by the built environment more than it describes the architectural character of the original buildings. The second quote vividly represents the association of the architecture with modernity, perceptions of the community’s determination in the face of adversity, and the absence of Art Deco as a term or concept in the 1930s. Edward Hirst’s use of the adjective ‘classical’ to describe the buildings points to their continuity with tradition and their architectural modernization rather than their disruptive or unfamiliar form. With these distinctions in mind we try to understand the mechanics of the local experience so broadly recognized as ‘Art Deco.’

The city’s central quadrant has been described as unified, modern, and visionary, and Napier is widely considered to be a period city with quaint vintage charm and a seaside holiday resort atmosphere. The buildings create a patchwork of styles that flaunt a mixture of trends rather than a planned Art Deco city, but recent endeavours to fill in the urban landscape with decorative trimmings, vintage artefacts, public art works and period signposting impose a more consistent and vivid aesthetic that sells the Art Deco identity with ease. Street furnishings are placed to enhance the character of the period architecture (fig. 16). Each of the green bollards and the many white, multidirectional viewing plinths (for sitting upon) have beach or Art Deco-related imagery set on top. They serve to slow the traffic down to near pedestrian pace while reinforcing the association of the buildings with beachside Deco. The palm trees continue this theme, framing the buildings with a tropical image that is busy and welcoming. This effect is enhanced by the illumination of spherical streetlamps at dusk, when evocative palm-shaped silhouettes and atmospheric globes are set against

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the sky. In a daily cycle, the shadows of the palms move across the buildings, creating an observable diurnal rhythm that fuses the built form with a less tangible romantic landscape (fig. 17). On a typical day, a vintage car is parked in front of the Art Deco Centre, with four flags for the centre lining the pavement (fig. 18). This is a distinct anchor for the city and a highly appealing imageable spot for tourists looking to pose by the period architecture.

The streetscapes present buildings that are mixed in colour and height, though none of the 1930s constructions exceed two or three stories. Where the facades join, rooflines and colours contrast, creating textural interest and a patchwork of mismatched geometries (figs. 19-22). The low-rise buildings do not loom at grand heights from which staggered levels, uniform balconies or other lateral symmetries extend, as we see in larger architectural examples from other Art Deco centres (Mumbai and Miami boast such features). Where there are balconies, they are mostly small non-structural Juliet balconies or, with the odd exception, they are inset in a manner typical of Spanish Mission Style architecture (fig. 23). There is a broad horizontal emphasis throughout the streets that stems from the low stature of the buildings rather than from a decision to work in the horizontal aesthetic associated with later streamlined Art Deco styles. In the slightly taller buildings where the vertical emphasis can be accentuated therefore, it readily is. One might compare the Daily Telegraph Building (erected in 1932) with Dunedin’s New Zealand Railways Bus Station (now part of Toitū Otago Settlers Museum, designed in 1939) to see how these different axes can be accentuated (figs. 24-25). One might then compare the verticality of the pre-earthquake Edwardian Masonic Hotel (fig. 26) with the low-rise horizontality of the 1930s Masonic Hotel to see how the low rooflines stretch and clarify the post-earthquake landscape (fig. 27). There is a solidarity of form, a reliable heftiness, in the low builds that conveys a submission to gravity and a synchronicity with the flat landscape that would not be present in the oppositional posture of more upright forms.

Generally speaking, the coloured lintels, shallow balconies and deep verandahs emphasise the broad streets they occupy while creating wide, covered pathways for pedestrians and café-goers to enjoy. This sheltered space prioritizes the pedestrians by

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slowing the pace of the central business district to match the movement of leisurely crowds. The low height of the verandahs contributes to the human scale of the architecture but the vertical attached columns on some of the neo- and stripped-classical facades that we see only when we step out from these shelters frequently contradicts this comfortable sense of scale.

In Napier there are few striking novelty features with gravity-defying geometries, what Dalvi calls ‘climactic devices’, but central columns and enlarged doorways with decorative lintels taking centre place in the various architectural compositions (fig. 28). Similarly, there are no towering stylised figurines like that of the Niagara Mohawk Building, Syracuse, New York (fig. 29), or on the New India Insurance Building, Mumbai (fig. 30), though there are brightly painted motifs and trimmings that act as focal points. They usually appear upon doorways, parapets, window ledges, and architectural inscriptions (figs. 31-33). Further, we do not see buildings that embody Robert Venturi’s ‘duck’ – a structure whose very form literally embodies the building’s meaning. Rather, they belong to Venturi’s category of the ‘decorated shed’ and rely upon applied symbols and signage to us of the buildings’ intended nature.

The Art Deco we see in Napier is therefore less about dramatic sculptural forms and more about individualized, symmetrical rectilinear arrangements that if severed from their adjoining facades would make still make compositional sense. They are not abstract or alienating in an avant-garde sense and remain legible in a traditional manner; that is, they do not deviate from established design principles of line, colour, proportion, and texture. Indeed, we must remember that Art Deco began to emerge well before World War I and was initially deeply conservative. It was very much tied to the neo-classicism espoused by the École des Beaux-Arts and is commonly derided for trying to break tradition while only managing to redecorate and reinvent classical forms.

The war heightened the emphasis on nationalism in new designs, even though an international ‘return to order’ dominated the fine arts of the 1920s (this is evident if one looks to the French painter André Derain, the work of Novecento Italiano artists,

or such American sculptors as C. Paul Jennewein or Edward McCartan). Nevertheless, the internationalism inherent in Art Deco already had its foundations in Art Nouveau, the Prague Art Workshop, De Stijl, the Omega Workshops, and the Weimar School of Applied Arts. Juliette Hibou has suggested that modernised historic styles were used to symbolise a resumption of order in a period of foreign competition and political conflict; she suggests that the intensifying call for nationalism hastened a return to tradition. Indeed, I argue later that as European countries looked inwards to their own artistic pasts for patterns and techniques with which to decorate their present — German speaking countries harking back to Baroque and Rococo styles, France and Italy to its folk history, the Spanish to their Pueblos, and New Zealand to the Māori culture — they not only imbued their new constructions with nationalistic connotations but also an evolving sense of time.

At this point, however, it is more useful to simply observe that the traditional legibility of the facades provides each edifice a distinct frontal aspect with a clear entrance, its own set of windows and independent signage, and that each composition reads as a symmetrical face that functions as a guide to entering the building. This facial symmetry and clear frontal orientation is so coherent that many of the buildings read exceptionally well when documented in a two-dimensional format, as in photography or illustration. This is especially true of those facades that are not horizontally impeded and overshadowed by looming verandahs (such as those on Tennyson Street, which tend to be offices rather than shops displaying stock that require sun protection (fig. 19). Their responsiveness to flat representation also means the buildings readily create an imageable *mise-en-scène* for the recreational and documentary habits of tourists, as well as providing an unimpeded backdrop for the pedestrian motions of everyday life.

With many of the buildings being placed so closely together the undecorated backs of the buildings are mostly out of view. Where we can see the sidewalls, down service alleys and access-ways, we are quickly reminded of the extent to which the expressive value of the architecture resides on the street-facing walls. We see how the communicative strength of the buildings relies heavily on the surface values of texture, colour, and the illustrative ambitions of small sporadic emblems (figs. 34-35). The

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primary street view, however, appears like a mosaic of flat facades that are carefully painted in contrasting hues with clear lines and contours that are striking when placed against the Hawkes Bay’s renowned blue skies. Such facades are highly reminiscent of the hand-painted backdrops you might find on stage or on a film set, and they have a compositional clarity and palette that calls to mind the paintings of Christopher Perkins or Rita Angus, or the work of commercial artist Marcus King, whose iconic body of commercial work ‘sold New Zealand’ to an international audience (figs. 36-37). Each of these artists worked in unblended colours that were characteristic of London’s Slade School of Painting during that time and were perfect for the hand-printed poster art of the era.

Francis Pound has argued that New Zealand art in the 1930s conveys a “self consciousness of itself as New Zealand art.”29 Some of the qualities associated with the developing New Zealand style were the ‘hard light’ of the country, the iconic rural railway station and dairy factory motifs, endless shorelines, burnt out native trees and decaying colonial buildings. He suggests that there was a rejection of the cosmopolitan and everything perceived as foreign, as well as the strengthening of a ‘blood and soil’ mentality towards the land.30 This attitude clashes considerably with the search for a localised identity or a ‘New Zealand modernism’ in architecture at the time, at least, in terms of Napier’s 1930s reconstruction. On the one hand, artists were refusing the lure of the foreign while using their knowledge of the foreign as a prerequisite for recognising and representing the unmistakably local. On the other hand, the architects seemed to be directly cutting and pasting foreign designs, adapting only where necessitated by the new building requirements and the shaky geological conditions. To see this in action we can readily compare a typical excerpt from The American Architect with the frieze on the former BNZ Building or the lintel on the Crombie Lockwood building (figs. 38-39, 43). Despite this difference across the disciplines of art and architecture, however, the aesthetic aspired to by both artists and architects at the time seems to reflect an interest in representational clarity and the increasing intelligibility of symbolic forms. I believe this is symptomatic of the increased mobility of the visual image in the 1930s and the absorption of graphic styles into the fine arts.

30 Pound, The Invention of New Zealand Art, 4.
The reality in both art and architecture is that the pool of influences had broadened to include America, while Britain was seen to be to lagging. This broadening is not an outright rejection of the Empire and its styles, but part of a more complex exploration into new source material and changing ambitions. The clear linear work of New Zealand artists, who were depicting the ‘harsh New Zealand light’ and iconic landscapes, is equal to the new clarity of form and distinctive regionalism in circulation in both America and Britain at the time. Consider the similarities between artists Grant Wood (American) or Harry Epworth Allen (British) and New Zealand painters Rita Angus or Christopher Perkins (figs. 40-41, 36-37). The stress on surface value and the flat representation of sweeping landscapes, as well as the adoption of schematic forms and subtle socio-political or cultural narratives, can be seen across each artist’s work. These are rural depictions within which the built environment takes a back seat to the natural landscape, and the reduced forms create pictorial “inventories of relevant facts.”31 With this legibility, though, comes a taming of nature’s wildness. This is a modern post-romantic perspective that converts the natural forms into an urban vocabulary (these are not the sublime landscapes of nineteenth century England).

Architecturally, the same qualities are reflected in Napier’s 1930s cityscape, where the pool of influences broadened to include simplified flat forms and a semiotic landscape of cultural symbols and geometric patterns set within reduced architectural compositions. This represented a new aesthetic for Napier’s streets – one that was modernistic but which did not radically change our understanding of the architectural structure. Overt political messages are not the hallmark of Napier’s Art Deco, but the cultural references displayed on the facades inherently politicise their existence beyond the architects’ original intentions. In both art and architecture of this period, therefore, we see an interest in the communicative value of the visual facade and an exploration of New Zealandness as set within the broader international trends of regionalism. In both mediums there was a stress on surface values and the expressive value of the flattened surface, whereby the smooth contours of the finished product act as a highly stylised filter set in place to remove any naturalistic, blemished, cloyingly traditional or allegorical forms. The acclaimed ‘harsh New Zealand light’ – often used as a

pretext for a domestic style in art and against which Napier’s architecture is so easily set – has also served to strengthen a visual connection between the cartoon-like presentation of Napier’s buildings and the hard-edged style of New Zealand poster art of the era.

Proponents of Modernism were highly critical of this type of ‘facadism’ in both painting and architecture, yet its popularity has not waned and mainstream culture continues to capitalise on the legibility of these formulaic arrangements. Clement Greenberg notoriously relegated the products of popular culture to the, in his opinion, artistically lesser realm of kitsch. Despite his disdain, Greenberg’s descriptions neatly describe a strong and growing trend in twenty-first century New Zealand’s home-grown visual culture, of which New Zealand’s Art Deco is distinctly a part. Bearing in mind Art Deco’s adoption of the modernistic rather than the Modernist, we can look at Greenberg’s definition of kitsch, which he describes as formulaic and derivative:

The precondition for kitsch, a condition without which kitsch would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions, and perfected self-consciousness kitsch can take advantage of for its own ends. It borrows from it devices, tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, themes, converts them into a system, and discards the rest. It draws its lifeblood, so to speak, from this reservoir of accumulated experience.\(^{32}\)

We witness this abstraction of fully matured cultures on Napier’s facades with Parkers Chambers donning geometric Navajo designs, the Maya-esque patterns on the Crombie Lockwood Building or the Central Hotel’s adoption of Egyptian lotuses (figs. 42-44). In Napier these motifs are used as visual devices for capitalistic and sentimental ends with a complete disregard for their original context. There is no major lived cultural overlap between Napier and Mesoamerica, Egypt, or Native American history; these symbols are present for aesthetic and acculturative purposes only. As a bicultural country, then, it is alarming that Māori motifs are used unflinchingly in this same manner and context, that is, with total disregard for the living experience of that culture (figs. 45-47). Their use on buildings that adopt cultural symbols as temporalising and legitimizing devices rather than as functioning signposts is part of the broader political process of assimilation that was still operating

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in 1930s New Zealand. Even though it might not have been the explicit or cruel intention of the architects to diminish or devalue the culture, that is precisely what they did. The unchallenged use of Māori symbols within the broader modernist discourse of primitivism is symptomatic of a persistent colonial agency. As this is discussed further later in this chapter, I will focus here on my assertion that Napier’s Art Deco culture indeed revels in Greenbergian kitsch by borrowing “devices, tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, [and] themes” from other cultures before converting them into an aesthetic ‘system.’

When the Modernists adopted the German word *Kitsch*, it was meant pejoratively. Greenberg deemed it deceptive rather than truthful and “dangerous to the naïve seeker of light.”\(^33\) In this he was not alone. The architect Auguste Perret (1874-1954) declared in an interview with Marie Dormoy: “I should like first of all to know who linked the two words, art and decorative. It is a monstrosity. Where there is genuine art, there is no need for decoration.”\(^34\) In a similar vein the Austrian architect Adolf Loos (1870-1933) said in his publication *Ornament and Crime* (1908) that “What makes our period so important is that it is incapable of producing new ornament. We have out-grown ornament, we have struggled through to a state without ornament. Behold, the time is at hand, fulfilment awaits us.”\(^35\) Loos even stated: “The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use.”\(^36\)

Quite against the repossession of old decorative forms, then, Greenberg contended that kitsch “changes according to style, but remains always the same” and quite damningly stated that it is “the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times.”\(^37\) The idea that kitsch should change stylistically whilst fundamentally remaining the same relates to the way that commercial art and architecture uses

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\(^{37}\) Greenberg, “Avant-garde and Kitsch,” 12. Notably, kitsch existed well before the twentieth century, so the modernist use of the word should be seen as a development of its meaning rather than a coinage.
decoration to serve marketability. This describes Napier’s approach to urban forms rather accurately, across its 1930s reconstruction, and its 1980s revival through to its promotions today. It is absurd, however, to fuel the modernist idea that an elimination of ornamental features should be the measuring stick against which all art and architecture, let alone a society, is evaluated. Greenberg’s endeavour to “exhibit that which [is] unique and irreducible” may have been central to the modernist objective in the realms in which he functioned, but it was not central to the reconstruction of Napier.

Rarely did the city witness examples of this Greenbergian/Perret/Loos-inspired modernism in action, with the notable exceptions of Cathedral Lane Academy (fig. 48) and the former AA Building on Herschell Street/Archies Bunker (fig. 49) — the latter of which is currently and quite ironically painted to fit in with the kitsch decorative Art Deco style being damned.

In defence of the decorative styles seen in Napier, Peter Shaw has pointed out that an “awareness of history is not destructive of progress.” I would add that it is its visual concession to the past that has allowed Napier to revel in an ever-cyclical visual culture. While Greenbergian or Corbusian modernist attitudes towards decoration clearly did not prevail during the reconstruction of Napier, the popularisation of the austere aesthetic that accompanied their philosophies did quickly turn the 1930s decorative styles out of favour and usher in a long phase of invisibility. It is no coincidence that their 1980s restoration and renewed popularity coincided with the rise of postmodernism. Napier’s buildings regained significance when all things modernist and, in particular, all things rejected by modernists were revisited and reevaluated through a new historicist lens.

Despite the ebb and flow of ‘isms’ and the trends they stimulate, the extent to which Art Deco architecture can be considered Modernist does not equate to the measure of their historical significance. Facadist, structural, decorative, derivative, authentic, unoriginal, or cosmetic descriptors of the architecture are less important than the simple observation that Napier has a great deal of well-preserved 1930s facades. To use definitions based on international twentieth century models continues to breathe life into the stale breath of academic modernism while providing few new insights about Napier’s heritage value locally. Except, perhaps, to point out the sad

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fact that in typical discussions of Modernist architecture we talk about the dynamic, even scientific, conceptions of space and light, mass, form and time, social impact and relation to landscape, but when we move towards derivative subjects – and they are derivative (Art Deco, moderne, jazz styles, streamline, commercial, kitsch, whatever the name) – we stop speaking in conceptual terms and turn solely to their formal characteristics and figurative qualities, as if they constitute the complete product and our relation to it (they do not).

Modernistic styles in architecture articulate time within space. Art Deco literature is dominated by the style’s plagiarized source material and the compromises of intellect that are often said to engulf popular culture. This emphasis on the derivative nature of Art Deco iconography does not acknowledge — for better or worse — the momentous spatial agency of highly accessible forms and their kitschy reproductions. The dominant idea is that the formal features of Art Deco outweigh any significance associated with its social presence, spatial orientation, and specific relations to time, person, and place. No matter how scholars choose to frame it, though, the fact is that the 111 new buildings erected in the two years after Napier’s earthquake had individually styled facades that now function collectively within the vintage culture of the Art Deco brand. They are therefore socially and spatially operative. Their origin in disaster means that they are inherently significant, even if only to the extent that they represent a collective response to a singular moment of historical mutation.

With this significance in mind, we might return to the appearances of the buildings. One can observe that while they are coherent in terms of age, scale, general approach, and their origin as a collaborative reaction to a major disaster, the buildings do not have a coherent iconographic theme when viewed as a whole. We associate them with modernity and optimism by way of abstraction – a sunburst, a speedline, a primitive motif – but there are no references made that a person unfamiliar with modernist iconography could read. I would therefore argue, quite against the popular grain, that in the decoration of the original buildings there is not necessarily, or indisputably, an exclusive subject matter being referenced. There is no transcendental subject or conceptual essence to which the period decorations allude.40 In what manner

do Egyptian motifs bolster speedlines? How does the Spanish Mission Style complement Neoclassicism? Perhaps the only unity of theme is time itself. The styling is modern, but the semiotic meanings are not transparent. Herein lies the distinction between style and content, or style being perceived as content, an ambiguity I will arrive at in the next chapter.

Some examples of 1930s motifs that are said to convey modernity in Napier include the sculptural parapet on the Masonic Hotel, which is reminiscent of a radiator grille that conveys “exciting new developments in transport and communications,” and below that the panelled glasswork displaying a distinctive 1930s font (fig. 50). The zigzags and linear patterns on the Kidsons Building and the ziggurats and sunburst designs on the Central Hotel are also said to represent “the dawn of a new, modern age,” while the lamp in front of the Former Ministry of Works Building is said to be futuristic and symbolic of “energy, power, and technology” (figs. 44, 51-52). Other purported representations of modernity are the Hawkes Bay Chambers, whose corporate logo has been “given the speed treatment,” and the stylized shapes on the Smith and Chambers Building, which “have associations with radio and electric waves…and machine-made patterns” (figs. 53-54). These examples, by no means a comprehensive survey of the motifs on display, pertain to the modern vernacular through their linearity and reduced forms, and they would have appeared fresh and unfamiliar to contemporary audiences. Yet they are not inherently descriptive of technology or futurism. Where one person sees a cutting-edge lamp another might just see a traditional lighthouse construed from contemporary materials. One must note that the recent layering of civic artworks and the manicured treatment of the public space has over time created a thematic effect that is vivid, instructive and direct in the task of connecting sporadic abstract 1930s designs specifically to the Art Deco genre and its associations with the conditions of modernity.

Of the buildings that might be identified as Art Deco, the motifs in Napier have been contextualised to fulfil the Art Deco narrative. Jonathan Woodham observes in his essay “From Pattern to Abstraction” that Art Deco designs were largely

characterised by “the use of figurative motifs such as flowers, plants and animals” but by the late 1920s “there was an increasing use both in Europe and America, of abstract and geometric motifs drawn from ‘primitive’, cubist, constructivist and other avant-garde sources.” The figurative motifs to which Woodham refers include lightning bolts (Tea service, Gray’s Pottery and Co Ltd, c.1935), fountains (Walter Gilbert’s frieze panel for the Derry and Toms Building, London, 1933), sunbursts (Clarice Cliff’s ‘Sunray’ vase, 1929), birds (René Lalique’s car hood ‘Eagle Head’, 1928), running figures accompanied by leaping animals such as fauns, gazelles, horses, hounds and panthers (Marcel Goupy’s enamel vase featuring a female archer next to what appears to be a greyhound in mid-flight or John Gregory’s Cupid and Gazelle, 1924), dancing women (Johann-Philipp Preiss’s ivory Flame Leaper, 1920s), and trim or contained – rather than wild and sprawling – bunches of flowers (Paul Poiret’s prints on linen in the 1920s for La Maison Martine). These motifs have been drawn from nature and then stylised to convey movement, vigour, wellbeing, modernness and, in later forms, a sort of mechanised mobility. The bodies depicted are agile and athletic, the birds are vibrantly coloured, the antelopes, gazelles, horses and hounds leap, sprint and gallop, and the fountains and magnificent jewels evoke opulence, youth and abundance. They are ornamental, elegant, vivid and fanciful, and they revel in both classicism and exoticism.

In Napier, we see a relatively limited mixture of iconographical elements that includes zigzags (the Smith and Chambers Building, Emerson Street), abstract geometrical patterns (107 Lower Emerson Street), and some flowers and fruit (namely grapes on the Australasian Mutual Provident Building Society Building on Shakespeare Road, and the pressed metal undersides of the Hotel Central’s awnings on Emerson Street). In terms of generalised cultural motifs, we bear witness to Navajo emblems (Parker’s Chambers, Herschell Street), a German flag (Hildebrandt’s Building Tennyson Street), genericised Māori designs (The Ministry of Transport Building, Tennyson Street), Neo-Maya ‘influenced’ patterns (National Bank Building, Hastings Street), a figurative Greek design (Paxies Building, Hastings Street) and neo-Egyptian papyrus motifs (Dalgety Building, Dalton Street) cultural motifs, as well as sunbursts (Hursts Building, Emerson Street), ziggurats (the Art Deco Centre, 44

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Tennyson Street), and Charles Rennie Mackintosh-esque grid patterns and roses (on a number of leadlights and also on the Abbotts Building on Hastings Street).  

This quilted array of symbols is symptomatic, for the most part, of the pace of the rebuild. The city was to be rebuilt as fast as possible and the approach to the decorative schemes were directly imported from international examples in many places (the spiral designs and patterns appear frequently in illustrated American architectural journals of the era). The inconsistency of iconographical choices also demonstrates that the people designing for the rebuild were acting as individuals and working towards specific ends, rather than acting as part of a comprehensive architectural movement. Two vivid examples of personalised expression in the rebuild are the Paxies Building, a Spanish Mission facade donning a Greek motif that represents the Paxie family that immigrated to New Zealand from Crete in 1905, and the Hildebrandt’s Building, which features a wave pattern connecting a New Zealand flag to a German flag in a personal reference to the building’s original owner-operator. These emblems are still cherished but, in true kitsch style, as decorative rather than descriptive forms. Indeed, Ghislane Wood observes in her essay “The Exotic” that while ethnological references in Art Deco “served distinctly national, regional or racial needs, its use was always governed by one concept – renewal.”  

Not only is this relevant to these examples but also to Napier as a whole, since the very act of post-earthquake reconstruction signified a regional regeneration.

Art Deco’s hybridity is one of its most renowned and controversial traits, and its visually collapsed contradictions are largely responsible for its uneasy status in the histories of art and architecture. However, it is this eclecticism — the practice of “deriving ideas, style, or taste from a broad and diverse range of sources” — that continues to mobilise the performativity of Art Deco. By utilising motifs from various cultures of the world, an aura of cosmopolitanism dances around objects dressed in the style. Across the Art Deco genre, decorative effects from cultures geographically distant from Central Europe and Central America were imported and distilled down to their most graphically striking qualities, while the grand structures

45 These bracketed examples are not comprehensive lists, just points of reference for a matching visual image.
and proportions of the classical world were harnessed for their grandeur, compositional stability and organising principles. Ghislane’s baseline of renewal is thus evident in both structure and iconography. In Napier we see generalised spiral patterns that, while originally being dubbed Māori and later Maya in origin, iterate nothing specific of either Māori or Mesoamerican cultures. What is actually on display are neo-Maya motifs, which is to suggest symbolic forms that have already been removed from their original context and recomposed within modern, ahistorical revivalist design schemes and then placed anew into Napier’s 1930s decorative scheme.

This distinction was pointed out to me by British archaeologist, academic and Mesoamericanist scholar Norman Hammond of Boston University and further corroborated by Virginia Miller of the University of Illinois. These specialists on pre-Columbian art and civilisation have stated that Napier’s reliefs are distinctly ‘un-Maya’ in origin.48 Miller suggested that perhaps the attached pilasters were at best ‘Maya-esque’ and the flatness of the reliefs were vaguely pre-Columbian but “hardly unique to the style” (and one only has to look to Roman, Celtic, Hindu, Greek, Southeast Asian and Egyptian cultures to see that this mode of bas-relief has a long tradition in many other parts of the world).49 As for the former Bank of New Zealand Building (Hastings Street), the lintel above the Scinde Building (Tennyson Street) and the motifs on the Crombie Lockwood and former Haynes Buildings (both on Hastings Street; figs. 39, 43, 55-56) – which Heather Ives and Robert McGregor respectively linked to “Mayan [sic] flower leaf designs” – each was observed to bear no resemblance whatsoever to anything of pre-Columbian origin.50 This points less to an interest in the early contexts of other cultures and more to an interest in their archaeology — their decontextualised, temporalising semiotic effect in the visual landscape. This reflects the modernist taste for primitivism and, in Napier’s case, the adoption of pre-digested cultural forms as transported, it is likely, through journals such as American Architect, Architectural Forum, and Pencil Points.

48 Informal conversation with Professor Norman Hammond during his “Maya Archaeology” De Carle Distinguished Lecture Series, University of Otago (September to October, 2013).

49 Despite its incorrect use in many publications, Professor Hammond advised me to use the term ‘Maya’ because ‘Mayan’ is reserved for languages only.

Motifs are only one aspect of Napier’s Art Deco identity, however, and visual coherence and the demarcation of New Zealand’s introduction to modernism preoccupy local architectural discourse. Visual coherence holds strong sway because consistency of style is paramount in assessments of the buildings’ heritage status. Apperly, Irving, and Reynolds state that an architectural style exists when a number of buildings exhibit “similar (but not necessarily identical) sets of characteristics related to the relationship of the parts of the building to each other and to the building as a whole, and of the building to its physical context.” This relates to the shape, spaces, colours, textures, and ornamentation (or lack thereof) inside and around the building, as well as the scale, detailing, structure and use, or not, of elements related to a previous style. As has been established, we see aesthetic consistency in contemporary Napier more than we see stylistic or ideological uniformity, and this consistency is interrupted only by occasional new builds that thoughtlessly detract from the period architecture (most new builds are incredibly sympathetic to the period aesthetic so these few may be taken as aberrations). Scale, proportion, and colour are tightly maintained by the Art Deco Trust in an effort to maintain the homogenous civic identity. With their towering pilasters the bigger buildings at times dominate the smaller scale constructions, and the Spanish Mission style on occasion meets with the Art Deco and stripped classical styles in jarring clashes of visual rhythm. With that, though, the pastel-based colour scheme light-heartedly imbues each block of facades with what I would go so far as to call a comedy of colour, communicating that while their anatomies are different, their general constitution and cheerful temperament is the same (figs. 57-58). As an aside, this veneer of cheerfulness over the architecture of disaster is a method of distraction and an exercise in concealment that is consistent with the illusion and wider discourse of optimism so frequently alluded to in period art and film, thinly veiling the darker realities of the era.

This use of colour is integral to the character of Napier not only in terms of aesthetic consistency within the streetscape but also in terms of the experience it stimulates in their representations across other media. In a promotional interview for the New Zealand paint company Resene, McGregor noted:

When Napier was rebuilt after the 1931 earthquake, the cement used in the stucco was tinted with oxides, including pink, green, blue and a variety of biscuit and ochre shades. Although this resulted in a remarkably colourful townscape at a time when most inner city buildings were grey cement plaster or brick, and paint colours were limited, those buildings would be rather sombre compared with the huge range of paint colours that we’re now used to seeing.52

Certainly, McGregor was right in noting that one of the single most striking things about observing Napier is the sprightly contrasting palette.53 To paint the facades in hues that are once again striking, that is, to the twenty-first century eye, is to remain loyal to the ambitions, rather than the reality, of the original designs. This approach neatly underpins the whole Napier Art Deco phenomenon.

Colour is an aspect of local heritage that is carefully monitored by The Art Deco Trust, which has carefully chosen these hues for visual and emotional effect. A similar decision was made in regard to the Art Deco of Miami Beach, where the waterfront architecture, in accord with Leonard Horowitz’s vision, presents pastels that drew inspiration from the sun, sky, and seas rather than any sort of historical source.54 Likewise, The Durban Art Deco Society has “formulated a number of ’Tropical Deco’ colour schemes that are sympathetic to the era but which also acknowledge contemporary sensibilities.”55 Mumbai Art Deco buildings have a pastel palette too, though the level of maintenance and recent emergence of interest in architectural preservation there means that the administration of a consistent palette has been, thus far, far much less comprehensive. In Napier the colour scheme marks a contemporary alteration to the architectural heritage, one that is in keeping with the Napier Art Deco Trust’s desire to keep the buildings active in the public eye. It also pinpoints a regional adaptation of the style, which is responsive to the beachside environment/Miami cruise ship realm of activity and, significantly, contemporary ideas about what the buildings should be.

The latter is enormously important. The impact of local interpretations of Art Deco is surprisingly great, impressing a larger effect on local culture than may at first

53 McGregor, Deco-rated Hero.
55 http://www.durban deco.org.za/tropical/
appear obvious. There are numerous products and themes that employ the Art Deco epithet, and the vague rubric of formal tendencies that we see in Napier’s architecture gives a lot of leeway to personal preference and perception. Martin Greif aptly wrote: “I suspect that the term ‘Art Deco’ should really be ‘Art Decos’ … and that the term embraces at least ten to fifteen mutually exclusive ‘styles’ each of which (if we take the trouble to observe them carefully) can be separated from the others.”\textsuperscript{56} It is here, then, that we need to separate Napier’s Art Deco from the other conceivable ‘Decos’—or at least pinpoint aspects of their conception that could have been utilised in Napier but were not due to the process of selection and the haste of the rebuild. Napier’s conservative, nostalgic, pastel-hued, class-conscious yet demure sort of workaday Deco, as it were, is a very particular interpretation of an era and a style, and has not been a natural (or unwitting) evolution in local aesthetics. One can see that much of the Art Deco phenomenon, namely, Art Deco tourism and its imagery, is about cultivating a nostalgic and fairly wistful type of experience loosely justified by the built environment. As Greif pointed out, however, this New Zealand permutation is just one Deco in a sea of possible Decos. So while the focus in most, if not all, studies on Napier’s Art Deco pertain to the formal properties of local architecture I argue that if we are going to make Art Deco the language of our heritage then we need to look closely at what we are choosing, or indeed not choosing to represent, as we embroider the historical narrative with highly selective stylised imagery. By looking at trends that are absent in local innovations and the witting or unwitting decision to reject certain ideas, the historical inevitability of Art Deco in local post-earthquake discourse is inevitably challenged.

\textbf{That Which Napier’s Art Deco is Not}

We can begin by quickly summarising that which Art Deco \textit{in general} is not. It is not a genre that is about understanding or demystifying the human condition; it is not an inward search. One can compare Art Deco’s graphic commercialism with the inward journeys of Expressionism, Symbolism, Surrealism, or the utopian ideals of architectural Modernism to validate this assertion. While Art Deco is associated in

particular with F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, it was not a literary, political or philosophical movement; indeed, it was not a movement at all. Further, while the style was adopted for religious buildings and artefacts, it is not religious by conception. By the same token, it is not exclusively atheist, agnostic, pagan or mythical either, though it can be adapted for any of these causes. Art Deco is not limited to or dictated by medium, and it continues to adapt to new technological innovations with digital arts and animation being prominent contemporary examples. Art Deco tends to be American or Eurocentric, but it thoroughly embraces notions of foreignness or otherness. It is regional, national, and international by nature, but it is neither perfectly exotic nor comprehensively traditional. It alludes to dynamic movement in static arrangements, and it temporalises the compositional space through semiotics. It is not about the exaltation of the individual artist genius, and the viewer is not required to be an intellectual or educated in the arts in order to absorb the modern forms. And finally, Art Deco was not satirical, ironic or self-referential, and individual identities were often absorbed into broader modern tropes, where notions of the self were externalised and detachedly stylised (Tamara de Lempicka represented herself vividly as surface design).

To turn to Napier specifically now, we can see that the Art Deco and other period styles are not Gothic or Romanticist in manner. Despite the city’s overt memorialization of the British East India Company’s rule in India (even being named after General Sir Charles Napier), we do not see the decision to adopt Neo-Moorish, or Indo-Saracenic Revival architecture (known otherwise as Indo-Gothic, Hindu-Gothic, Mughal-Gothic, or Neo-Mughal architecture). It is a style that would have required some heavy refinement in terms of earthquake safety, but authoritative examples of low level, dome-less buildings, decorated with flat relief did exist elsewhere and could have been adapted or incorporated into the Art Deco framework with its vast array of symbols had the reconstruction committee and its architects been so inclined. Of course this may well be explained by the fraught relationship between Britain and India at the time and the extent to which architects from Auckland were interested in using icons that would tie Napier back to the history of the British Empire is open to discussion. I am unconvinced however that their stylistic choices were so political as

58 There is mention of the “Moorish-Spanish style” being considered as “appropriate for the climate” in a paper from June 1931, showing that the pool of options was, at
to be ‘rejections of Empire,’ and I perceive the absence of Indo-Saracenic Revival sources to be attributable solely to their absence in American architectural journals. This signals not necessarily a rejection of Empire but an interest in evolving architectural styles and a shift in the agents of design.

Similarly, while New Zealand’s exchanges with China were well established through imports, exports, mining, and migration, and the population of Chinese men (though not women) in the country was high, orientalism is not at all evident. North Africa is vaguely hinted at in lotus designs, palmettos, and stylised papyrus motifs, but the trend of ‘Egyptomania’ is neither striking nor structural. Asia and the Middle East provided prolific inspiration to Parisian Art Deco (as is evident in the fashions of Paul Poiret, the art of Erté, or the set designs of Lev Bakst) but are not at all prevalent in Napier, even though there was some precedent for orientalism in the earlier British Gothic architectural styles (consider the extreme case of The Royal Pavilion in Brighton). Again, British precedents lose out to American trends. This is where Napier’s situation presents significant tensions between, on the one hand, a cut-and-paste attitude to the decoration of the new architecture, where it would seem that anything goes, and on the other, a deliberate turn away from - but not a rejection of - the aesthetics of empire and representations of imperial history. Caution has to be exercised here because, arguably, the turn away from British styles was purely practical in that its stone architecture is not designed to endure earthquakes, where the coastlines of America, particularly around Santa Barbara, clearly is. We can also observe, for instance, that the architects turned away from the iconic timber-framed and timber-clad buildings that are typical of colonial housing in New Zealand too. These are prolific in the architecture of earthquake-prone Wellington or even San Francisco, and we might easily have seen the New Napier rebuilt in wood, though, I suspect fire damage to the city during the earthquake made this decision easier though by no means a foregone conclusion.

The element of fantasy that is inherent to the Art Deco style in Napier points most conspicuously to America and its native cultures as the exotic ‘other.’ This is to point out that while Erté-inspired prints and postcards and Chiparus-esque figurines


are now sold around the city, Napier’s period imagery and the poetic space it alludes to, conjures, and carves out through semiotics and visual cues, is less that of a fantastical escapist variety but a space more closely and figurally tied to interwar nostalgia and American jazz-era frivolity that is continually being curbed by British style high teas and brass bands (fig. 59). While the scale and simplicity of the architecture sets certain limits for the local Art Deco imagination, the greater vintage culture that the facades inspire leaves much wider margins for imaginative input. ‘Art Deco’ in Napier might be best defined as synonymous with ‘neo-vintage,’ where the prefix ‘neo’ is interchangeable ‘faux,’ ‘mock,’ or ‘quasi-.’ ‘Vintage’ products are produced and exchanged in the present to further generate the ‘Art Deco atmosphere.’

Napier’s period architecture and promotions of it are not about mystifying the everyday through otherworldly glitz or through the creation of a glamorous or erotic mise-en-scène. This is an Art Deco centred on the British class system. It is not therefore a night-time Deco, a subversive, seductive or decadent Weimar cabaret atmosphere, nor does it evoke a film noir appeal or the lure of Dark Deco, as might be conjured by Berlin, Paris, or Shanghai examples (the latter of which has, in the work of Amey Kandalgaonkar, been likened to a living Gotham City). While these themes are touched upon during Art Deco weekend with such events as the Speakeasy Burlesque, the everyday representations of the city more commonly display the brass bands, beaches, palm trees, and the bathing families of daytime which are more readily associated with imported British culture and the sun cult of Miami Beach, both of which appear to hold equal sway.

With a continued focus on that which Napier’s Art Deco phenomenon is not, we do not see projections into, or advancements of, the future in the atmosphere or iconography of the city’s commercial architecture. This is so, despite the thriving streamline culture in American 1930s permutations. While local architecture signalled a break from the British architectural tradition and a step towards the fashions of contemporary America, it does not reflect any cult of novelty around the development of futuristic technologies, or the utopian ideals of the Constructivists, Functionalists and Futurists in contemporary Europe - each of which have now been fully realised in the metamodern and somewhat dystopian pulp trends of alternative history, such as

retrofuturism and diesel punk. Art Deco has also been adopted into these highly imaginative and subversive twenty-first century subgenres but much like the seductive European imagery of Deco Noir, these liberal, experimental permutations are not absorbed into the collective Art Deco culture of Napier.

While the origins of Art Deco graphic styles generally lay in the wake of the vanguard art movements of Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism and Fauvism, and the architecture swam in expressions derived from modernism, Napier’s graphic styles and artistic depictions in many ways reflect traditional modes of representation and the security of the static Beaux-Arts order that is set in place by the architecture. In both life and graphic design the buildings adhere to symmetry, classical detail, and small-scale motifs. The buildings act and appear only as buildings, rather than as sculptural novelties evoking ocean liners, aeroplanes or diesel engines, each of which were major themes in American Art Deco and moderne styles. Again, Venturi would confirm here that these are not ducks, least of all futuristic ones. This may be attributable to the depression era of the build; if this is the case, we might conclude that, to varying extents, the designs represent the security of the familiar rather than the escapist, futurist fantasies conjured during the economic downturn, as is produced in more recent promotional materials. Perhaps more poignantly, it reflects the serious reality of mourning that large swathes of the community were enduring in the aftermath of the city’s devastation. It was not a light-hearted historical moment.

The buildings do echo an industrialised world through their flattened reliefs and shallow spaces, alongside their repetitive geometric detailing and reduced ornamentation, which may be taken to connote the mechanics of mass-production. Yet despite claims to the depiction of ‘speedlines,’ particularly in domestic Deco (figs. 60-62), they do not imply movement and action so much as suggest economical but passable ornament. Here I am pinpointing proposed public expressions of optimism and spirit within a community that was regrouping in the wake of a debilitating disaster. I do not believe that such vague representations of the industrialised world denote any fundamental changes in philosophy or any genuine trust in the new conditions of modernity beyond their faddish appeal. Here, I support Shaw, who wrote that “Disaster had visited unexpectedly upon their town but social ideals remained unchanged…Napier would resurrect their town, not revolutionise its appearance.”

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61 Shaw, Art Deco Napier, 15.
Indeed after the earthquake it makes sense that the new streetscapes would imply nothing but the safety and security of stationary, immobile architecture – cautious new forms that threaten no repetition of recent events while exhibiting unambiguous hints of familiar designs throughout. In this vein, Benton and Benton note: “Part of the fascination of the style lies precisely in its confrontation of new values with old and in the hint of fragility that often lurks behind its glitter.”62 The fragility of Napier is still an elephant in the room with frequent earthquakes and the constant threat of another disaster still looming large. In this way, and as earlier mentioned, I perceive Napier’s use of Art Deco and its related styles to fulfil the task of concealment; it was to minimise anxiety as much as it was to express modernity.

The general absence of futuristic speed and explicit forms associated with technological innovation can be attributed to the later development of streamlined styles in New Zealand. This claim is corroborated by the vague emergence of streamline forms later in the Art Deco houses of the Marewa suburb and other hotels and homes built in the 1940s around New Zealand. Arguably, though, the revival styles that were employed after the earthquake – and I class Art Deco as revivalist in many ways – were not suggestive of any inclination whatsoever to formulate a modernist utopia within which the basic conditions for daily life were intended to be fundamentally rethought. Rather, they suggest a refined and modernistic approach to established traditions, looking ahead with the certainty of a past in its place.

Upon dwelling on the facades it quickly becomes clear that the symbols lining the street fronts do not echo the specifics of local culture. With the exceptions of the aforementioned Tobacco Company and the AMP Buildings, both designed by architect Louis Hay, we are not met with flora, fauna, industry, culture or phenomena particular to New Zealand, let alone to Hawke’s Bay or Napier. References to Napier’s wool, fruit, port, rail, and wine industries are not prevalent and clifffy landscapes, bluffs, and hills are completely absent, though we do see vivid waves represented on the Hildebrandt Building. Given the geography of the town and its recreational associations with water one might expect bas-relief depictions of bathing bodies, Tangaroa, Neptune or Poseidon, boats, ships or fish, or even more fantastic and conspicuous sun imagery. Nevertheless, sunbeams are subtle, Māori Atua and fish are absent, and bathing bodies and boats are restricted to recent additions in murals and

tiling. In fact, the human figure is almost entirely absent from the 1930s architectural decoration altogether. Three exceptions include the ‘new woman’ motif on the interior walls of the Municipal Theatre (fig. 63), the Greek classical motif of a liberated woman on horseback on a Hastings Street facade (fig. 64), and the four allegorical, classical bodies that loom in a Palladian fashion above the splayed corner cornice above the AMP Building (fig. 65). These exceptions are hardly remarkable or representative of a pressing ideology during the rebuild.

This absence of the human form reveals a disconnection from the early, highly decorative styles of Europe’s 1920s Art Deco and a preference for the austere earthquake safe American styles of the mid thirties. It also shows a preference among the architects for the moderne linear aesthetic in contrast to, for instance, the whiplash curls of Art Nouveau. This linearity is said to connote “production-line living,” to quote A. L. Kennedy’s talk on the twentieth century relationship between man and machine. Any relationship between person and machine in Napier, however, does not integrate the key agricultural industries of the area. Nor does it include the idea of heroic toil during the rebuild. There are no themes of human labour represented and the scant allegories evidenced are female. Napier’s Art Deco phenomenon is a celebration of technology that does not embrace struggle or the human labouring aspects of it. Certainly, the connection of a style to an act of labour seems a peculiar thing but it is not uncommon within the genre, particularly when one looks to the nationalist regimes of the twentieth century, in which blood and soil ideology and the inherited connections between people and their land were used as legitimizing devices for specific cultural and ethnic preferences (the Nazi regime in particular produced lucid examples). Of course, Napier was not in the throes of a dictatorship but then, neither was Chicago or Philadelphia. The pride displayed in these American allegories of industry is not comparable to any presentations of Napier’s period architecture or, perhaps more significantly, in its present day augmentations.

The preference for the humanless machine aesthetic dissociates the overall look of Napier from the early settler history and the established colonial atmosphere that generally exalted the Gothic or the Classical, whether in stone or in wood. Paradoxically, over time it was this decision to modernise the aesthetic that has come

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to endow the streets with a strong vintage character. But as the twenty-first century world moves on from classicism and colonialism even more comprehensively, we can see that the difference between pre- and post-earthquake Napier was relative and not radical. The new buildings did not assert old English colonialism but neither did they wholly depart from its familiar classical rhythms into the stark grammarless forms of Modernism. The town witnessed instead the arrival of a pronounced marketing strategy in the name of financial recuperation and the development of tourist industries. The updated recreational facilities of the city were highly advertised and used to bring tourists to the region, while the notion of ‘building back better’ – an adage currently circulating in the present day reconstruction of Christchurch – was fundamental to the new city from the outset.64 “The town itself will be an attraction. The many and handsome buildings will please the eye” reads a pamphlet from around 1933; “Bright shops with their handsome fronts are tempting to those who are out to spend.”65 Thus it might be said that where the formal representation of British rule and its architecture was waning, American ideas about consumerism were intensifying. Furthermore, where disaster psychology was strong, the representation of personal histories and local life was nearly absent.

While acknowledging how remote New Zealand is in relation to Art Deco’s epicentre(s) and its artistic precedents – France, arguably England and America – McGregor contends that the arrival of the Art Deco style to Napier neatly coincided with the requirement for earthquake-safe buildings that featured, for instance, flat relief and poured concrete construction and with the need for an architectural vocabulary that would express the “spirit of the new Napier.”66 He explicitly states that Napier’s post-earthquake architecture embodies identity, technological and even epochal change, and this is quite literally advertised by the Art Deco Trust as part of the city’s individual energy and ‘character.’ McGregor frames many aspects of the style — form, colour, iconography — as modernist symbols and portrays Napier as having an outstanding collection of buildings in world heritage terms. Further, his writing conveys that the architects’ reconstruction of the city in this style was a natural

65 Napier: The City Beautiful (Napier: W.F. Hill, c.1933), 5.
progression given the fashions overseas at the time. To corroborate this view, he effortlessly connects Napier’s leadlight windows, motifs, and colours to European trends of the era – Art Nouveau, Bauhaus, the Ballets Russes – giving the impression that Art Deco dripped down in small though colourful doses from the Northern Hemisphere, into the New Zealand designer’s reach. This arrival, during a time of great dreariness and depression-filled post-earthquake flatness, is pinpointed as a significant moment in the introduction of modernism to New Zealand.

McGregor’s approach is romantic and strategic. He was promoting and constructing a sense of heritage while trying to garner support for the preservation of the heritage quadrant. This is not to imply he was disingenuous — he clearly was not — but it is to underscore his biases. As a point of contrast, Paul Walker, in the essay “Shaky Ground” (1992), also contends that Napier’s buildings signal an introduction of modernism to New Zealand, but he does so by pointing to a crisis in representation during the city’s reconstructive phase. Walker notes that control of local affairs after the earthquake did not return to a representative body until April 1933 (two years after the disaster), when the Borough Council reassumed its authority. He argues that it is here “in the breakdown of representational structures” that the disastrous quality of the earthquake is to be properly located, not in the number of deaths or the material cost. He argues that while the deaths were tragic, the flu epidemic of 1918 took far more lives, locally and nationally. Yet selectivity becomes evident here, as this epidemic is “hardly remembered in our mythology at all – where are all the flu monuments?”

Walker discusses a lack of representation regarding economics and land titles, before positing that it was in architecture and urbanism that the breakdown of representation was catastrophic, and he calls the facades “a kind of beautifully kept lawn cemetery of ‘symbolic forms.’” He discusses the way that Napier’s architects were in synchronicity with the moderns in their suppression of ornamentation, or at least, in their reduction of the decorative form. He does however stress that the new decoration “eschewed any representational role” and that, with a lack of decorum no less, the style fawns over technological innovation. He points out that the motifs lack

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67 McGregor, Art Deco Motifs.
conceptual connection with the classical style, which was governed by propriety and related to privilege and prestige (this may be a good thing), and that it is a style in which all values are relativized, thus ending for this region “pre-modern architectural semiosis.” It is in this way, Walker concludes, that the shaky beginnings of modern architecture in New Zealand were founded. Walker focuses less on the spirit of Napier and the theatrical origins of the 1930s styles, but in referring to a ‘fawning’ over technology and a discontinuity with the classical tradition he supports McGregor’s view that Napier displayed the beginnings of New Zealand’s relationship with Modernism.

Outside the central business district, the suburb of Marewa, located on the land raised during the earthquake, has a protected heritage area of Art Deco housing. Here we encounter Domestic Deco and the issue of landscape design. Most of the houses are concrete bungalows with flat roofs and a low horizontal emphasis. They are not as decorative as the buildings in the CBD, but they share the same palette and a similar taste for flatness, stepped massing, and singular centrally-positioned motifs that attempt to offer a sense of ornament without really committing to the cost of emblematic relief-work. Many echo the streamline moderne end of the Art Deco spectrum (discussed further in the next chapter) but they are quite humble examples that really present only a gesture towards the sweeping curves and a hesitant salute to the stainless steel handrails of the streamline style. Town planning regulations at the time of the rebuild required fencing to be a maximum of three feet tall to maintain a sense of openness about the suburb, therefore, many of the original boundary walls are simple concrete designs with low Art Deco gates (many of which now have plants in service of privacy).

These houses were built in the 1930s and into the 1940s with the inner city being made the greater priority in the post-earthquake reconstruction. Here we strike that approximate ten-year delay issue. Whereas Europe and America had been streamlining all facets of design (including underpants and coffins) since the early 1930s, in New Zealand it was just beginning to have an effect on architectural design...

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71 This is a reductive account of his thesis and for real insight into his arguments I recommend the highly readable text from which this summary was crudely drawn.
at the end of the decade. There is little streamlining in Napier’s 1931 CBD, which is laden instead with more static, rectilinear patterns. However, from the late 1930s onwards we see a rise in houses with sweeping corners, portal windows, horizontal grooves and lines, and an emphasis on cool, simple, often nautical colours. There is a fine line here between the austerity of modernism and the general austerity of housing during a time of economic hardship – perhaps the former posed a convenient trend to which the latter could attach and their vintage appeal has come full cycle whilst softening the distinction between them.

Here ends our examination of that which is not present in Napier’s Art Deco. We can see that while the pool of imagery associated with the style has in recent years opened right up to include all the fantasy and escapism we can possibly include, the original inspiration was restricted to that which was available in journals or seen by the students of design and architecture who had enough mobility to have witnessed firsthand the American examples. We can observe and even feel the conservatism and economy of the architecture, and we can understand their visual and physical reassurance as solid post-disaster buildings. With this context in mind, any expectations for a highly decorative or experimental exposé of architectural creativity, or an ideological probing of an intellectual vanguard is empathetically dropped. Practicality met with available trends under strenuous circumstances and time pressures led to the appropriation, rather than the innovative creation, of motifs. Ultimately, this is a conservative daytime Deco built firstly to stand safely and reassuringly on shaky ground, secondly for ease of utility, and thirdly for aesthetic attraction.

A New Zealand Style

The rapid construction of Napier – twice over – has meant that the built landscape has provided two distinct snapshots of the city’s architectural evolution. Its buildings, first in stone and then in concrete, have shaped and reshaped local activity through self-conscious and strategic acts of spatial construction. Initially, as a Victorian settlement, Napier’s buildings told a tale of transplanted Europeans. Through ornamented brick facades on orthogonal plots, the introduction of infrastructures and commodities, the frilly band rotundas and extensive promenades, the early streetscapes signalled the arrival of imperial capitalism and western ideas about time, space, and
nature. This was intrinsically tied to attempts to assimilate indigenous ecosystems and cultural identities through steady and ubiquitous suggestions of a colonial government. A colonial presence was translated through architecture that reproduced the order of England — manicured green spaces that display nature as a garden, the central placement of memorial statues, neoclassical and Georgian/regency buildings, and class-bound, Elizabethan divisions of public and private spaces which simultaneously evoke picturesque romanticism and material wealth (fig. 66).

This era of construction was then wiped out and largely replaced by new facades but the rubric for modernity had changed. Against the grain of modernist tenets, beautification was key in the production of Napier’s facades, and ornamentation was not rejected on principle so much as it was rejected on the grounds of safety. This does not make the facades modernist but it gives them the appearance of being modern. You do not easily visualize a horse and cart on these streets and the image of corseted women and lengthy hatpins does not sit well with the wide pavements, soft-hued architecture and seaside leisureliness. While the walls are stucco and rendered in pastel they still appear weighty, secured and tightly packed. They appear this way because they are built in blocks with shared walls that move in synchronicity during an earthquake as opposed to being a series of separate buildings with independent walls that clash and disjointedly smash against one another, ultimately causing excessive destruction and increased fatalities. Regardless of the modernization of the internal structure, the facades do not scream ‘America!’ the way some enthusiasts purport but significantly they do not scream ‘Mother England!’ either.

Historically the city has ambitiously been compared with Nice, Brighton, and Miami – coastal townships noted for warm temperatures, lively ports and their eminence as resort destinations. Architecturally, they are recognisable cities with iconic buildings that are outlined or posed against broad seascapes and open skies. Their marine leisure aesthetic, drawn from the two-dimensional traditions of landscape painting and graphic design, allow the various edifices to contribute to the overall picturesque and historical resonance of the setting. Moreover, these cities have long responded to modern Western perceptions of leisure time and convenience, and through a host of colonialist filters (ecological as well as cultural) the urban landscape
imposes aesthetic and socioeconomic hierarchies upon the found environment. This is true of Napier, where it can be noted that at the cost of even positive change, social histories and environmental narratives are, in places, as much subdued as they are nourished in the built environment.

These international comparisons are not arbitrary. The Hawkes Bay was one of the last places to be officially established within the colony of New Zealand, a colony that was itself settled comparatively late. Historical, territorial consciousness already had a voice by 1874 and notions of a national identity within the empire were already beginning to emerge. The country’s long history in advertising shows that homegrown New Zealand identities (national, regional and personal) were profoundly significant beyond emotional understandings of one’s personal identity when removed from the imperial ‘homeland.’ Indeed, the country’s very existence and success as a colony depended on its productivity its attractiveness for tourists and emigrants. A strategic balance of familiarity and exoticism was the prevailing national image and a promotional device.

Being so isolated from the British homeland geographically, it was no light task to move to New Zealand in the early twentieth century. Perceptions of socioeconomic stability and the possibility of an improved lifestyle in a beautiful setting were absolutely integral to the task of enticing potential tourists to commit to an extreme and expensive journey to the South Seas. So alongside the country’s industrial output advertisers worked with images that gave New Zealand a distinctive character within impressive — but not too wild — natural environs. This meant displaying a country that boasted enormous natural beauty but which was also functional, approachable, and tamed. So with swamps, indigenous forests and lofty mountains rendered non-productive wastelands, it literally paid to focus on natural features that nurtured recreational activities such as rivers for fishing, beaches for swimming, flat areas for pools, games, shopping, and gatherings, waterfronts for

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74 New Zealand became a dominion in 1907, an occasion which was celebrated as “Dominion Day” in September of that year.
strolling, and so on. With this selective representation in mind, the comparison of Napier to other highly sought after destinations – Brighton, Miami, or even Venice (the latter being quite a stretch) was a well-considered move. In fact, Napier has been not only metaphorically related to these places, it has over the years been spatially and architecturally modelled upon them.

The architectural historian Ian Lochhead is another highly significant contributor to critical discussion on the status of Napier’s facades. Lochhead supports McGregor’s earlier suggestion that the arrival of the Art Deco style to Napier coincided with the practical requirement for earthquake-safe buildings. In his essay “New Zealand Architecture in the Thirties: The Impact of Modernism” (1984), the author deals with architects’ awareness of European modernism and its introduction to New Zealand, initially in periodicals and later in application through the construction of landmark public buildings. He notes that diversity in architecture during this time has long been obscured by modernism and that such a singular dominance is no longer defensible. Lochhead discusses the tensions between traditionalism and innovation in New Zealand architecture during the interwar years and demonstrates the gravity of classical styles despite a hovering awareness of modern architectural philosophies. The author suggests both cultural and practical reasons for architects to decline modernism for so long: remoteness from industrialised urban society and the material destruction of war, a lack of relevance in rejecting the ‘burden of the past’ in a young country, such realities as the big windows of ‘sun worship’ (so prevalent in contemporary design) causing furniture to fade and living spaces to overheat during New Zealand summers, the fact that flat roofs tend to leak, and so on. He thus connotes that New Zealand’s delayed response to modernism was considered rather than borne of naivety. When New Zealand finally did begin to adopt modern (and ‘moderne’) styles from around 1935, Lochhead argues that it was indeed stimulated by a desire to develop a “specifically New Zealand identity,” that is, to adapt “the aesthetics of modernism” to the practicalities of building in New Zealand whilst taking a step towards “forging a New Zealand architecture.”

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In this article Lochhead describes a broader shift in notions of national identity at this time, with American ideals frequently becoming more relatable and perhaps more relevant than English standards. He also contends that it was the recognition of New Zealand’s distinct conditions together with the pressing need for practical changes in construction that initiated New Zealand’s eventual relationship with modernism. The article’s brief mention of Napier is in reference to the endorsement of earthquake-savvy materials rather than to Art Deco. This is likely due to the article’s publication before the establishment of the Art Deco Trust in 1985. Despite this fact, the article fits with what I will later describe as ‘second wave Art Deco literature’ that essentially points to a revisionary response to modernism, and it carves a space for further work — the present thesis included — to explore the symbolic status of and notions of identity within New Zealand’s Art Deco architecture.

From a less structural perspective, McGregor also began to address the idea of a New Zealand style in his article “Indigenous Art Deco in New Zealand” by looking into the use, or dearth, of Māori influence on the buildings’ surfaces. He sandwiches New Zealand’s Art Deco between European functionalism and an interwar taste for provincial decoration. The author notes that “Māori ornamentation” was surprisingly underused during the 1930s, but where it was applied to modern (essentially non-Māori, pākehā) architecture it was aesthetically quite successful. McGregor uses Napier to illustrate the paucity of Māori ornament and design in period New Zealand architecture and notes that while only three buildings in Napier feature Māori designs, seven reference Maya culture. The author does not seek explanation of this imbalance although its peculiarity is certainly acknowledged. He also notes the rarity of New Zealand plant life in local ornamentation and explains this by way of indigenous flora not lending itself to architectural form. This is a line of enquiry that could warrant investigation since personal observation of Napier’s facades have shown that, unlike the Miami, Tulsa, Vancouver, or Melbourne’s Art Deco (arbitrary but graphic

examples that clearly reflect the immediate natural and built environment) Napier does not make use of localised symbols at all let alone being so selective in their choices. If this absence is because of the sculptural unsuitability of the local landscape, flora, fauna and sociocultural iconography, it is reasonable then to speculate that there were broader issues of a lack in skilled craftsmanship at the time of the rebuild. I suspect, however, based on the type of literature being imported to New Zealand in the 1930s, that this was not the case. Rather, notions of economy, imported ideas about identity, and modernity were at the heart of aesthetic decision-making. It is unlikely that the young architects had the luxury of time, money, or professional authority to experiment with uniquely home-grown New Zealand designs.

My readings on New Zealand art and culture of this period have also led me to ask if a waning interest in New Zealand’s ‘Māoriland’ image (the country’s colonial representation abroad as a romantic landscape filled with picturesque Māori peoples and their cultural exotica) steered Napier’s modern design away from imperialist nostalgia and its association of tikanga Māori (Māori custom) with an outmoded and unfashionable past.\(^\text{81}\) In *History, Heritage and Colonialism*, Kynan Gentry talks about the selective use of Māori art on coins, stamps, posters and other media as part of broader attempts at 1) providing a sense of history to a young colony, 2) legitimising British colonisation via the portrayal of a shared settler-Māori identity, and 3) competing with the overseas tourist market by offering visitors a uniquely New Zealand experience that would justify their intensive travel to such a remote destination.\(^\text{82}\) With these imperialist functions for Māori art in mind, a nation that is reassessing its identity — or at least a province with something to prove in designing its post-disaster image — might sever its ties with fading Victorian interpretations of a Māoriland nation in favour of something, ostensibly more dynamic and forward-looking. Unfortunately, this suggestion has overt diabolical racial overtones that are true to the era. Indeed, the genericising of Māori culture within European frameworks appears to have stretched far beyond artistic and material culture. Conly highlighted

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the issue of segregation in the camps following the earthquake and the association of Māori with poor health:

Maoris [sic] at both Napier and Hastings were accommodated in camps separate from those established for Pakeha [sic] refugees. The ruling was made by the Health Department on the grounds that “typhoid fever is common among natives and a larger proportion are chronic carriers of disease.”83

This discrimination will be addressed again at a later point and from a more informed perspective. For now, it is sufficient to suggest that the use of Māori designs on, for instance, the ASB Bank in Central Napier is not a simple unifying display of biculturalism (fig. 45). Art Deco around the world habitually dislodged and disabled indigenous iconographies for aesthetic purposes, using emblems of the past to promote a specific vision for the future. It is not unreasonable to suggest the same may be true of Napier’s reductive Māori architectural detailing. It is here that I would also suggest that we get comfortable addressing our uncomfortable past — it is uncomfortable. We need not squirm in acknowledgement of this but rather focus on the mechanics at play so that we may utilise a more progressive set of discourses.

Ultimately, McGregor’s interpretation of indigeneity equated to a pre- or non-European New Zealand. This is true insofar as his search for New Zealand permutations of Art Deco looked toward Māori design while excluding New Zealand pākehā cultures as a possible avenue for indigenous — connoting ‘unique to New Zealand’ — expression. New Zealand pākehā identities are either assumed to be 1) intrinsic to the architecture and therefore exist as a given, 2) an identity that does not stand apart from the borrowed European and American architectural styles in use, or 3) not befitting of the term ‘indigenous’ on account of British heritage. These implications are antiquated. When discussing indigeneity, definitions need to be pluralised, and in considering provincialism one should not merely be considering tikanga Māori but specifically the Ngāti Kuhungunu iwi. Paul Memmott and James Davidson in “Indigenous Culture and Architecture in the South Pacific: 25 Years of SAHANZ Research” talk about this kind of generalising as the “stereotyping of Māori

83 Conly, Shock of ‘31, 136.
architecture into a single genotype.”

It could be argued that this reductive sort of thinking is a major contributor to the severance between actual and theoretical culture, the difference between lived experience and the symbols that encode that experience. In light of this divide, the impact of the Māori Renaissance on evaluations of Napier’s architecture is worthy of question; surely the political, cultural and artistic ascendance of Māoritanga (Māori culture, practices and beliefs, Māori way of life) during the 1980s affected interpretations of Napier’s architectural ornamentation? For instance, how, if at all, did the 1984 Te Māori exhibition alter perspectives and emphases on the Māori designs on the roof of the ASB bank?

It pays to dwell on McGregor’s “Indigenous Art Deco in New Zealand” a little longer despite its brevity. The author points out the apparent confusion between manifestations of Māori and Maya motifs on Napier buildings without differentiating between ancient Maya and neo-Maya design. I would argue that this is a significant distinction within a style that utilised time and commoditised cultures in such an explicit and ongoing way. Given its reappropriation of icons from specific cultures and its juxtapositions of style and chronology, the shapes of Art Deco cannot be considered ideologically passive even if there is no manifesto behind it. It is not coincidental, for instance, that the onset of the Mesoamerican heritage industry corresponded with the use of pre-Columbian designs in modern architecture. Nor is the inclusion or exclusion of Māori designs on Napier’s buildings, structurally or superficially, culturally inert. This is a matter of representation, and representation matters.

It is possible to look at the streets of Napier’s Art Deco quadrant as a living amalgam of heritage and aesthetic reform. Despite its optimistic aura, this is not an unproblematic domain. An example of this can be found via Ian Mill’s *What’s in a Name*, a poignant publication that acts as a dictionary and encyclopaedia of Napier’s street names. It brings home the influence of British Indian history on this colonial settlement and, to my mind, the representation of the predominantly white, English,

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85 Professor Emeritus of Archaeology at Boston University, Norman Hammond, is hugely knowledgeable on Pre-Columbian archaeology and it was in conversation with him that I became aware of the neo-Maya/Maya distinction in art, and the application of genericised Maya motifs in modern architecture.

male authority inherent in the city’s organisation and establishment. It is culturally significant that when a whole new suburb arose from the seabed during the earthquake it was renamed Marewa, meaning ‘gift from the sea’ in te reo, and yet all the street names within it – Nash, Nuffield, Kettle, Massey, Latham, Lowry, Sanders, Seddon, Storkey, McLean, Vogel and so on – continued to singularly represent this dominant type. This is a way of organising the space in which cultures are performed. It creates an ethos that functions like a museum display, where social hierarchies are organised according to the curator’s logic. This activates political agency and it boils down to the representation and accessibility of culture in the public arena. Spatial agency has to do with the way spaces are harnessed and distributed, and for whom they are made available.87

With this definition in mind, then, McGregor restricted his examination of ‘indigeneity’ to the translation of motifs rather than to overall form and spatiality. This means he does not take into consideration the immaterial characteristics of identity that are inherent in the construction of Art Deco and architecture generally. Mulugeta Metaferia, in “Architectural Space as a Constituent of Architectural Character,” isolates the notion of ‘character’ in architecture so as to look at space as an expressive identity.88 In doing so, he successfully argues that “volumetric form is not a neutral background to the finish of a building.”89 This deserves attention because ‘character’ is consistently used in relation to the appeal of historic Napier. It is one thing to look at the buildings’ formal identities in search of meaning, but it is another to consider their immaterial identities as accumulated by memory and habit.90 On this, Umberto Eco has written that “our brain in building and retrieving memories, uses spatial metaphors.” Napier’s Art Deco quadrant, as an urban configuration, a backdrop to daily life, and an ongoing reproduction of an international Art Deco image, expresses much more than a default by-product of an architectural style.91 It is an endless

conjuring of imported forms, and it is laden with nationalistic, propagandistic fantasies with suppressed origins in fear and desperation.

Nationalism and the identification of a ‘New Zealand style’ is a contentious theme that consistently runs through analyses of New Zealand architecture. The complexity of this topic is surveyed in *Looking for the Local* (2000), a book that focuses on a selection of photographs that were put together in the forties and fifties for a publication on modern New Zealand architecture that never eventuated. The book’s failing was the lack of consensus on definitions and permutations of New Zealand Modernism. Amidst many other strong arguments within the book, Clark and Walker point out that, in Michael Rothenstein’s words “…the camera has been the greatest publicist of modern building.” They suggest that the architectural literature being disseminated around the globe in the first half of the twentieth century and thereafter had the quality of being doubly modern. This means that the black and white cropped and tightly framed presentation of monumental buildings, which emphasise stark contrasts and edgy geometry looming over the viewer like a shrine for the initiated, is itself a modern filter on an already dauntingly modern public form. Using the camera in this way, to frame the already framed, would have been pertinent to architects working in New Zealand, and specifically Napier, who were looking at two-dimensional representations of international architecture often without visiting them in person. The circulation of architectural imagery and the transportation of ideas, both overt and tacit (contrived and incidental), within modern photography bring to light the international architectural imagination to which Napier’s architects were connected. To my mind, the knock-on effect of ideas arriving in a printed format would have been an awareness of the commercial capacity of facades and townscapes in graphic reproduction – thus the marketability and virtual life of architecture was born.

As far as nationalism goes, the printed image has long been integral to place-formation. If there is ambiguity around the introduction of modernism to architecture we may find clarity in the sibling discipline of fine art. Artists of the interwar era were explicitly establishing a new, self-consciously ‘New Zealand’ approach to painting. Being less weighed down by tradition than most European countries, they were highly responsive to the modern styles coming out of America. Evidently, artists around the

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country, not just the architects working in Napier, were absorbing the streamline styles of the era. A shining example of this is the soaring chambers of commerce energetically fused with speedy lines, dynamic transportation, and monumental contrived indigenous images that quite deliberately permeated the country’s 1940 Centennial Exhibition posters. This exhibition employed the Art Deco manner to promote New Zealand’s modernity to international audiences. Linda Tyler in “Take the Train: Man and Machine in Posters from the New Zealand Railways Publicity Branch in the 1920s and 30s” and Peter Alsop and Gary Stewart in Promoting Prosperity: The Art of Early New Zealand Advertising have established that Art Deco as a graphic style played a major role in creating a New Zealand image, most notably in the Railways Department publicity posters. The country’s image in reproduction, from the nineteenth century through to about 1940, as carried through postcards, stamps and posters seems to have lingered optimistically between homely and pastoral romantic forms and highly stylised ultramodern streamlined styles, often giving the impression of ‘what could be’ rather than what necessarily is. It was in reflection of this utopic imagery that the travelling exhibition Selling the Dream: the Art of Early New Zealand Tourism opened in 2012.

A tribute to the lasting appeal and historical sway of the early posters of tourism, the exhibition was accompanied by a book, Selling the Dream: the Art of Early New Zealand Tourism, which provides details on the industry and cultural climate from which the celebrated imagery emerged. In observing the selected poster designs and their promotion of a New Zealand dream, I would argue that part of their appeal today is the incredibly kitsch delivery of a manufactured and predominantly fictitious national character that aligns local imagery and its unique identities with generic vintage stereotypes. It is like watching Disney interpret Aotearoa for middle class overseas tourists – it is both momentarily arresting and wildly inaccurate. The posters display a multitude of identities that have been squeezed through a picturesque filter to produce an array of graphically stunning, iconographically beautiful but conceptually disquieting compositions that are at times laughably worthy of a cultural cringe, while being at other times overwrought with uneasy oppressive devices.

Whether the posters of this era are inspiring, comical, or crushing therefore depends on who you are and how you relate to the commodification of New Zealand cultures and landscapes.

In thinking about this kind of exportation of culture and scenery in two-dimensional form, one might again return to the Napier rebuild and its performance as a holiday resort destination. For instance, Michael Windover, in his book *Art Deco: A Mode of Mobility*, considers the representation of Vancouver’s Art Deco across varied media. He pinpoints the notion of a ‘virtual image’ pertaining to the city’s skyscraper skyline as an iconic form on, for instance, postcards of the 1930s. This connects with Walker and Clark’s notion of the ‘doubly modern’ image and the earlier suggestion of, what I called ‘an ‘international architectural imagination’ (whereby Napier’s architects connected with pool of imagery circulating overseas). It is noticeable that, however light-hearted, the present day Napier Art Deco phenomenon creates a lingering mythos around local history. While that myth is distinguishable from the post-earthquake recovery reality, the experiences of the people using the CBD and the take-home image for tourists is one of a Napier well-connected with American and European modernity. The closest thing to an analysis of Napier’s virtual image and its contemporary interpretation of Art Deco is John Paston’s *Postcards of Hawke’s Bay New Zealand*. This book displays an excellent overview of the region’s historical postcards, although it presents more like a photo album or coffee table book than a scholarly evaluation.

When grounds across Hawkes Bay swayed, folded, and were thrust upwards, transforming buildings to dust and seabeds to mud banks within just two and a half minutes, the unprepared residents acted on instinct. It was a truly terrifying and defining moment for this eastern region and it altered the course of innumerable lives from the moment the shaking began. Not only did the earthquake dramatically change the natural landscape and individual perceptions of the living earth, it wiped out the architectonic backcloth that daily lives and identities had been subliminally immersed in and attached to for decades prior. In a moment’s notice, in the midst of great loss and a lot of physical pain, this abrupt event forced inhabitants to physically uncouple

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their sense of self from their physical environment. Residents instantaneously went from living privately to living communally while being swiftly torn from long-held visions of futures well invested in the walls that collapsed around them. In the fiery aftermath, they were faced with the task of rescue and recovery, with the possibility of total place-abandonment forcefully pulling on the heartstrings.

At the time of the post-earthquake rebuild and with an exceptionally small quantity of original buildings left to dictate new appearances, the reconstruction committee had an opportunity renovate the cultural landscape and to carve into it the traditions of the people who built it. There was an uncommon chance to reassess and reposition the conventional processes that had shaped Napier until that point. Like students heading to a career advisor, the city authorities were forced to look at how they wished to sculpt their future. The material remains of Napier had crumbled in an apocalyptic moment, but it was this very misfortune that made systemic and aesthetic changes possible.

Napier’s Art Deco is far removed from the French variety on display at the 1925 exposition, and it in no way mirrors the gilded walls of Tulsa or the dizzying decorative schemes of the Chrysler Building. The buildings are mixed in colour, height, and shape, and while hailed as one of the most coherent examples of Art Deco era buildings in a condensed area they still manifest as a patchwork of personal tastes and ideas. The streets appear neither American nor British, yet they display distinct elements of both. What is, to my mind, most striking is that they display nothing of their pre-earthquake appearances; they pay no respect whatsoever to the walls that crumbled down on February the third, 1931. In terms of visual culture, this is significant.

Further, the orientation of these buildings in time and space is not haphazard. They have emerged through conscious construction twice over, and their intrinsic value is being capitalized on in a process that amplifies their inherited value. A former Napier resident, in McGregor’s highly circulated publication *The Art Deco City*, is quoted as having said, “It is no longer possible to imagine Napier without The Art Deco Trust.”98 There is a lot of truth here, and it is rewarding statement for the dedicated workers of the Trust, who have put so much of themselves into saving and preserving a wonderful part of local heritage. However, as a student of visual culture,

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the idea of a Napier unimaginable without the Trust raises significant alarm bells. This is not because of any negativity towards the highly effective and quite successful work that the Trust and other Art Deco enthusiasts do, but because of the way that a more nuanced history is being indiscriminately absorbed into, and couched by, the broad spectrum Art Deco fantasy. Art Deco in Napier is more of an ethos than a specific style and distinctions made between the Art Deco spirit, character, style, theme, fashion, aesthetic, type, or indeed brand, are lacking. One the one hand, the irrelevance of these ambiguities for everyday conversation can be acknowledged, but on the other hand it is the twenty-first century; if Napier is going to maintain significance, its visual heritage needs to be placed under a floodlight and pried open with a crowbar. The next chapter, accordingly, sets about defining the limitations and constructions of the term ‘Art Deco’ before problematizing its use as a category within cultural heritage.
Chapter 2

Heritage and Happenstance: The Categorical Problem of Art Deco

The facades of Napier’s heritage quadrant soothe the memory of a natural disaster. They present an aesthetic response to a calamitous historical moment. The various frontages share a vocabulary but any sense of uniformity derived from their collective appearance is not bound by conventional theory. The Art Deco Trust makes no false claims about its broad-spectrum use of the term Art Deco:

The term Art Deco, used as a description of Napier as "the Art Deco City", is a generic one, not just because Art Deco is the predominant style in the city, but because it conveys its character, the period and the mood.¹

The significance of local architecture, as has been agreed between The Art Deco Trust, Heritage New Zealand and the Napier City Council, is therefore the variety of buildings in the styles of the 1930s — Stripped Classical, Spanish Mission, Prairie and Art Deco — contained within such a concentrated area.² The built environment has collective value and architectural eminence is derived from the rare circumstance of its major reconstruction within a very short period of time. From there, its heritage has snowballed as the preservation of its appearance as an Art Deco city becomes increasingly convincing. Central to this thesis, then, is the highly visual culture that has developed as the buildings become increasingly conceptualised across visual media and the performativity of the historical facades as Art Deco objects. Before we release the architecture from its built forms, however, we must ascertain the subject we are dealing with.

This chapter provides an overview of Art Deco as a style, idea, and mode of heritage. There is no singular definition for Art Deco. When we begin to explore the enormous iconographical and social content it comprises our recognition of the genre becomes increasingly vague and abstracted. Divided into four sections, this chapter

examines the nature of Art Deco both in Napier and as an international style. Iconographical representation is examined, and British and American cultural influences as they manifest in Napier are considered. It is argued that while Art Deco has a strong historical presence it has never left popular culture; instead, it has mutated through generational change. The varied styles’ derivatively conceived existence has meant that their enduring cultural presence has been consistently tempered by the intellectual rubrics of modernism. This is demonstrated throughout the enormous body of literature on Art Deco which is, in this thesis, grouped into three overarching waves according to underlying shifts in authorial approach. The facades are also considered in terms of their perceived value as heritage and their human significance is addressed. Ultimately this chapter argues that the facades have veiled significance and their social content requires ongoing renewal in order to maintain relevance in the face of changing audiences.

Napier’s Art Deco Phenomenon

The Art Deco phenomenon is the production and performance of the Art Deco idea in its entirety. Where earthquake stories end, Napier’s Art Deco phenomenon begins. I use the phrase ‘phenomenon’ because, by the Art Deco Trust’s own proud admission, Napier’s architecture is a blend of American and European styles though rarely an exacting example of any one style. The epithet of Art Deco to which Napier and its people so often respond therefore pertains to an atmosphere and an era more than it does to a particular style. This ‘atmosphere’ extends from the period facades, through the fantasies of its spectators, to the more serious realms of corporate identity and heritage listings. Local businesses exploit ‘Deco’ in the most unexpected of places: Deco Dental, Deco City Self Storage, Charlies Art Deco Restaurant, Deco Electrical, and so on. The Art Deco Trust sells Art Deco water and Art Deco chocolate. To complement this, 1930s decorative typestyles are applied throughout the streets, and business signage that is sympathetic to the Art Deco character is more than standard. These stretch from the local papers (*The Napier Courier*), through restaurants (*The Emporium Eatery* or *Charlies Steak House*) all the way to Beth Shan Funerals.

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The Napier City Council together with the Art Deco Trust have overseen the installation of decorative gutters, murals, sculptures, historic information boards, palm trees, colour schemes, street lighting and other such street furnishings along the way. The buildings are said to preserve an epoch and with that, a unique character that has huge tourist potential.\(^4\) What is being sought here, then, is the preservation of the buildings as living resources “a flexible rehabilitation approach rather than formal restoration.”\(^5\) This can be distinguished from the stricter category of preservation within which artefacts are isolated and preserved in their original condition. Through the daily activity of, and care for, the buildings Napier’s facades stand amidst an ongoing process of heritage cultivation. This approach fosters the value of non-touristic daily encounters between the residents of Napier and their built environment – encounters that are inevitably less exaggerated in expression as the need for the buildings’ ability to function takes precedence.

On a day that does not belong to a major Art Deco event, therefore, or a day that will not see a cruise ship arriving to vintage clad hostesses, it pays to take a walk around Napier to experience its mundane reality – all towns have a prosaic daily grind and it is not to be regarded negatively. This is what David Seamon has dubbed ‘the place ballet’: a phenomenological notion whereby individual participants come together in the same space unintentionally to create “a larger place with its own tempo of activity and rest, bustle and calm.”\(^6\) What one finds in the everyday routine of a place ballet is the town in a state of self-immersion. It might be likened to a person in their home folding washing unobserved, or the condition of an individual on the busy streets of a crowded city — interacting but not engaging, functioning but preoccupied, personally engrossed and oblivious to the wider street and neighbouring pedestrians. It is the city’s primary state, and it forms the socioeconomic backbone of its existence. More explicitly in the present context, it pinpoints the lived reality and contemporary utility of the period facades.

In Napier the place ballet operates in unison with the passage of tourists, and Art Deco is most theatrically performed within the leisure industry. The architectural

\(^5\) Napier City Council, “Inner City Study.”

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tourist is invited to become part of the heritage they observe by touring in a vintage car, wearing a boater hat or by dining in a Gatsby themed dinner. Whether they decide to walk at their own pace observing the finer details with a pinstriped guide or opt to cruise the city in a Model T Ford, they become part of a wider spectacle, at once active participants and onlookers, both artefacts and products of Napier’s Art Deco phenomenon. The most blatant example of this arrives with the annual Art Deco Festival, which boasts impressive statistics in terms of the local economy and extremely positive feedback from the many visitors who come from around the world to experience it.\(^7\)

Each February this local five-day festival celebrates an era, a style, a fashion and a Zeitgeist. There is a service in honour of the lives lost in the earthquake, and a full military service is held to install the bell of the HMS Veronica (the crew of which came to Napier’s rescue in 1931). For the rest of the occasion, swing dancers grace the streets, the sound shell comes alive with jazz bands, Marine Parade dons traction engines, and vintage cars line the streets as far as the eye can see. On top of this, there are steam engine rides, aerobatic flying displays, rail car rides, and themed picnics, dinners, and dancing extravaganzas from early morning until well into the night. The majority of people present — there were approximately 40,000 of them in 2018 — will give a clear nod to the 1920s and 1930s through their dress. Meanwhile, the streets are closed to traffic and open to soap box derbies, gymnastic displays, food stalls, parades and general festive performances and activities. The Art Deco Festival is a fun affair, but it is by no means a reflection of Napier’s history and nor does it claim to be.

In 1986 the Art Deco Trust presented to the Napier City Council the “Inner City Study,” which explicitly stated that new buildings being erected need not copy the Art Deco and Spanish Mission styles of architecture but that they should “be the inspiration for new design.”\(^8\) In context, this means that the ambition of the Trust is the acknowledgement of, and loyalty to, the 1930s rebuild without being bound to historical simulation. The concept of the Art Deco weekend and the wider city brand is to create a romanticized, exaggerated and festive ‘interwar atmosphere’ against which the buildings might be contextualized and celebrated. In essence, it is a lively though

\(^7\) An estimated 40,000 people attended the festival over five days in 2018; Victoria White, “Art Deco Festival a roaring success” New Zealand Herald, accessed 29 August 2018, https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today.

\(^8\) Napier City Council, “Inner City Study,” 6.
historically inaccurate celebration of the 1930s in which the buildings earn their keep and maintain relevance by providing a vivid backdrop that encourages their preservation. There is little to do with Napier’s actual history represented during this event, and any contextualization that does occur is openly distorted. The Royal New Zealand Air Force memorial displays and the military uniforms dotted around are a display of war nostalgia more than they are manifestations of Art Deco. While the buildings are said to evoke images of American modernity, it is largely British culture that is celebrated during the summer festival. Union Jacks fly and “God Save the Queen” plays before film screenings.

This imperialism itself is not out of place despite its clash with the American styles of architecture in celebration. As much as first and second-generation Pākehā New Zealanders were beginning to speak of New Zealand in its own right, newspaper articles of the era suggest the umbilical was still strongly corded to the motherland. Governor General Lord Bledisloe had spoken of the “fine British qualities which were conspicuous at the time of the disaster,” and the whole disaster was interpreted as a blow to the Empire. Reports to do with Britain were composed in ancestral, paternal language and most towns in New Zealand at the time had a strong sense of transplanted British culture. So much so, in fact, Felicity Barnes compellingly argued that it was actually “unpleasant to be labeled ‘colonial’ when you felt you were part of the same extended family and might even be a better version of it.”

Prior to the 1931 earthquake the city of Napier conformed to English aesthetic ideals of the picturesque and it has continued celebrate ties to empire. When Napier became a designated borough in 1874 under Commissioner Alfred Domett, the CBD readily took on the appearance of an English seaside village, with Norfolk pines planted along the city’s seaside edge and a paved promenade placing foot traffic and leisure activities against the ocean backdrop. Photographs of the pre-earthquake Victorian and Edwardian buildings cast in heavy stone and laced with ornament carry

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9 “Napier En Fete,” New Zealand Herald, January 24, 1933. See also the related Punch cartoon “An Empire’s Lamentation” depicting a pensive Britannia posed on some rocks looking over water to a smoldering Napier. The Governor General presented it to the General Assembly Library at Wellington in 1931. “An Empire’s Lamentation,” New Zealand Herald, June 26, 1931.

resounding imperial order while the street names elevate British conquests in India and male martial prowess.

After the earthquake, the buildings came to collectively convey an identity that sits somewhere between American and British aesthetic ideals, with a peculiar New Zealandness derived from their practical adaptation to local conditions. This is their unique strength. The aesthetic identities of the facades were, in places, uniquely tied to Māori histories but not indebted to them; the impact of Pākehā settlement on Māori lives is neither a fact nor a memory that can be read on the faces of the buildings. The treatment of the natural environs does not echo tikanga Māori, except from an archaeological perspective that celebrates it an an aesthetic rather than a living cultural expression — and even then, its representation is scant. Any Māori representation associated with the facades does not function to create a Māori space or to engage with taha Māori in a meaningful way. Four buildings feature Māori designs: The ASB Bank, The Napier Antique Centre (1932), The Soundshell (1935), and The Briascos’ Building (1930). The use of Māori culture as ornamentation conforms to the modernist notion of primitivism, whereby Indigenous cultures are often simultaneously frozen in the past while being appropriated for aesthetic effect. Here we encounter New Zealand’s complex relation to Britain as the ‘homeland.’ Barnes has suggested that New Zealand was perceived as an extension of London. The histories associated with the metropolis therefore, also belonged to New Zealanders. With this shared ‘British’ heritage, ancestral continuity, New Zealanders could pride themselves on the idea of their country as a ‘new’ land — “unencumbered by the primitive past” they were part of the modern solution. From this perspective, symbols of both Pre-European Māori history and the colonial Māoriland tradition were undesirable in 1930s Napier because they identified New Zealand as a British periphery rather than as part of progressive modernity. Looking at Napier’s facades the desire to preserve Te Ao Māori (the Māori World) is not as striking as the desire to dabble in, what might now be recognized as the kitsch notion of ‘Māoriana.’

It should be noted that that Art Deco indeed has strong foundations in historicism and pastiche, which have generally served to allegorize the past, future, and our passage between the two tenses via industry and fantasy. Deco fantasy often

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11 Barnes, 78.
12 Barnes, 92.
equates to exoticism, which can at times become uncomfortable though it is precisely this vivid display of composite signs, and their ambiguity of content, that has enabled the style to regenerate and prosper across different decades. So much so, in fact, there is cause to argue that Art Deco never completely disappeared. Art Deco’s short interwar lifespan is unconvincing because its sprawling existence outside of manifestos meant the genre was, from the outset, in a state of perpetual change. Where there have been compulsory lulls in the production of Art Deco – as with most forms of art at different points during the wars – the style did not vanish but mutate. The Art Deco influence has thus remained evident in an array formats ever since the whiplash curls of Art Nouveau were reined in by the early geometries of the machine aesthetic.

An Enduring Idea

From its genesis at the *Exposition Internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* through its interwar zenith and recession with World War II, Art Deco is uncontestably said to have thrived. Then, as ideas about the future changed so did the vocabularies of the style, or, to paraphrase, so did the broad array of surface geometries and iconographies associated with changing modern surfaces. When the United States detonated the first atomic bomb in July 1945 the Atomic Age started, and atomic energy came to characterize modernity and progress. In the visual sphere this was reflected in Disney productions (*Our Friend the Atom*, 1957), film (*Godzilla*, 1954; *Them!* 1954; *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, 1953), television (*The Jetsons*, 1962; *Walt Disney’s Disneyland*, 1954-58), comics (*Dagwood Splits the Atom*, 1949; *Hydrogen Bomb Funnies*), domestic furnishings (the designs of Charles and Ray Eames, and Kuba Komet home entertainment systems), beauty pageants (*Miss Atomic Bomb*, 1957), and even the ever-present Peace Symbol, which was designed by Gerald Holtom for the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958. Within this sphere, particularly on the pro-nuclear side, Art Deco’s angularity, asymmetry, streamlining, graphic clarity, and juxtaposing of geometric shapes was readily harnessed to describe generic conceptions of science, nuclear energy and dynamic futurism. This can be directly correlated with Art Deco’s portrayals of electricity and mechanization, the science of the earlier decades. Rather than resting on the urban scale, atomic imagery extended into space, bouncing between molecular, terrestrial,
and vast intergalactic expanses. Such extremes in scale are a denotation of the times, with particular reference to the space race of the Cold War, and may be taken as a full departure from any residual interest in ancient classicism that Art Deco might previously have been bound by. Exceptionally reminiscent of the earlier Art Deco themes (especially its Streamline Moderne period), however, is the location of human desire within an increasingly mechanised future and the trajectory of material progress. Atomic designs occupied a commercial space. Daily life was aestheticized through direct references to contemporary science and graphic art exhibited the ideological echoes of an unacknowledged ‘Atomic Deco.’

1960s permutations of the 1930s genre are also evident with Art Deco persuasively reappearing in fashion. This is highly visible, for instance, in Whitmore-Thomas Associates’ designs for London’s decadent department store, Biba. Inge Oosterhoff wrote: “The general design of the store was inspired by old Hollywood glamour and Art Deco style. The store was kept very dark and there were mirrors and peacock feathers everywhere.” From the store’s advertising fonts to light fixtures, an Art Deco revival (or evolution) was clear. Also in plain site at this time was the wider interest in 1930s fashion and the borrowing of Art Deco and Nouveau motifs injected with psychedelic colours. This revival is evident, for instance, in the film Bonnie and Clyde (1967) or across numerous band posters from the 1960s. In the same decade, we can also observe starburst wall and mantle clocks from Europa Jewels or Westclox designs and functional furniture that demonstrates the intersection between Deco and psychedelia as visible in Verner Panton’s chair designs. Deco-esque album cover art such as The Beatles’ Yellow Submarine (1969) or The New Vaudeville Band’s Winchester Cathedral (1966) emerged at the same time as painter Roy Lichtenstein was referencing patterns and motifs from Art Deco art and architecture and Frank Stella was producing post-painterly abstractions. Further, we can look to the lowbrow


comic art of the era to see the Deco influence on representations of cityscapes (Captain America or Shadow present clear examples).

During the seventies a corresponding interest arose in original Art Deco objects for their antique value. Bevis Hillier’s book Art Deco of the 20s and 30 (1968; the cover of which is palpably a seventies rendition of the style) spawned an interest in the acquisition of Art Deco artifacts as distinctive, collectable manifestations of their age.\(^\text{15}\) Christie’s auction house began to trade under the epithet, and Andy Warhol, Yves Saint Laurent, and Steven A. Greenberg became notable collectors. The musical The Boyfriend starring Twiggy and set in the 1920s hit the screen in 1971, and the general trends of capelet sleeves, deep v-neck collars, beaded evening bags and Sears spectator shoes showed a distinctly 1930s flavour.\(^\text{16}\) Despite this ongoing interest in the styles of the 1920s and 1930s, the late seventies became a period when many Art Deco buildings began to succumb to the threat of the wrecking ball. Therefore this is also the period of the defensive rise of Art Deco preservation societies. The consolidated efforts of named architectural conservation groups led to the restoration of historic buildings and the increased emergence of freshly painted buildings in striking colours. This marks a shift in our historical interests, as the prolific Art Deco revival became a return to, and reclamation of, Art Deco in its original forms.

During the eighties and nineties heritage conservation gained momentum, and related tourism begin to flourish. In Napier, the first souvenirs were a simple t-shirt and a key ring, but this soon expanded to include postcards, posters, books, crockery, stationary, fashion accessories, badges, toys, chocolate, Art Deco water, and, most recently, beer. In the 1980s Napier’s approach to time and space began to launch itself into the enigmatic sphere of performativity with Peter Wells’ film Newest City on the Globe (1985) and the City Council’s adoption of Art Deco as the city’s identity. It became a matter of restoration and revival on the original site of the buildings and, as the 1980s and 1990s unfolded, we were no longer dealing with Art Deco ‘inspired’ objects but reclamations of the real thing.

In the present era, Baz Luhrmann’s film The Great Gatsby (2012) tapped directly into the Art Deco mise en scène while the Autumn/Winter design collections of Marc Bohan for Christian Dior, Perry Ellis and Yves Saint Laurent (who reinvented

\(^{15}\) Bevis Hillier, Art Deco of the 20s and 30s (Michigan: Studio Vista, 1968).
\(^{16}\) Fiona Gallagher, Christie’s Art Deco (London: Pavilion, 2002).
Sonia Delaunay’s 1920s textile designs) prompted yet another circulation of the period fashions. Art Deco is strongly evoked in the paintings of the contemporary New Zealand artist Zena Elliot, who has presented the geometric forms of Art Deco woven into Māori forms and abstract design in exploration of “individual identity within an international community.” It is also often found in contemporary science fiction film sets, where 1930s Maya revival and references to Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) frequently inform the look of spaceships and alien civilisations — *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens* (2015) is a recent example. Popular if fragmentary conceptions of an ‘Art Deco period’ have become a rich source for restoration hobbyists, recreational dancers, party planners, and vintage enthusiasts alike. The style’s lack of prescriptive theory and articulated ambition has allowed for this diversity of interest to proliferate because there are no strict tenets for evolving permutations to betray.

As demonstrated here, throughout the years Art Deco has continued to find an active presence in popular culture. Significantly, ‘original Art Deco’ means almost nothing. If the style’s departure from France is pinpointed as the style’s departure from authenticity, then some of the style’s greatest examples are undermined. Considered globally, most Art Deco is not French. Alternatively, if the style is periodised and constrained to a life between the wars then established ‘facts’ are being overlooked. It began before 1914 and existed well after 1945. The success of its contemporary vintage appeal has led the validity of the style’s ongoing influences to be curbed in favour of its pastness. This brings to mind Benjaminian ideas about aura and our conferral of meaning upon objects. New objects have no history, hence no significance, but give it eighty years — *et voila!* This claim is both reductive and flippant, but once the static confines of Art Deco’s interwar existence are challenged, its clarity of form, graphic linearity and temporal fixations explode into view,

seemingly all over the place and without conclusion. ‘Art Deco’ cannot be used synonymously with ‘vintage.’  

In considering why Art Deco remains so popular it is clear that we must acknowledge that its appearances across all media have primarily been designed to be striking and appealing. Unlike the indirect, intellectually encoded or nonrepresentational references to modernity within other strains of modernism, Art Deco is filled with explicit, accessible references to the excitement of modern life, transportation, and the various revolutions in social customs. What is truly extraordinary, then, is that in all of its permutations and performances over the course of its century-long lifespan (when taken from its early phase in the 1910s) related architectural and art historical literature has treated the subject as purely visual. Art Deco has been worn, travelled in, looked through, drunk from, enacted, used as a backdrop, danced around, carved, painted, welded, carpeted, watched, spoken, sat on, lived in, read, played with, bought, sold, and recovered. Outside of film, however, it has rarely been examined in art history as the profoundly spatiotemporal notion that it is. To corroborate this, we can look at how the subject has been framed by art theorists. The vast literature on Art Deco may be reduced to three overarching phases of critical production. These phases group the literature according to the attitudes and understandings that inform their impressions of Art Deco and serve to demonstrate retrospectively the ways in which the subject has evolved.

Three Phases of Art Deco Literature

The initial and longest phase of conceptualising Art Deco spanned from the time of the 1925 International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts in Paris, through to the late 1960s, when Bevis Hillier coined the term ‘Art Deco.’ This is the original era of production, the peak period for what is known retrospectively as Art Deco. In literature, this phase is dominated by proponents of Modernism, who were largely responding to industrialisation and the politics of World War I. Norman

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19 I often use the past tense within this thesis because much my source material is from 1930s Napier and in examining its production I am considering modernisms of the past.
Bel Geddes (*Horizons*, 1932), Le Corbusier (*The Radiant City*, 1933), Nikolaus Pevsner (*Pioneers of Modern Design*, 1936) and Clement Greenberg (“Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” 1939) wrote their influential texts during the international spread of the moderne styles in the 1930s. These authors were preoccupied with the capacity for art and design to capture and direct the Zeitgeist. Filled with such references as the “new style, the genuine and legitimate style of our century” (Pevsner), “a sincere style” (Bel Geddes) or “the authentic art of our time” (Greenberg), this first phase of literature employs a honest/true/authentic versus insincere/false/artificial binary, which reveals a belief that art and architecture is imbued with moral worth and a fundamental social responsibility, while politicizing (and aggrandizing) the authors’ quest for quite specific kinds of architecture and art. Bel Geddes, Le Corbusier, Pevsner and Greenberg wrote essentialist commentaries in an era when the world was coping with unprecedented regimentation, totalitarian politicisation, mechanisation, depression, fear and anticipation. In processing what Paul Greenhalgh calls ‘secular idealism,’ artists and designers were constructing utopian models that attempted to transform society through works of art.

Modernism heavily influenced this first phase of literature in an era that Arthur Danto has called, “The Age of Manifestos.” The high output of public declarations in the first half of the twentieth century, provided structure and a vocabulary for the political ideas circulating at the time. The strong presence of bounded art ideals and published artistic intentions have for a long time cemented the shape and emphases of Western art history. Art literature, right through until the second half of the twentieth century continued to confirm the hierarchies imparted by the historical vangards. In

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reading Corbusier, Pevsner, and Greenberg, for instance, derivative modern styles are condemned in what Serge Guilbaut called an “art of combat.” Namely, if Modernism was authentic then its decorative cousins were not. If modernism promoted social reform, the other was a fashionable regression. This kind of censure is exactly what the authors of the second phase of literature on Art Deco were reacting against.

The second phase, a revision of the closed brackets of modernism, emerged in the late 1960s and ran its course by the 1990s. Informed by post-modern understandings, it defended, defined, and surveyed Art Deco. Grand attempts were made to outline the style’s uncertain parameters, largely by pinpointing its motifs, themes and eclecticism. Generally, the focus is on locating the sources and symbolic translations of Art Deco iconography. There is an emphasis on the amalgamation of contradictory forms (a square cup or a streamlined coffin), juxtaposed styles (oxymoronic assemblages dubbed ‘modernized classicism’ or ‘decorative modernism’), and the union of unconnected cultural symbols (Egyptian patterning on London’s cinemas or African masks on Parisian interiors). These semiotic contradictions are said to be performing the act of renewal, both in reframing historical symbols and by modernising the appearance of otherwise unchanged objects.

The third phase, from the mid-1990s through to the time of writing, points to a period when definitions of Art Deco become abstracted. From here, it is accepted that Art Deco, however defined, played a valid part in twentieth century visual culture but descriptions open up to allow for fluid, less thematic, interpretations of its nature. Within this third phase, authors are less likely to reduce Art Deco designs to sunbursts and fountain motifs, and more likely to critically engage with the their political presence in visual culture at that time. Perhaps surprisingly, it is not until the third phase of literature emerges that the deeper question of what Art Deco is beyond its formal qualities arises. Hillier was the first to argue that Art Deco was a style that developed in the twenties and reached its most complete expression in the thirties. This is later echoed by Alistair Duncan, the author of extensive reference work on Art

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Deco, who maintains that while it cannot be summed up as an homogenous style, Art Deco describes stylistic tendencies exhibited between the two World Wars.  

Whether or not Art Deco is perceived to have yielded to, morphed into, or remained consistent with modernism is entirely equivocal, highly complex and largely unanswerable because there is no Art Deco manifesto from which to yield confirmation. Patricia Bayer (Art Deco Architecture: Design, Decoration, and Detail from the Twenties and Thirties and Art Deco Interiors: Decoration & Design Classics of the 1920s and 1930s), Victor Arwas (Art Deco), Duncan, and Ingrid Cranfield argue that the ‘modern’ and the ‘Modernist’ developed together, often colliding and causing friction and with a variety of permutations between opulent French Art Deco and the commercial moderne, which Carla Breeze calls a ‘popularized modernism.’ Curtis and Spark support Breeze, who suggests that Art Deco was a middlebrow bridge between consumerism and modernism. Hillier, who argues that Art Deco was in essence “Cubism domesticated for public consumption,” goes so far as to pose that this domestication of the avant-garde movement consigned “Cubism to its proper place, interior decoration.” Kristina Wilson and Martin Eidelburgh, respectively, have argued for plurality in conceptualizing modernism in terms of design. They suggest a variety of veins in modernist design, such as streamlined modern, biomorphic modern, modern historicism, and post-war modern. But in considering the streamline styles as forms of Modernism, they exclude those veins from their definitions of Art Deco, which they limit to the ornamental French manner.

In building upon the proliferation of surveys of the second phase, these third wave conceptualizations attend to the structure of Art Deco. By acknowledging its emphasis on surfaces and stylistic eclecticism, they attempt to address Art Deco’s

broader socio-historical position. In viewing the phenomenon as a visual but emotional response to the Great Depression set amidst the reconstruction of a post-war world, such texts relate the frivolity, novelty and forward-looking imagery to a wider sense of desperation, uncertainty and anticipation. Darton writes that

If Art Deco was bold, bright and innocent, the reality of the age was far more sinister, far less comfortable and secure. Art Deco could be light-hearted on one level and deadly serious on another. As the style in a time of unprecedented change, it was fluid enough to reflect that change.31

Other scholars (Duncan, Breeze, Benton, Benton and Wood, Hillier, Arwas, Battersby, Bayer) acknowledge this duality and the intense socio-political atmosphere in which Art Deco was produced. Arguably, Windover is the first to provide a detailed academic account of how this actually operated and to consider how a surface or an interior translates intellectually. His text considers the agency of Art Deco through its embedded notions of lifestyle.32 He uses specific examples to demonstrate how the surfaces of Art Deco espoused ideas of social mobility and explains Art Deco as the aestheticization of mobility itself.

These broadened third wave cultural investigations of Art Deco reflect the emergence of post-modernism, post-structuralism and increased interdisciplinarity within the visual arts. Simultaneously, they also reflect the new information (and enthusiasm) being shared through the annual publications and conferences of local Art Deco trusts and societies around the world. One might consider Melbourne’s Art Deco and Modernism Society with their quarterly journal *Spirit of Progress* or the Auckland Art Deco Society’s magazine *The Metropolitan Flyer* (both established in the 1990s). Since the 1980s heritage trusts and societies have formed across the globe (in Shanghai, Miami, Mumbai, and London, to name but a few) not only to celebrate the Art Deco phenomenon and instigate period revivals and events — giving past cultures renewed importance in present culture — but also to garner an awareness of the preservation and conservation of heritage buildings.

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In these contemporary explorations of the historical style and its associated histories, I would argue that this third wave of analyses may be aligned with metamodernist perspectives. Metamodernism is a standpoint from which the participant can view Art Deco in terms outside of the traditional and “worn-out categories” of modernism while nonetheless being cognizant of their lasting significance. When loosely applied to Napier’s phenomena, the metamodern perspective allows the many iconographical, contextual, temporal and spatial contradictions to function simultaneously and in a way that Art Deco itself historically always has. Where new meets old, where myth meets reality, where history meets heritage and the modern meets the postmodern, the metamodern bounces attentively but amorphously. Luke Turner, one of its key thinkers, best sums up metamodernism:

Whereas postmodernism was characterised by deconstruction, irony, pastiche, relativism, nihilism, and the rejection of grand narratives (to caricature it somewhat), the discourse surrounding metamodernism engages with the resurgence of sincerity, hope, romanticism, affect, and the potential for grand narratives and universal truths, whilst not forfeiting all that we’ve learnt from postmodernism.

Metamodernism thus connotes an ‘oscillation’ between aspects from both modernism and postmodernism, signalling a knowing return to the romantic formulas of less academic praxis and sources. These sources, often sentimental, idealistic, and naively optimistic — the fairytale, the novel, the ritual, the kitsch — are viewed through a revised and politically engaged lens, allowing tropes to play out through traditional semiotics while imbuing them with contemporary cultural awarenesses (for instance, an awareness of hierarchies and privileging) drawn from the modern and post-modern eras.

Ultimately, metamodernism denotes the validation of that which has been dubbed impractically utopian, if only for the momentary comfort, hope and sincerity inspired by its romantic affectations (the quaint aesthetics of cupcake feminism spring

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to mind). As Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker point out, metamodernism should not be synonymous with some sort of transcendental balance but rather “it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles. Each time the metamodern enthusiasm swings toward fanaticism, gravity pulls it back toward irony; the moment its irony sways toward apathy, gravity pulls it back toward enthusiasm.” In view of this constantly shifting feeling, metamodernism is a transitory synthesis between modernism and postmodernism where multiple contradictions are held in view simultaneously for reconstructive purposes, without ever actively reverting to the old solecisms. In looking at Art Deco from this angle we can distinguish between past and present conditions while speaking about the style holistically. Satisfied that a style can exist in permanent flux, with periods of heightened attention and development sitting beside long unremarkable periods, third wave analyses of Art Deco have credibility because they are informed by observed output rather than institutionalised theory, which in all its accuracies can also be enormously binding.

In all three phases of literature it is frequently claimed that Art Deco was originally a commercial response to the assorted appearances of various strains of 1930s modernism in the fine arts (Cubism, Novecento Italiano, Expressionism, Abstractionism, Symbolism) and architecture (Modernism, Bauhaus, Rationalism, Constructivism). This is true enough. I would argue, though, that the creators of the various Art Decos were independently reacting to the changing conditions of modernity in the 1930s. The institutions associated with the fine arts are not the only valid source of creative response an era can proffer, and self-consciousness in production does not equate to authenticity. All claims of authenticity in representation are highly flawed when examined honestly. In retrospectively deciphering Art Deco, one of the key glitches is the tendency of authors to say “Art Deco sought to…” or “Art Deco was about…” with the same all-encompassing certainty that one might say “Futurism was entangled with fascism” or “Modernists rejected ornament.” This notion of an ideology at work is readily construed but it is a misguided way of speaking about a wide network of ideas.

The key distinction that needs to be made here is that between intentionality and parallelism. Intentionality may be used to refer to one’s purpose in making an art piece and may be harnessed in discussion of an artist’s creation of a specific artefact. For instance, an art historian can often ask why a particular building, painting or vase was created precisely as it was, and to what philosophical or practical end this was so. The conscious ambition on the part of the artist designates intentionality in the object’s creation. Parallelism, on the other hand, refers to correlations that are perceived retrospectively. Hindsight allows us to make links between works that were produced independently of each other during the same period. The simultaneous appearance of a particular motif or a comparable pull towards particular source material or subject matter during a given timeframe can, for instance, reveal visual cultural trends that were not hitherto recognised or articulated. In looking at parallel processes, the art historian might explore unacquainted artists and ideas operating concurrently in disparate locations so that, with the vantage of hindsight, broad convergent impressions of art’s history may be developed over and above smaller scale meanings. One can observe, for example, the role of painting change as documentary photography unfolded or the appearance of hills in landscape painting diversifying as the aerial perspectives observed in flight altered artists’ perceptions. These are not singular ideologies but an assemblage of new insights working in parallel across media.

In his essay, “The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man,” the anthropologist Clifford Geertz made a similar distinction between meaningfully integrating relative theories, and merely drawing correlations between different cultures. In this anthropological context, Geertz uses ‘parallelism’ as synonymous with ‘anology.’ He notes its use in the placement of “supposed facts” side by side for the purpose of inducing vague relations between things. The implication here is that meaningless correlations can almost always be drawn if one’s ambition is to simply identify preferential likenesses across a broad sample of cultural productions. Geertz regards this selective connectivity as an obscure sort of “tailoring” that never produces genuine correlations between cultural and noncultural factors but varyingly persuasive “affinities.” Art historian, George Kubler, made a similar observation when he

38 Clifford Geertz, The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965) 42.
39 Geertz, 43.
distinguished “convergent happenings” from “linked events” in discussions that compare paleolithic cave paintings with decidedly more recent South African Bushman rock paintings. Kubler concluded that despite conventional discourse there is “no demonstrable link between the two groups, however much they look alike.”

In pinpointing intentionality and parallelism in relation to Art Deco, I am making a distinction between that which was knowingly produced in contribution to received philosophies of modern art and those spontaneous artistic productions that developed separately but ubiquitously in response to and within the settings of modernity. For instance, modernism clearly recognised itself as a broad movement. In Nikos Stangos’ words, modernism was “intentional, purposeful, directed and programmed from the start… [it was] launched to make a point…to proclaim concepts.” One can often claim the same about individual Art Deco artefacts, but it cannot be said of the genre as a whole. In formulating one’s own impressions of Art Deco, therefore, it is eternally useful to stop and consider whether one is identifying consciously united moments in visual culture or if one is quilting together comparable but detached creations under one umbrella for the sake of categorical ease. This is not to argue that analogous trends developed around the globe while makers remained oblivious to their foreign counterparts or to the social conditions to which they were responding. Work that is not intellectualised upon production does not equate to naivety. However, it is to suggest that the Art Deco phenomenon cannot be spoken of in the singular, or as a unanimous, premeditated crusade in the name of style, innovation or artistic democracy. ‘Art Deco’ does not describe a body politic or collective intention. It describes networks of inherently pluralistic aesthetic and semiotic ideas that are tenuously, and contentiously, bracketed by the World Wars. While certain styles have since come to represent an ‘accessible modernism,’ cheerful translations of reticent avant-gardism for the everyday user, they are first and foremost responses to the conditions and experiences of modernity in their own creative right. Never mind if they are kitsch, derivative, or even commercial — these are irrelevant value judgements.

To push this further, as is necessary within a subject which has been so imprecise and spontaneous in its creation, the suggestion here is that labelling an

object ‘Art Deco’ neither answers questions about content nor establishes significance. It merely suggests a thirty-year window in which an object was likely to have been created and something of its modern appearance, and even these vague notions have dubious borders. Consider the term ‘renaissance’ as a phrase applied to art, architecture, fashion and knowledge. Under the heading, one might expect paintings to be perspectively arranged or a recognisable set of proportions to inform the composition. Upon viewing a specific example, however, ‘renaissance’ speaks little of a painting’s unique properties, identity, significance or context — the patron, its purpose, the environment for which it was made, the artist, the economy, the emotions to which it is bound, the pressures involved with its production, the skill required and so on. With such ambiguities in mind, the aesthetic trends that are now recognised under ‘Art Deco’ and that have often seemed to comprise a sort of united style in reply to modernity, need to be untied from unidirectional readings of art history. Trends that seem like coordinated responses (the Egyptian craze or the move to Streamline Moderne) or ‘the next step in graphic representation’ simply point to a broad array of populist, market-driven responses to changing climates, across a vast span of time. It emerged and continues to re-emerge with shifting generational interests and emphases.

To complicate matters, the umbrella term ‘Art Deco’ persists because it is useful. It is here, on this note of semantic frustration, that we need to observe the key operations of time and space in Art Deco. It is on the strength of these two abstractions that ‘Art Deco’ can be used to successfully denote strikingly different objects. With all the vagueness of ‘art’ and the vast connotations of ‘deco’ notions of time and space are launched into the geometries of graphic design. These two concepts, space and time, glue together such unlikely specimens as the Grand Rex movie palace in Paris to the New India Assurance building in Mumbai, a Lalique Vase to a Phillips radio, or indeed the Criterion Hotel on Napier’s Emerson Street with Henryk Kuna’s sculpture in Skaryszewski Park, Warsaw. Pick any Art Deco object to compare with another and one will observe vastly different creations that while separated by geography, medium, intention, scale, purpose, designer, patron and even style, fundamentally occupy a temporalized space that is draped with the semiotics of desire. Art Deco everywhere remains imaginatively bound by sharing the final effect of material certainty and temporality within a hierarchical framework of economic and cultural production. What is consistent across the genre is the cultivation and exchange of objects that produce spatiotemporal effects – the production of hereness, nowness and possibility.
by way of (re)possessing the past and reaching for the future in symbolic form. Hence, Napier’s ongoing manufacture of Art Deco phenomena may be viewed as ongoing constructions of local time within an increasingly international space. Reimagined thus, Napier points to our changing relationship with the past and our intentions for the future much more vividly than it points to a static set of interwar styles.

Our relation to Art Deco has always been in flux. Not only because of changing sociocultural and art historical perspectives since the genre’s enigmatic dawn but also because Art Deco itself is borne of contradiction and diversity. In architecture, as will be drawn out from Napier’s example in the chapters to follow, Art Deco points to a site of oscillating struggle and consensus both formally and less tangibly. Like modernism in its broadest definitions, Art Deco is wittingly or otherwise bolstered by ideological crises. Yet unlike its institutionalised cousin, the populist genre finds its strength in duality. The ancient accentuates the modern, the undecorated underscores the ornament, rigid classicism frames radiant exoticism, and internationalism highlights the boundaries of localised regionalism. That which equates to conceptual disharmony for Modernism is manifested in Art Deco as decorative pastiche and temporal synthesis. The idiom is strengthened by site-specificity, indigenous iconography, geometrical juxtapositions, unexpected montage and representational schemes that are unaffected by or impervious to intellectualised doctrines. Therefore, where modernism continued to seek aesthetic reform, socio-political reorganisation, universalism, and authenticity, the objects of Art Deco appear at least to freely revel in the regeneration and renewal of artistic traditions.

Towards World Heritage

A push towards modernisation is evident in Napier’s pre-earthquake buildings as well as the beginning of the street-widening project and plans to expand Napier’s suburb. However, it was not until the city was constructed anew that these upgrades

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42 “Possession of the past” is a turn of phrase taken from David Lowenthal, Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History (London: The Free Press, 1997).
43 Where ideological inconsistencies are found in more formal modes of Modernism, the art-piece is often said to have failed. Art Deco, subversively, presents inconsistencies and repeats them until new patterns emerge.
were imbued with the sentiments of modern optimism and civic strength. In fact, I argue that their initial identity was borne of erasure with their task being to whitewash and overwrite the horrors that took place at the site. After the New Napier Carnival in 1933, which celebrated an efficiency of recovery rather than architectural style, the point at which the altered appearance of central Napier became aesthetically significant occurred when the period streetscapes gained touristic and heritage value. This is when the buildings became emblematic and culturally performative within an increasingly settled disaster recovery narrative.

Eelco Runia has considered how great disasters and climactic moments in history act as catalysts for cultural change and mutation, something that Napier illustrates well. After the earthquake, transformations in Napier’s built environment emerged from significant changes in material and developed understandings of earthquake-savvy construction. The enhanced expressive value of the buildings (their sealed, clean-cut textural qualities) also coincided with the modernization of the town’s infrastructure and planning, most notably with the removal of tramlines and the subterranean placement of telephone, power, storm water and sewer lines. It does not necessarily or naturally follow, though, that post-earthquake reconstruction ‘subject matter’ should change or that if it were to change, it should result in the streetscapes that we see today. This query concerns representation in architecture and frames Napier’s facades as vehicles for social content. The hyperbole and sweeping promises printed in contemporary newspapers attest to the psychosocial role of the ‘New Napier’ construction. During a period of deep economic depression and disaster, the new streetscapes were intended to alleviate economic and social gloom. The modern fantasy associated with the period styles were in this manner an aesthetic coping mechanism. ‘Art Deco,’ including all the styles that this epithet encompasses, was a

44 The Briascos Building, the old post office building, and the historic Farmers Co-op Building (Hastings) stand as evidence of local interest in modern architecture before the disaster.
45 White City Suggestion, Hawkes Bay Herald, 9 June, 1931.
49 Benton and Benton mention in their essay “Avant-garde Sources” that early abstract art had brought about a “pictorial space that lost its inside” and had become all “outside,” in other words that stressed the primacy of surface”; Charlotte Benton, and
mode of representation that was fluid enough to adapt both its appearances and content to accommodate changing circumstances. For example, as the outwardly frivolous post-World War I mood became affected by economic downturn and ominous political regimes, the initial 1920s Art Deco fantasy of characters and places untouched by industrialized society were, in a volte-face, transformed into objects made to look industrialised, standardised and machine-like, if not actually becoming mechanised or mass-produced. Comfort in the past was destabilized by the growing need for the changes promised by the future.

As already noted, representational forms in Napier are vivid in presence but veiled in significance. In looking at the buildings in the heritage quadrant any atmosphere of ‘cheerfulness’ on the part of the buildings reflects, for the most part, the strength of colour schemes and our own culturally established poetic associations. The juxtaposing ideologies of the various styles in use have yielded to the greater discourses of the rebuild. Their origins in distinct and sometimes opposing schools of architectural theory have lost resonance in favour of their newfound collective street appeal and their site specificity. For instance, if the styles now dubbed ‘Art Deco’ were optimistic and playful in their use of a ‘primitive’ past for highlighting modernity, then the Spanish Mission Style had originally been intensely retrospective and sincere in its return to what was perceived to be a ‘simpler time.’ This places lived revival against archaeological display. Stripped classicism, on the other hand, combines classical architectural orders with the clean surfaces of modernism. Historically, this has made a formal and conservative statement (evident in both America and Europe), but in Napier this generates ambiguity around the adoption of stripped style as a self-conscious move away from the authority of colonial tastes. In contrast to such classical conservatism, the Prairie Style was overtly about eliminating European Classical tendencies in favour of developing a uniquely North American mode of architecture (whether or not this was ever actually achieved is contentious). The style’s responsiveness to minimalism, constructivism and the prairie landscape that is native

to the Midwest, however, makes Napier’s renditions profoundly disconnected from their original context.

It is obvious that the ideologies informing these architectural styles were not the motivation behind their New Zealand application, something most clearly evident in the case of the Prairie Style. However, the breadth of their collective cultural impact and popularity suggests that we need to acknowledge our own peculiar selectivity and masking in what appears to be a search for continuity when reading into the character and meaning of Napier’s Art Deco, character, mood, atmosphere, or style as a heritage landscape. In formal terms, this is primarily the terrain of the architectural historian who will be able to expertly discern these architectural choices in relation to a working knowledge of New Zealand’s architectural schools at the time. As an art historian, however, there are a few things I can assert.

Firstly, it is difficult to accept Napier’s buildings as a manifestation of local identities and responses to adversity, as if architectural styles point to moments of social consensus between architect and community. The opportunity to modernize the streets so as to solicit the consumers’ gaze was taken, but the values operating in the production of a new city were not particularly democratic or egalitarian.

Humanitarian architect, Alexandra-Jayeun Lee, has argued that

Some rebuilding agents see the principle of “building back better” as an invitation to “build back faster” under the mantle of “progressive” design and “avant-garde” concepts, but the social reality of post-disaster complexities suggests they can undermine the wicked problems of building back better.

With regard to earthquake stricken Christchurch, New Zealand, Lee has argued that while expert-centred reconstruction is “less time-consuming and more straightforward in decision making and policy implementation…[the] short term advantages gained by such methods are lost in the longer term compared with the community-centred approach.”

50 For a perspective that criticizes this supposed consensus, see Nishat Awan Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011). This text convincingly promotes the radical idea of egalitarian architectural praxis as opposed to the genius architect tradition.


52 Lee, 486.
Christchurch Cathedral) political interest groups can “hijack” the space to establish radical change “at the expense of the disaster victims.”

Jeremy Till convincingly supported this view in his ground-breaking book *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, in which he emphasizes social rather than professional ethics. Till points out that spatial decisions play out to social ends. He argues for the integration and mediation of mutual knowledge between the architect-genius and the public so as to increase and democratize spatial production.

This radically egalitarian approach was not in operation during Napier’s 1931 reconstruction. Records demonstrate that expert-centred architectural design was called upon in preference to any kind of community-centred approach. This top-down approach to power has been justified as an efficient answer to the city’s two major dilemmas: 1) a lack of finance with the disaster striking “just as the worst economic crisis the Dominion has ever known was making itself fully manifest” and 2) a lack of time, as “the best town planning ideals required time but, in Napier, it became essential, if the town was eventually to be restored at all, that every citizen was to get his business going again as soon as possible.” While these constraints were said to have sufficiently speeded things along, it was also suggested that “the interplay of these two unfavourable factors seriously limited the application of town planning principles to the rebuilding of Napier—particularly the financial factor.” I would add with conviction that this expert-centred approach also equated to a white-male approach, with female and Māori input being extremely limited.

Secondly, I have observed that across the visual arts variations in style are frequently matched to historical events, with evolutions of form being retrospectively

53 Lee, 486.
55 The Reconstruction Committee minutes housed in the MTG Hawkes Bay archives room note that people were getting fired up about being kept in the dark with regard to city’s rebuild.
57 “The Replanning of Napier.”
58 Namely because the higher education associated with the architectural expertise required was still largely unavailable to most Māori, women and working class men. Although sexism abounded in the architectural profession – note article on women’s town planning and Auckland research example.
tied to sociocultural developments. Often there are clear-cut cases, as with the effect of histories of violence on themes in art (civil wars and conquests) or developments in philosophy spurring new ways of apprehending and representing reality (existentialism or metaphysics, for instance). In pairing people and periods with styles though, semantics can concretise transitory notions while fetishizing objects.\(^{59}\) In Japanese the word *korembi* refers to the effect of the sun filtering through the leaves of trees, a term that has no equivalent in English. We write poetry about the play of light, but the phenomenon itself has no identity; it is perceived as naught, negative space. There is no etymology to offer dappled light its own history and no anchored place in the hierarchical order of nature to give it significance.\(^{60}\) Such is the power of language to alter our perceptions. The same applies to the pairing of people and their art to wider periods and styles. Trends in art, when named in hindsight, often say more about current interests than what was integral to, or conscious in, the making of the art piece. The naming of schemes and styles is of course useful and trends are observable, but the titles we establish must only be taken as tentative. While we are most comfortable with well-shaped categories in art (an ancestral lineage and a narrative that presents a breadth of stylistic connectivity), the cosmetic links we make between manner and ideology or between lived experiences and concrete forms can be as impeding as they are informative. Saying ‘Art Deco’ can have the same effect, and it is useful at times to altogether forget the term. This is upsetting because it thrusts us into historical chaos, a situation in which narrative uncertainty may be a more accurate, yet much less simple, approach to arguing for one’s heritage.

Ian Lochhead’s assessment of Napier’s architecture for World Heritage Status demonstrates that the linchpin of heritage value tends be continuity and discontinuity in architectural style. Lochhead, among others, points out that the Art Deco epithet has “obscured the stylistic diversity of the buildings contained within Napier’s so-called Art Deco precinct.” In his assessment, he mentions that Napier must contend with “underlying negative perception[s] of the style.”\(^{61}\) This signals the focus of his assessment on the formal attributes of Napier’s Art Deco precinct and his use of

\(^{59}\) Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*.
\(^{60}\) Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*.
international conceptions of modernism as an evaluative measure. From this assessment one can draw some insightful observations about the period streetscapes. For instance, Lochhead notes that while there is a range of styles are present, including Spanish Colonial Revival, Prairie School, Stripped Classical and Moderne, there are no examples of Modernism in the avant-garde sense of the word. He also notes that the differing stylistic vocabularies “do not seem incongruous because the scale, materials and methods used throughout the area are remarkably consistent,” which points to the city’s technical rather than stylistic coherence as well as the fact that “the term Art Deco has been applied retrospectively to the architecture of Napier.”

Lochhead describes the architectural quality of the buildings as being at best “routine, a feature that reflects the necessity to rebuild rapidly and within the rigorous economic constraints resulting from loss of so much capital but also from the depressed economic climate of the period.” He observes the use of ready-made decorative features of Art Deco and suggests a few attempts by local architects to adapt the Art Deco preference for ‘primitive’ and exotic decoration in the local context (the Ross and Glendinning Building and the Former Bank of New Zealand Building). He draws the popular conclusion that the “styles of the British colonial world had been replaced by the up-to-date architectural vocabulary of the contemporary United States of America” before pointing out that these quickly appeared dated with the appearance of such Modernist architects as Paul Pascoe and Ernst Plischke. He moves into the history of the buildings being saved by the Art Deco Trust, detailing the screening of Peter Wells’ *Newest City on the Globe*, the publication of Shaw and Hallett’s *Art Deco Napier: Styles of the Thirties* and the inauguration of the Annual Art Deco Weekend in 1989 – a smooth and uncontested commentary of how the buildings came to be so highly maintained and preserved today.

Lochhead points out that the unbroken sequences of 1930s facades above street level “maintain the architectural character of the precinct” and that sympathetic infill buildings do not compromise their integrity. With that though, he notes that more recent outfits, their signage and modern fittings have diminished the experience of the

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buildings at street level, despite the survival of a significant number of original shop fronts. Since Lochhead wrote this report, the Napier City Council have placed regulations on signage, while adding street sculptures and art works at street level. However, I can corroborate Lochhead’s observation that architectural consistency and character resides for the most part above the verandahs.

In terms of the facades’ suitability for World Heritage status, an argument is firstly built around Napier’s architecture clearly presenting international styles of the era, and then it is broken down into formal qualities that are either consistent with other examples or discontinuous, and therefore unique to New Zealand. This is in keeping with the idea that Art Deco simultaneously promotes regional and international qualities. In asserting these qualities, value is placed on the differences, authenticity, originality, and novelty of Napier’s Art Deco precinct in relation to other comparable centres. For instance, it is frequently cited that in 1985 British historian Sir Neil Cossons described Napier as “a planned townscape in a coherent style” that is comparable with Bath, England.\(^65\) Lochhead argues that this comparison is not helpful, since Bath was developed in large-scale monotone productions over a much longer period, whereas Napier was built rapidly to a mosaic-like effect. He goes on to point out that Napier was built at a time when “fundamental issues of architectural style were being re-examined and a wide range of stylistic options were available to architects.”\(^66\) He then compares Napier instead to the cities of Santa Barbara, Miami Beach, San Francisco, Asmara, New York, Los Angeles, Havana, and Noto, and at the national scale to Australia and the United Kingdom. These comparisons are most insightful and highly valuable to those interested in assessing what it is that we find to be so precious in the Napier example. Two comparisons are particularly relevant to the present study: Santa Barbara and New York City.

Lochhead observes that in post-earthquake Santa Barbara (from 1925) the choice to rebuild in the Spanish Colonial Revival style reflected the early history of the place, whereas Napier’s rebuild did not reflect local cultural or architectural history. He suggests that local expressions in Napier stem mostly from the use of Māori decoration, which, as I have suggested elsewhere, is generic, sparse and representative of little in terms of local life and the content of the buildings. The resulting cultural


discontinuity amounts to mutations in the visibility of the lived past, not necessarily a shift away from the memory of it. It signals the tactical sculpting of a new civic image based on international, yet not British, predecessors. The tandem impact of practicality and American modernism resulted in streetscapes that showed a desire for cosmetic change over the resurrection of pre-earthquake buildings, a change that has made for much speculation about changing notions of national identity within empire, and local identity within nation. But Napier is not representative of New Zealand. While comparisons between British Deco and Napier confirm that the city drew inspiration from America rather than Britain, it is exceedingly hopeful to suggest that a handful of architects designing in a hurry for commercial purposes with great financial constraints planned buildings that embodied private or even public opinions about identity.67

Whether we find the lack of cultural continuity in Napier’s architecture to imbue the buildings with more heritage value or if we find them to be of lesser significance because they are largely imported designs, both options are problematic. Each viewpoint assumes a level of civic agency that was largely immobilized at the time. New structural regulations, the Reconstruction Committee and the Napier Associated Architects ensured that small, organized groups oversaw the rebuild. Moreover, both perspectives refer to ideas that have been established in a rear-view mirror, thus creating a teleological view of New Zealand’s search for an independent architectural identity and Art Deco’s role within that endeavour. All the same, we can confidently conclude that it is this point of departure in Napier’s architectural heritage, and its lack of consistency with the visual narrative until that point, which initiated an incredibly profitable shift in local culture. Not only does Napier stand out from the rest of New Zealand, and perhaps the rest of the world, for its condensed precinct of 1930s architecture, it has also developed from there a whole new culture based upon it. Whimsical re-enactments of 1930s culture merge fact and fiction with a flexibility that benefits from any passing visual or performative trend that even mildly complements it. The cultural discontinuities of Napier’s architecture therefore present an act of concealment rather than an act of representation, be it local or national, and this concealment concerns the self-conscious commodification of the city as a destination both historically and in the present context.

Lochhead’s comparisons with New York City bring up the tender point of grandeur, or lack thereof, in terms of the scale and decorative richness of Napier’s architecture. On the one hand, he suggests that this renders Napier’s streets somewhat architecturally insignificant. On the other, it highlights the stylistic homogeneity of the streetscapes. In terms of the Art Deco phenomenon that is flourishing in Napier, the small-scale simplicity of design is a draw card in that the streets are highly imageable and operative at the human scale. The buildings are readily represented in art, while the human body and the human experience are easily and comfortably framed by the buildings and the surrounding streetscapes (figs. 67-69). This scale facilitates the place ballet of period-oriented tourism while remaining restrained enough to respond to the more prosaic activities of the residents’ daily routines on- and off-season. Indeed, Napier’s central business district off-season is an authentic representation of the lived reality of Art Deco in New Zealand, with the demure nature of the streetscapes being the very thing that authentically entwines the style with civic life. Here, I am pinpointing the buildings’ utility, their architectural identity as it arrives through use. This might be contrasted with the removed experience of architecture in liminal spaces, such as the fantastic theatre palaces, chambers of commerce and hotels that are commonly associated with the Art Deco style.

Lochhead suggests that the human significance of the buildings (a criterion for World Heritage Status) is summed up best by an adage inscribed on a triumphal arch in the city centre: “Courage is the thing, all goes if courage goes” (fig. 70). This phrase was used to inspire folk during the city’s disaster period, and it is unanimously stated among authors on Napier that the city’s reconstruction “is an enduring expression of these fundamental values.” Interestingly, for a town retrospectively said to be attaching itself to notions of modernity by turning away from British classicizing traditions, this inscription is set into a traditional Roman style arch. What is more, this adoption of conservative classicism is prominent in Napier with the Veronica sun bay, the Kirk sundial, four major stripped-classical buildings and at least

69 These are the words of Scottish author and dramatist J.M. Barrie, perhaps best recognised as the author of Peter Pan. This quote was part of his Rectorial Address as delivered at St. Andrew's University in Canada, in May 1922.
two Neoclassical buildings within the protected precinct. ‘Human significance’ as it were, has become the core of Napier’s commemorative Art Deco culture as the buildings, now set unmistakably in a *milieu de memoire*, remind us of their disastrous yet triumphant origins. Nevertheless, memorialization of that event and narrative are not entirely consistent with the city’s architectural embrace of modernistic aesthetics, with stylistic choices still showing a greater preference for the classical tradition. There was still a clear attachment to classicism for ceremonial purposes demonstrating that in the 1930s Napier Art Deco was perceived as a commercial and impersonal aesthetic.  

Examining the communal grave for the 101 victims of the Napier earthquake, we see Art Deco mask collective loss with the sealed aesthetic of the new city. The grave is located at Park Island Cemetery and was designed by architect Louis Hay. It is an Art Deco design that is in keeping with the look of the new city (fig. 71). It comprises a tapering obelisk tower with slim, stepped wings and a juxtaposed diamond-shape inscribed “1931.” The monument is set into a rectangular garden with a low-standing wall behind it. On the wall is a marble inset engraved with victims’ names and the words “Their sun is gone down while it is yet day.” As Hay was in the midst of designing several other buildings in the Art Deco styles, it is unsurprising that this monument would fit with his work— if not for professional consistency then for the civic associations of triumph over tragedy that the region was developing through the style. One might contrast this with the private monuments of Park Island Cemetery – the family-owned headstones that were selected for the commemoration of loved ones both after the earthquake and in the years following rather than the choice of the City Council or an architect. In a sea of plaques with cursive fonts, Edwardian headstones with gothic detailing, traditional angels and crosses, little urns, and a plethora of polished-granite plaques and book-shaped memorials, the peach-coloured geometric obelisk designed by Hay is prominent and strikingly divergent (fig. 72). It represents the people interred as well as a public respect for the community’s losses. It sets this burial apart from others in the cemetery, not only as a mass grave that is distinguished by scale and colour but also symbolically. By aesthetically tying the memorial to the proud architecture of the new city, the disaster is represented as a decisive historical

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71 It might be considered faddish in domestic architecture where its non-commercial use was more clearly representative of individual desires associated changing fashions. While the buildings may have endured, their popularity and frequency of construction has plainly fluctuated.
moment and a significant collective experience; it presents unification in the wake of destruction.

The division of classical and modern styles in Napier’s private and public period memorials may simply reflect the lack of availability of the newer styles for everyday consumers. This may be the case even if Art Deco was beginning to permeate local architectural palettes before the earthquake struck (the Briasio Building and the old Fire Station being clear architectural examples of its earlier beginnings). Alternatively, the tendency towards classicism might reflect the public’s ambivalence towards the integrity and yet unestablished symbolism of the modern, or specifically American, styles for such serious or personal dedications. This scepticism may have been circulating even though the many architects of Art Deco memorials around the world would be quick to challenge such a view. Art Deco’s symbolic strength endures, for instance, in the ANZAC memorial in Sydney, Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, the Quezon Memorial Circle in the Philippines, and the Wright Brothers Memorial in North Carolina presenting just five outstanding examples of serious Art Deco memorials. Numerous snazzy Art Deco churches exist while, what might now be dubbed, ‘Crematoria Deco’ thrives around the world. These memorials are a testament to Art Deco as a commemorative style. It is likely, then, that New Zealand’s earnest hesitations concerning the sincerity of the style are more closely tied to the relative dearth of Art Deco in Britain. This may just be symptomatic of the delay that New Zealand has historically had in the reception of imported trends (owing to its geographical isolation), but it could also serve as evidence of the still-strong conservative British identity of New Zealand’s Pākehā population. For instance, Green wrote about an early suspicion of the value of modernist art and the New Zealand preference for a common sense realism that does not disrupt the expected norm. He wrote:

73 With examples like The Ritz Hotel in Piccadilly, London, and a whole BBC television series dedicated to ‘British Deco’ one cannot claim the style was not fashionable in England. It is more a case of the style being less representative of the British Empire than, for instance, Neoclassicism or the Georgian Revival styles.
If Britain was at one remove from the Continental avant-garde, New Zealand was at a second remove. The main sources of information about art were *The Royal Academy Illustrated* and *The Studio* which had little to do with even the British avant-garde. A radical, critical tradition stemming from the pre-war British avant-garde, is missing from New Zealand derivatives of British art.\(^75\)

Tying into this, Lloyd Jenkins observed that 1930s New Zealand “still relied on Britain for imported ‘fancy’ goods” but went on to point out that where ‘modern’ used to convey an unsettling sense of the foreign, during this same period it began to “establish itself as a viable alternative to traditional solutions.”\(^76\) There can be no doubt that Napier’s architects drew upon American architectural trends, and there is some evidence to suggest that American consumer culture was making an impression at this time. For instance, the New Zealand’s department store Farmers was the first to adopt democratic American sales styles.\(^77\) John Chase wrote that:

> Consumerist architecture exhibits a love of eclecticism similar to that found in post-modernism, but it is an eclecticism founded on the belief that memories of other eras and places can be legitimately represented, rather than ironically deconstructed. Unlike high art architects, consumerist architects are not free to satisfy only their own internal set of artistic concerns, rather they must try to locate a common ground with the sets of architectural images already held by the public at large.\(^78\)

This observation calls to mind the way that Napier’s commercial buildings have been tied into an existing architectural framework within which one can make sense of the unexpected streetscapes by associating them with other established Art Deco centres, particularly Miami. In thinking about the buildings as commodities — marketable edifices that work individually as commercial outlets and offices and collectively as an imageable townscape — we are reminded that from the outset Napier’s period architecture was first and foremost consumerist. While the new-historicism of 1980s post-modernism has played a critical part in the renaissance of these buildings (this is

\(^75\) Green, “Modernism and Modernisation,” 148.
particularly obvious in Peter Wells’ film *Newest City on the Globe*), their identity was always forthrightly commercial. Their imported motifs and modernistic decorations were therefore always candidly eclectic and aesthetically disconnected with the local landscape, but they were never so esoteric and embedded with obscure symbolism that they failed to be commercially viable. We can read into the buildings retrospectively because we can view the historic picture of post-disaster reconstruction holistically. We can place them in relation to broader national events, but it would be an error to spend too much time trying to demystify any profound human significance within the transported American motifs and the obvious pastiche of imported styles in this isolated context.

Napier’s buildings, as post-disaster monuments, were an exercise in forgetting. As suggested earlier, they were an act of concealment. It is often said that the Art Deco style marked a new attitude in the people of 1930s Napier and that optimism and strength abounded despite the private reality of trauma, mourning, loss and hardship that marked so many lives. The M.T.G. Hawkes Bay archives house a number of personal letters sent in the days following the earthquake. In reading them, one gleans a sense of the sort of experiences that were being internalised by individuals. One man wrote to his mother: “[We] shall never forget the sights that met our eyes – they are too horri

value of what they had learned to admire and respect. Women became less fertile…The crises was even more prolonged than the war. Nations were economically cut off from one another, but they shared the common lot of poverty.80

In Napier, the new buildings with their low stature, affordable time efficient materials and shallow reliefs together speak of streets forged in a time of crisis and urgency:

Heaven knows, we were having a hard fight before, but now everything is gone, we all have lost. It’s hard on those who have given their life’s work to build up a business and home then to see it wrecked in a second. There is only one thing now, we are all on the same footing - and that is to start all over again.81

Inevitably, with such a sudden and unstructured dislocation from one’s familiar surroundings arrives questions about what and where is ‘home’; while record books show the guillotine slicing through local history in a measured moment, individual sensory experiences are a lot less finite. The reality of disasters such as this – the deafening roar of falling masonry, nagging dust, the dry smoky air, the biting mosquitos, the sight of the dead being pulled from the rubble, the smell of burnt skin, the problem of sewerage, the taste of canned food, the makeshift bedding, the injuries endured and so on – is a prolonged and life changing experience that cannot neatly be processed in the two-year period of recovery lauded in Napier’s history books.82 The seismic waves that came and went did not necessarily signal a beginning or an end to the survivors in the way that is represented by the reconstruction of the built environment. While there was a distinct difference between life before and after the earthquake, the lived experience was more of a slow transition, an ongoing evolution of character and memory and a pliable relationship between person and place. It is unconvincing to suggest that the choice to rebuild in modern styles reflected a radical adoption of liberal attitudes in the private lives of residents. Building after the earthquake required the re/construction of identities in the post-disaster context, when

81 J. Anderson and Son, “Letter to Mother and Family.”
peoples’ sense of dislocation would have been heightened by the stark absence of the built landscape in which they had forged memories pre-disaster.\(^83\)

With this psychological reality in mind, any of the optimism that was originally projected by the architectural styles (not necessarily with the symbolism of rebuild itself) lay with Auckland’s young architectural graduates, who had been given a big opportunity to design in the new manner.\(^84\) Contemporary documentation has shown that such American architectural publications as \textit{Pencil Points} and \textit{The Architectural Record} combined with an awareness of Santa Barbara’s post-earthquake reconstructions in 1925 were central in the decision, not only to attempt to rebuild the main centre in a cohesive style, but also to build in modernistic American styles. It is reductive, though, to suggest that the new faces of Napier were progressive responses in the face of adversity. Structurally the rebuild made genuine advances in earthquake safety, while it stylistically presented an unusually concentrated mix of period styles. The continued use of a conservative classical tradition for more serious and personally-affecting commemorative purposes, however, begs the question of the extent to which a ‘British spirit’ was still being housed in the new American style buildings.\(^85\)

It is uncomfortable to nationalize an attitude by suggesting that a certain ‘spirit’ belongs to a people. In general, this is too convenient, an incautious and essentialising approach. However, the ‘human significance’ of the buildings may well reside in their accumulated meaning and increasingly manicured symbolic power within a current climate of heritage tourism rather than in any intrinsic representation of local attitudes, lifestyles and identities of the 1930s. If the buildings do in fact represent these themes, then they speak for a privileged minority during a time of great hardship and cultural inequality. This does not mean that their construction or design was underhanded. Rather, it was opportunistic and pragmatic within the limitations of the time. It is hindsight and generational processing that allows us to see in full the nature of their existence. The buildings are a unique architectural response to, and capitalistic projection onto, the landscape of a disaster. This is in contrast to their being perceived

\(^83\) Alexandra-Jayeun Lee, “Casting an Architectural Lens on Disaster Reconstruction” Disaster Prevention and Management 484.


as a reflection or product of the private and lived realities of that disaster. They are a statement that was made by select ‘fathers of design’ — not the communities of families, Ngāti Kahungunu iwi, and especially not women — about coping with and surviving not only a grand catastrophe but also an abrupt moment of historical severance and discontinuity.

While observing a wealth of architectural authenticity on a site that is nationally significant, one should also be forthright in noting that the streetscapes swim in hyperbole and aesthetic artifice. The poetic imagery inspired by a calamitous tale of disaster has been used to make sense of an inequitable past. The urban landscape has been accentuated and illustrated to normalise the story of triumph. This is true of Napier city but it also applies to other tourist destinations or entertainments that make the most of recent events and devastating histories. This is evident in Rotorua’s Buried Village, the film Tangiwai: A Love Story, the offer to dive around the wreck of the Rainbow Warrior, or to participate in the Red Zone Tours conducted in earthquake stricken Christchurch – not to mention such vivid international examples as the London Dungeon, tours of the remains at Herculaneum and Pompeii, Alcatraz or the Museum of the Inquisition in Lima. Napier does not present dark tourism, thought at times it exists on the cusp.86 It is important, though, to note the city’s extensive representational embellishments and the fine line between commemoration and commodity fetishism, both of which embroider sites of heritage tourism for the most hard-hitting historical or emotional effect possible.87

In the 1930s, Napier’s facades were an exciting post-earthquake beginning and a celebrated novelty. As phoenix-like commemorations of the tragedy or as emblems of contemporary sensibilities, however, they were more reflective of the architects’ aesthetic leanings and the council’s public relations plan than they were of the people’s readiness or desire for metaphysical or constitutional change. As post-disaster objects (the utility of buildings in the public arena defines them as objects), they assertively presented a clean, safe, sealed world symbolic of modernity and the utopias of whitewashed modernism, but they were also alien in their lack of concession to the

built landscapes and living spaces that were lost. Their triumphal commemorative value is a recent bestowal daily imparted by “You Are Here” signs illustrated with disaster imagery, and their social significance has been carefully cultivated around their commercial identities. Asking locals in casual conversation about their personal attachment to the 1930s architecture testifies to a mixed view of the buildings’ non-touristic importance beyond their general aesthetic appeal.

Maintaining the human significance of these buildings thus means releasing the architecture from its finite forms. Their original roles as objects of erasure and concealment can most clearly be understood when one contemplates the current need for such elaborate visual bolstering in order for them to be understood as post-disaster Art Deco buildings. The buildings and their associated past do not speak for themselves. Their origins in disaster are not etched upon the facades, and their associations with a wider Art Deco culture are not inherent but applied and exaggerated, particularly in the cases where the Prairie, Neoclassical and Spanish Mission styles stand so proudly. On the one hand, it is simply a fun theme for the city to go wild in applying, and, on the other, it is a serious case of maintaining the buildings’ worth.

The Hawkes Bay successfully uses its history, landscape and industries to draw in the summer crowds so as to stay competitive, visible and desirable. As such one of the most enduring issues associated with the local architecture is how to sustain a sense of relevance in the 1930s styles, as if for each generation or specific audience it is necessary to ask what can be done to present these buildings as precious. Every party concerned with heritage conservation or heritage tourism in relation to the architecture asks this question. In his stimulating paper “Aesthetics, Play and Cultural Memory” Kenneth Tucker observes that:

Social relations are in flux; they must be reembedded constantly in new contexts. Despite continual change, individuals attempt to create a stable identity. Thus the control of time becomes a central problem in the world. As the future is severed from the past, the future must be directed or in Giddens’s phrase “colonized.”

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Thus, the significance of the buildings has been subsumed into the commodity exchange of the marketplace. Continued funding and the competitive sale of heritage tourism constitute success and value. The buildings need to be valued as efficient and productive in terms of income generation, as innovative in their design or, at a minimum, iconic in terms of cultural novelty.

One strategy for presenting these buildings as precious is tying them to the earthquake memory within a discourse of trauma and triumph. Viewed in this manner, the buildings stand as living memorials to a time of crisis when lives were lost and the moment when, according to local narratives, the spirit of Napier was forged. In this sense, they are heavily bound to Napier’s genius loci, its distinctive atmosphere and its courageous forgery in the context of disaster. The buildings are precious because they were built and occupied by the determined citizens who faced adversity with resilience and optimism; they are monuments and trophies.

The architecture also maintains relevance in its provocation of a semi-fantastical past where the streetscape acts as a theatre. Here, Art Deco is a cultural novelty, and the term becomes a loose denotation of an era and its Zeitgeist. In this way the buildings are an architectural exhibition or art installation that encourages the performance of an imagined past. When one engages with the buildings by physically embodying or enacting the associated Zeitgeist, one creates a private experience that enlivens the buildings and, more precisely, our memories of the buildings. This is achieved as tourists personify popular stereotypes by, for instance, travelling in vintage cars wearing boater hats, using period language, posing in doorways, wearing fur and pearls to the opera, or dancing the Charleston in front of the Masonic Hotel. If enjoyed by consumers, these acts promote conservation and a cycle of consumption (costume buying, souvenir purchasing, restaurant dining, accommodation staying and so on).

This performance of architecture is comparable to the way that the Whitestone Trust raises awareness for the preservation of Oamaru’s Victorian precinct by bringing the buildings to life through physically engaging, often light-hearted and fictive, historical experiences. Photographs of our performances, now posted on social media, fortify Napier’s virtual image further, drawing upon and adding to the poetic space that Art Deco occupies. The imagined, romanticized, Hollywood version of the period fantasy is overlayed with what is materially present, intensifying the significance of the buildings by imbuing them, paradoxically, with new memories of the past. Equally, vicarious nostalgia derived from memories passed on to us rather than lived by us.
connects us to our environment on an emotional level. This emotional connection creates tiers of meaning upon the space we inhabit by superimposing our memories onto the knowledge we have of the history and established public memory of the place.

A less abstract method of keeping the buildings relevant to changing audiences is to situate local architecture within the worldwide Art Deco collection within which Napier is presented as a rare collection of buildings erected in a (relatively) cohesive style during the strain of the Depression. The significance of the buildings lies in their collective value and the presentation of a city that, through an aesthetic lens, gives us a glimpse of a bygone era. Viewed this way, we are presented with explorations of ‘New Zealand Modernism’ with the earthquake hastening — as if it were inevitable — the arrival of international styles to the country.90 Local architectural styles are placed within a broader architectural history where the appearances of this Hawke’s Bay city are anchored by big names like Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan. Their work heavily influenced one local architect in particular: Louis Hay, the designer of the cemetery. This attachment to more famous examples not only reminds us of the significance of the individual in deciphering what we value, but also the role that the architectural celebrity and the historical canon can play in what we recognize as noteworthy architecture.

These methods of ‘maintaining relevance’ are not to the detriment of the overt street appeal of Napier’s facades, which will be liked or disliked by individuals regardless of their alignment with prestigious architects. They do, however, demonstrate the way in which received tradition and an international narrative have been used as yardsticks to give prominence to Napier’s streetscapes. This might be compared with the way that Akaroa, on New Zealand’s Banks Peninsula, is widely recognized as a French settlement — even though the French Company that settled there never had official sovereignty or land titles. Instead, they lived in a sustained state of negotiation with the British officials.91 In preserving and promoting limited, though no less valid, evidence of its French origins — the occasional French street name or quaint colonial cottage — and by holding a biennial French Festival, Akaroa

becomes an intersection of romanticism and reality. Local history meets world history, and local artefacts that might otherwise be viewed as obsolete are valued as evidence of New Zealand’s connection with global history. What is striking about sites of heritage such as this – be it Waitangi, Arrowtown, Dannevirke, Parihaka, Oamaru, or indeed Napier – is how painfully vivid New Zealand’s geographic isolation becomes, and the way in which New Zealand’s evolution, from the pre-European era to the present day, has always been a spatial issue.  

Addressed to the 3,000 people that attended the one-year anniversary of the earthquake in 1932, something of a public thanksgiving, Commissioner Barton voiced appreciation on behalf of the Napier community to the rest of the Dominion. He stated:

A year ago we were indeed separate. We were geographically isolated. We were mentally and spiritually dwelling apart…it is impossible…for us to enumerate your acts of kindness and assistance. They sprang from your individual impulses, but they became national in volume.

Further into his speech, Barton gave thanks to the Royal family, in particular to King George VI, whose sympathies and condolences had roused “in the hearts not only the deepest gratitude but feelings of national pride, and pride in our common humanity.”

The country’s connectivity, or lack thereof, to other landmasses has been its defining feature, whether in the journeys of the early Polynesian settlers or in the long silences of tourists arriving by steamship. Isolation has been both a blessing and curse in terms of the country’s cultural integrity and industrial capacities, and spatiotemporal awareness is always in negotiation when it comes to our relationship with the rest of the world. Whether one is lauding Rotorua as having some of the world’s best volcanic tours or listening to Keith Richards describing Invercargill as the rear-end of the world (a polite translation), the outsider’s view of New Zealand has always mattered for economic reasons, if not for pride.

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94. “Napier’s Thanks,” Evening Post, 10.
New Zealand’s extreme geographic isolation has had the effect of fortifying distinct localized identities (like the ski-town image of Queenstown or the sublime associations of Fiordland) while also, in the present era of increased mobility and the global citizen, setting up a transcendence of the national identity and its geopolitical borders. As the world becomes increasingly synchronized through modes of popular media — which at once foster immediacy and connectivity, the fragmentation of knowledge, and at times a complete whitewashing of reality — New Zealanders negotiate their own tensions between private, public, local, national, and international identities. While this occurs, our heritage industry booms as travellers to New Zealand seek that which is different to their place of origin, that which is unique about this place and, essentially, that which makes New Zealand intelligible, digestible, and relatable according to their established worldview. Pockets of history, such as Hōne Heke's Rebellion or Kate Sheppard’s influence on women’s suffrage movements, need to be woven into a narrative that is continuous with how the rest of the world is understood. This is where Napier thrives: it ties New Zealand to a recognizable modernity, a quaint architectural rendition of international Modernism, interwar optimism, and American jazz age glamour.

Ian Lochhead has suggested that Napier’s remoteness from other world centres as well as its comparative isolation within New Zealand has meant that “international tourists and scholars have to make a special effort to visit the city” thus making isolation a major factor of limitation in Napier’s Art Deco profile. All the same, it is also conceivable, that this remoteness makes Napier’s fairly low key Art Deco examples worth seeing. It was in Art Deco architecture that the Americans rather than the French prevailed, and where Parisian Deco was rare and short-lived, the American architectural permutations were more sprawling and prolific. This American prolificacy facilitated the style’s distribution around the globe, as architectural imagery was made accessible and marketable to architects internationally. The original French high style of Art Déco, however, was impermanent in its architectural permutations. It is so far removed from the Hawke’s Bay’s presentation of Art Deco

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that usage of the same title can actually appear rather shocking.\textsuperscript{98} By way of being disconnected enough to exist without more flashy rivals, the facades are thus as liberated as they are limited by their geographical remoteness.

The centrality and mobilization of memory, time and the human experience are fundamental to the heritagization process.\textsuperscript{99} Hence, we must keep in mind at all times that the iconicity of the buildings, as they are advertised and promoted within New Zealand and internationally, points to the highly functioning devices of desire and performance. Significantly, such iconicity points less to the tangible assets – the buildings, monuments and streetscapes – and more towards the relationship between the built forms and the collective imagination.\textsuperscript{100} The dynamic forms of Art Deco contribute to the ambience of social spaces in such a way that the style has provided a display of material certainty in times of crisis. The public arrangements of signs and symbols on the varied surfaces of public life – be they derived from Indigenous cultures, industrial sources or avant-garde artworks – have always been an exercise in temporal reference. The placement of local cultural emblems within neoclassical frameworks, for instance, is an articulation of time in space, local time in imperial space, contemporary culture mounted to an ancient culture. Just as a white cube of the gallery prepares the viewer for the confrontation of artworks by demarcating a liminal space, Art Deco’s temporal allusions have become a primer for viewing and, significantly, accepting semiotic chaos and cultural pastiche. The ‘Art Deco’ epithet mobilises ideas about time (and cultures across time) while suspending principles held in the present-day in favour of opening the otherwise closed brackets of historically acceptable mores.

The art of Deco is thus an art of referentiality. Art Deco is a mechanism by which objects, people and their spaces are associated with the fantasy of time and progress. It operates superficially in that its formal properties reside on veneers but its socio-political sway is much more structural, culturally if not architecturally. As an

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\textsuperscript{100} Michael Windover and R. W. Liscombe, \textit{Art Deco A Mode of Mobility} (Québec City: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2012).
exercise in externalisation Art Deco is a wheel put in motion in the 1920s and its cogs remain well oiled. It rolls on and on along the spines of generational expression, hovering between eternal, classical and novel forms without ever truly committing to a singular kind. It would seize up if it were not so lucrative. Yet capitalising on hope by selling the possibility of futures is the baseline of Art Deco’s success story. Infinite impressions of a fanciful life perpetually inspire the Deco daydream, and our associative capacities are always at work as we muse. What becomes apparent in Napier is the peculiar fact that a style which once brought the future closer now permanently attends to an insatiable longing for the past — an imagined past that is vividly suggested but never wholly prescribed.
Chapter 3

Spatiotemporal Agency in the Production of Napier’s Art Deco as Heritage

Spatiotemporal agency refers to how the experience of space and time has the capacity to affect the social environment.¹ Spatial agency in architecture concerns physical and sociological conceptions of space as built forms mediate the environment for social purposes, while temporal agency relates to manifestations of, and changing relations to, various modes of time.² Hence ‘spatiotemporal agency’ is the dynamic construction of social spaces in and across time, both within and around built forms. By definition, agency is an “action or intervention producing a particular effect” though Anthony Giddens provided a more nuanced definition when he suggested that “agency presumes the capability of acting otherwise.”³ Here, agency is not only an action or intervention that produces a particular effect but an action or intervention that has been selected over and above alternatives. In architectural terms this points to the idea that choices are present in the processes of design and that there exists no singular or certain pathway to resolution.⁴ It also denotes the control, constructions of otherness, and cultural politics inherent in architectural processes.

Art Deco has spatiotemporal agency, yet employing a style to pinpoint social content is, at best, slippery. This chapter outlines the ways that representations of time and space have functioned to set a trajectory for the conceptual and material creation of Napier as “The Art Deco City.” The following pages will identify some of the ways that Napier’s period facades have been operating to social ends, with a particular

emphasis on how an architectural style has initiated culturally constructive processes. For clarity the chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, it will be noted that the fallen city did not present post-earthquake designers with a *tabula rasa* but a site that was embedded with memory and expectation. Discussion is centred on the introduction of new iconography to the city space and, in turn, the sense-making processes set in motion. The second section addresses the cultural agency of Napier’s period facades in view of New Zealand’s colonial history by emphasizing the peripheral position of taha Māori (the Māori perspective). Art Deco is pinpointed as being a Pākehā aesthetic that mobilises non-Māori perceptions of time, space and place. The operation and representation of time in heritage is introduced here, using Ngāi Tahu artist Lonnie Hutchinson’s hīnaki installation as an example of spatiotemporal representation from Te Ao Māori. The third section establishes the facades as sites of tension that anchor and temporalize the natural and social landscapes. Space is conceptualized as something less bound to volume and more tied up with the relatedness of different trajectories. It is noted that Napier’s Art Deco culture has become self-referential and that the style has both framed the urban landscape and influenced its perceived content. The last section deals with the notion of generational processing and the ways in which trauma is (or is not) presented publicly. Napier’s facades, as products of disaster, exemplify the metaphysical expectations we have of visual, in this case built, forms. Art Deco is not merely a historical phenomenon, but a culturally active site in the present moment that is increasingly embedded within a ‘period atmosphere.’

**The Symbolic Role of Napier’s Art Deco**

In the post-disaster rebuild many of Napier’s buildings were designed as conjoined units that would move in synchronicity during the violent rush of any future seismic waves. Outwardly, the new streets were to have “an atmosphere of cleanliness, up-to-dateness and efficiency.”\(^5\) Thus the facades were of maximal importance because the beautification of Napier was taken to be an integral and hugely symbolic part of the rehabilitation process. Beauty was not only equated with modernness but

was intended to connote triumph in the face of adversity.\textsuperscript{6} While comprehensive legal restrictions were being put in place to assure that the ‘bones’ of the buildings would be earthquake safe, the idea of cohesively expressing a \textit{genius locus} was instrumental and foremost to aesthetic decision-making.\textsuperscript{7}

The public faces of Napier’s new buildings were to produce the homogeneity of design, while the interiors remained a private issue. Physically, the buildings were rebuilt on the same plots and street lines where they had previously stood, and sections were only altered in size for the introduction of access ways, corner-splaying and street-widening (a project that had begun before the earthquake struck). The initial aspiration to look like Santa Barbara, rather than to function like it, shows a clear aesthetic starting point from which the New Napier would be designed. The locality of the Napier CBD was therefore not the \textit{tabula rasa} (a modernist’s dream), as is often suggested in local accounts, but a site bounded by its past and its expectations for the future. The buildings are a response to a natural disaster — an inescapable, destructive and traumatic event. The faces of the buildings present an attempt to create a new but not renewed urban aesthetic with the replacement buildings omitting all reference to the architecture that had fallen. The new modern aesthetic was to mobilize a more prosperous, profitable, functional, and secure urban lifestyle.\textsuperscript{8}

The disastrous associations of a fallen city that are bound to or overwritten by Napier’s street fronts initiated processes of place-formation. Strong undercurrents of nostalgia, rooted in romantic mythology, have enabled a distinctive civic character and an increasingly performative social character to grow. To achieve this, Art Deco Napier connects with notions of time and abstract appeals to human desire by staging processes of association. The Art Deco style is deeply rooted in the histories of human culture, yet the buildings in Napier do not reflect a local past so much as they project onto or connect with international histories. It is an \textit{outward} looking phenomenon. It is also a temporalizing phenomenon, since the symbols on the facades were adopted to connect with the international trends and, thereby, with chronologies of modernism. Cultural contrasts in Art Deco are adopted to delineate time in such a way that

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  \item \textsuperscript{6} This is evident both in contemporary newspaper accounts and in the reconstruction committee minutes.
  \item \textsuperscript{7} Christian Norberg-Schulz, \textit{Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture} (New York: Rizzoli, 1996).
  \item \textsuperscript{8} See Michael Windover and R. W. Liscombe, \textit{Art Deco A Mode of Mobility} (Québec City: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2012).
\end{itemize}
'otherness' is visually synonymous with 'pastness.' On Napier’s period facades, this applies to toi Māori, since allusions to New Zealand’s pre-European cultural life and lineage were utilised to create a deeper sense of history than could be called upon by the country’s short colonial history. The adoption of Art Deco and its related styles in Napier therefore, wittingly or otherwise, exercises spatiotemporal agency over pre- and post-colonial New Zealand.⁹

Art Deco is explicit in its adoption of symbols. As such its sociocultural expressions are highly visible if not always directly legible. Looking at Art Deco globally, the simultaneity and temporalisation of human cultures is vivid. As themes from mythological and practical life overlap the viewer performs visual alchemy. Mythology provides the duration of an idea while a practical application in new contexts produces a sense of value. Consider sun worship as a theme. Artistic interpretations of the sun’s significance can be traced back to the Neolithic era through ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Incan, Slavic, Germanic, Roman, and Greek cultures through to the present day. Art Deco capitalises on the iconicity and duration of sun imagery as a way of selling, for instance, modern homes (but equally toasters, jewellery or magazines). Likewise, the leaping and running animals of Art Deco can be found throughout history, from prehistoric cave paintings through medieval hunting tapestries, Renaissance sculptures and drawings, frolicking Rococo pastoral scenes and nineteenth century Romantic landscapes to present day urban graffiti, tattoo art, murals and contemporary drawing, painting, and digital practices. The animals’ connotations of vigour remain throughout while their symbolic implications change with context. The Greyhound coach lines logo, for instance, analogises the dog’s speed with efficient transportation while their hunting ability or companionship has less resonance. Dancing female figures provide another example with their long history in allegory and metaphor from the three graces of antiquity, Edgar Degas’s ballerinas, or in the photography of Lois Greenfield or Gene Schiavone. A bronze and ivory table lamp by Demétre Chiparus would typically depict a white dancer in sparkling Egyptian costume to harness the excitement associated with ‘exotic’ performances. As such, the lamp capitalises on the much admired look of an ancient culture and, in so doing, reveals more about the geography of its production and developments in

⁹ Douglas Rushkoff, “Kairos, Chronos, Time and Space: Designing for Humans in a Digital World” (Symonds Memorial lecture, Yale University, New Haven, CT, January 12, 2015).
archaeology, the film industry, and the Ballets Russes than it does about the living cultures and identities of Egypt. Lightning bolts offer a final example here. Their vertical zigzag emblem once denoted Zeus and the order of the universe, but now they more readily point us to either the danger of electric appliances or, in a step sideways, such pop icons as the Australian band AC/DC. The enormous powers of Zeus — or Tamateuira, Tlaloc, Indro, Ukko, Thor, or any other interpretations of natural electrical phenomena — have been tamed to signify the operation of domestic power or, accordingly, the prospect of an energetic rock and roll performance. These emblems of human culture have been in circulation throughout visual history almost without reprieve. Their use and reuse, sometimes to the point of semiotic negation, makes sweeping spatial connections by grouping, displacing and trivialising serious, communicative, and sometimes-sacred emblems. Napier’s papyrus motifs, for instance, do not propose New Zealand’s history of scroll-making but a history of geospatial isolation in which North East Africa is perceived as peripheral and exotic.

This syncretism of emblems is one of Art Deco’s most peculiar and striking characteristics. Beyond its potentially pleasing aesthetic geometric effects, such decorative schemes analogize discrete traditions while tabularizing the decorated object, in this case Napier’s buildings, on an international clock. In Napier’s context, the small scale but nevertheless present neo-Egyptian and neo-Maya combined with the decorative pan-tribal allusions to Māoritanga mark a major paradigm shift, from the framework of colonial time to world time. By aligning toi Māori with Maya art, the imagined space is stretched beyond colonial settlement and beyond the pre-European period to include a sense of ancientness that does not belong to local Pākehā culture and its comparatively brief domestic history. I am not suggesting that an evocation of the ages was an explicit intention in the reconstruction of Napier. Rather, the decision to suggest one’s own culture is progressive or metropolitan by appropriating the signs of other cultures was a decidedly modernistic device.10 By conjuring eras associated with the history of cultures external to and older than the European occupation of New Zealand, the public spaces of Napier city were aestheticized, and modernity was articulated.

With the style’s symbolic capacity and temporalising role in mind, it is by effort of imagination and popular association that the beholder reads into the forms, patterns and motifs that are now colourfully presented in Napier. In “The Unsung Role of Metonymy” Donald Kunze uses metaphor in architecture to explain the operation of chains of semblance as manifest in “self-contained systems of representation.” He suggests that individual subjects vanish beneath symbolic appearances and that this disappearance of uniqueness is fundamental to the success of symbolic relations. Metaphorical representation, regardless of medium, can thus be aligned with misrepresentation insofar as established signs displace peculiarities belonging to a given subject. In asserting that Napier’s heritage culture is aesthetically bound to the 1930s, then, we encounter the spatiotemporal agency and poetic capacity of an architectural aesthetic.

The metaphorical function of Art Deco is where Napier’s architecture becomes dislodged from the built form. As much as Bevis Hillier tried to categorically pin the style down, it is the spiralling poetic space of Art Deco that cements the genre. The retrospective world of ‘Art Deco’ defies exacting definition, while its ongoing (re)productions in the present have proved its character to be endlessly renewable. This prompts us to recognise that a major part of Art Deco’s perceived international continuity lays with the modernity that is signified rather than the signs or styles used to articulate it. From a perspective less bound to the details of formal representation, the whole eclectic genre is a vivid exercise in symbolic relations. As much as Art Deco is a set of established decorative styles used to signify lifestyles and historical moments, it is the loosely bound realm of Deco-by-association — that which Art Deco iconography mobilises without depicting — that continues to give it body and appeal.

As we enter the sprawling world of symbolic appearances in Napier city, we encounter the figuration and forgery of a Zeitgeist on the site of a vanished city. Readings of Frank Szirmay’s allegorical Gilray Fountain on Marine Parade — popularly known as The Spirit of Napier (1971; figs. 73-74) — are readily construed

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13 The notion of a ‘vanished city’ was taken directly from Peter Wells’ film Newest City on the Globe (1988).
yet extremely discursive. Szirmay has said that he was inspired by the city’s architectural aesthetics as he produced “the naked form of an upward reaching young woman.” She looks like an enlarged domestic Art Deco ornament depicting the ‘modern’ or ‘liberated’ young woman, and yet it is said to represent “Napier rising from the ashes of the 1931 earthquake.” The sculpted object is many steps removed from its intended content. We tie the sculpture’s formal qualities (her placement on a podium, her upward posture, the plain surfaces, cast bronze medium, and the painted concrete fountain that rushes below her) to cultural content (Art Deco, modernity, triumph, architecture, liberty, the rising phoenix) only through a chain of affinities and vague semblances. The space the monument occupies and its assertion of content in the public sphere is derived from that which it connotes to the culturally prepared viewer rather than from that which it objectively presents. Our anticipation of the Art Deco subject thus enables predigested visual cultural content to alter our perceptions of the sculpture, despite the complete absence of corroborative iconography.

When imagining ‘Art Deco’ one tends to imagine the contextual issues and matching historical moments – women’s liberation, prohibition, the world wars, technological change, the Great Depression, mass production, the age of travel, and in Napier’s case the 1931 earthquake and reconstruction. These moments constitute Deco-by-association as their representation across media has been put through the geometrical filters associated with the age in order to connect a loose set of styles with periods in time. More than this, Deco-by-association marks the continued construction of an interwar Zeitgeist by aligning the specific concerns of modernity (individualism, progress, capitalism, urbanisation and so on) with broad developments in visual culture. These abstract correlations are fundamental to the reception of Napier’s Art Deco in that they constitute the intellectual, emotional, poetic, and discursive sense we make of the city’s architectural styles — whether they played a part locally or not.

The strong association of Art Deco with the historical context in which it was first produced draws attention to the imaginative quality that is often required in order for its architectural character to flourish, with deductions of meaning being drawn from the buildings’ continuity with culturally specific frames of reference.15 The

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15 This ties into Heidegger’s concept of being in that the buildings’ source of intelligibility and our capacity to understand them rests upon a background of
presence of aesthetically divergent buildings in the post-disaster rebuild would have made aesthetic sense only when local frames of reference were extended to include American international styles. For instance, the Market Reserve building in Napier was the first building completed after the Napier earthquake, and the first to appear in what is now recognised as the American Renaissance style (fig. 75). The immediate significance of the building, as well as marking a departure from local architectural traditions for the reason of earthquake safety, was its symbolic presence as a revivalist response to the modern experience. Hence, for full architectural impact one was required firstly to be aware of its American colonial influences and secondly to find some significance or appeal in the arrival of that influence to New Zealand. Local architecture was thus set into bigger global patterns in order to derive context, meaning, and worth.

The inversion of this sense-making also exists with meaning in architecture being an inward project: where a facade would make less sense or represent discontinuity internationally. The external kōwhaiwhai designs on each the Ross & Glendinning Building (presently the Napier Antiques Centre) and the former Bank of New Zealand building (now ASB Bank), for example, each present attempts to bring a Māori vocabulary to the international style. New Zealanders can make sense of this with respect to the tangata whenua, yet should the buildings be transposed to the Art Deco City of Tulsa in Oklahoma (an arbitrary example) all iconographical and historical continuity would be lost. The kōwhaiwhai pattern in this case would embody New Zealand as the exotic ‘other.’ This corroborates the idea that private frames of reference have everything to do with how one validates, identifies and finds meaning in an object. It also reveals that in Art Deco, an art of referentiality, human geographies are distilled and displaced as a way of anchoring the style to nationalist histories and international art historical and architectural discourses.

The reduction of cultures to a bound and usually past-tense/static time and place opens an unwelcome door to the discomforts of a style forged in an era that is renowned for its primitivism and exoticism. Art Deco’s continuation of Orientalism in the early French styles, for instance, were a vividly essentialising device.  

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Orientalism often renders ‘the East’ static and undeveloped by using visual stereotypes. One might look at European travel posters of the 1920s and 30s to see vivid depictions of ‘ancient’ Myanmar (Burma), India or Bali juxtaposed with modern cars and steamships or, likewise, any examples of Egyptomania that sought a very select view of Egypt in light of the 1922 excavations of King Tutankhamen’s tomb. This tendency, which conjures an exotic but patronising virtual presence for Middle Eastern, Asian and North African societies, had been present in the amusement halls of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain long before it was adapted for more modern styles.\textsuperscript{18} While there was often a genuine fascination with and admiration for the source material, Art Deco — by creating a virtual presence for the ‘Orient’ in Western art, design and architecture — tied exotic cultures to the remote past in order to frame Western modernity as progressive.

While Orientalism itself is not evident in Napier, the rhetoric of 1920s isolationism to which it was bound is present.\textsuperscript{19} In an era when perceptions of speed were changing, recreational travel was bringing distant places closer, and great archaeological discoveries were breathing new and exciting life into ancient history. By employing motifs from historically remote ages, the styles of Art Deco were harnessed to stamp time as a pliable and commodifiable phenomenon rather than as an abstract, unobservable idea or noumena, to adopt a Kantian term.\textsuperscript{20} Just as historical motifs have been used to accentuate the modern era, they have been employed to assert a Western view of time’s unidirectional passing. This is particularly relevant to the healing of 1930s Napier, a city whose communities were keen to move on from their trauma but also eager to stay rooted in the certainty of established knowledge regarding time, place and periodicity. Conveying at once time’s fleetingness, eternity, constancy and cyclicality, the exotic appeal of Egyptian papyrus, Maya ziggurats, Greek columns and Māori friezes — as depicted within Napier’s Art Deco — can be said to have represented time iconographically whilst simultaneously taming and fetishizing that time within the popular imagination.

\textsuperscript{18} Stephen Escritt and Bevis Hillier, \textit{Art Deco Style} (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 38.
\textsuperscript{19} See Robert B. Kaplan, “The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and The Battle Against Fate” (lecture, Lexington, VA, Washington & Lee University, January 16, 2014).
\textsuperscript{20} Skara Brae was investigated for the first time in 1927, and John Eric Sidney Thompson had been excavating and producing the first publications on Maya ruins in Mexico since the mid 1920s.
Māori Agency in Napier’s Presentation of a ‘New Zealand Style’

Michael Findlay has pointed out that while much thought was given to the issue of a New Zealand style of architecture there was never a ‘ Dominion Style’ (hence, no Dominion Deco) in the way that there was an established Federation Style of architecture in Australia. Curiously, given the increasingly perceptible and deliberate ‘New Zealand character’ of art in other media, Napier’s decorated architecture impresses the landscape with symbols that are not patriotic. The buildings are of their site in terms of their seismic responsiveness, and they meet local needs in their daily utility, but the decorative schemes are not faithful to established colonial or tikanga Māori conventions. Yet, despite their divergence from traditional settler styles, claims to American modernity, and the introduction of modernism to New Zealand, the revivalist styles now framed as Art Deco present evidence of Napier City’s colonial roots. The bottom line here is the Pākehā agency operating in the production of the New Napier.

While Art Deco was never officially adopted to promote or represent settler culture (unlike, for instance, the neo-classical architecture that the British and French traditionally employed in the colonization of their dominions), the repeated decontextualisation of Indigenous motifs and the reductive representation of living and ancient cultures points to cultural adaptation and assimilation. The original contexts, meanings and appearances of the cultural emblems found in Art Deco designs were and are habitually distorted in favour of aesthetic appeal while the integrity, reciprocity and spiritual significance of those emblems is rarely, if ever, a concern to purveyors of the style. In Art Deco Napier depictions of cultural ‘otherness’ are inverse affirmations of a dominant Pākehā culture. In self-contained systems of representation, systems that are unique to each building, unrelated motifs operate side-by-side nonchalantly. This eclectic presentation of cultural emblems in Art Deco styles can appear egalitarian but,

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more often than not, the symbolic differentiation is heavily predisposed to Western perspectives.

Historically, where Māori designs were used in Napier’s rebuild the symbols were generic and connotative of a pan-tribal view of taha Māori that did not depict specific identities or histories.23 It has been said that the earthquake had a levelling effect beyond the flattening of the townscapes, a claim that suggests social integration. However, the rare and indifferent use of patterns on friezes demonstrates pre-disaster inequalities continuing to be played out in the post-disaster context. The dominant and functional forms are Pākehā, while the decorative trimmings are Māori. This exhibits a Pākehā-centre/peripheral-Māori dynamic, a clear example of colonial agency.24 This is not to suggest that decoration is inherently passive. The very representation and prominent placement of Māori patterns conveys esteem and purpose. As the Art Deco authors Escritt and Hillier have pointed out, ornament was patently functional where it was used to signify success and confidence, as with the powerhouses of American modernity (like the Chrysler Building) or New Zealand’s treasuries and investment firms (like Napier’s former Bank of New Zealand).25 However, the displacement of symbols from the context for which they were designed subverts their native meaning. One is led to feel that any esteem conveyed at the time by 1930s ‘Māori Art Deco’ — there is a publication by this title as well as tours that incorporate this idea during the annual festival — communicated a cherished New Zealand past rather than a thriving contemporary culture.26 The decorations are representations from taha Māori but they not representative of it.

Contemporary promotional materials, especially those pertaining to Māoriland, convey a sentimental approach to Pre-European New Zealand, where Māori imagery was presented ‘nostalgically’ within palpable discourses of loss and primitivism. One need only look at the vivid advertising of the era to see that there is little of tikanga operating in 1930s Pākehā translations of Māori art and design.27 Similarly, there is no

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25 Escritt and Hillier.
ancestral memory embedded in the representation of Māori cultural spaces as tourist attractions, especially those falsely concocted for postcards and posters. We can praise Napier’s permutations of Art Deco for being a step in the ‘right’ direction insofar as the buildings utilized and kept visible Māori designs in an era when assimilation was a major project, but we cannot with open eyes propose that they were in place to act as agents for taha Māori. If this were the case, they would work to create a Māori space. In looking at Napier’s period architecture there is little evidence of such attempts being made, arguably none at all.

A Māori space is a space informed by tikanga. It is one that nurtures and normalizes tikanga Māori and allows for its physical, spiritual and practical manifestation. There are bodies of literature emerging in relation to Māori building traditions that are only now being framed as architecture. One might look to authors Deirdre Brown, M.P.T. Linzey, Rangihiroa Panoho, Mark Adams, and Haruhiko Sameshima as an entry point into this line of research. It is not the present task to build on Māori architectural knowledge, except to suggest that despite decorative trimmings Māori agency is conspicuously absent from Napier’s historic buildings. It is more pertinent here to observe that a significant manner of exercising cultural agency in the city space comes from Western ‘spatialisations of time.’

Spatial difference in Napier’s Art Deco manifests visually as temporal difference — this applies to both geography (regarding New Zealand’s distance from the European and American epicentres of Art Deco) and culture (the hegemony of a Pākehā rebuild). Centres and peripheries are stated and reinstated, as iconography is understood relationally: motifs are understood as primitivist, objects are related to as

28 Maria Theresa Amoamo produced significant research on Maoritanga as tourism within a postcolonial framework in her doctoral thesis “Decolonising Māori Tourism” (doctoral thesis, The University of Otago, 2008).
29 Rumour has it that local kaumātua blessed the buildings/or the opening of the BNZ bank but there is no record or supporting information concerning this.
kitsch, America is set against Britain, an Indigenous ‘other’ underscores an unspecified agent, and masculine productions of technological futurity are the solution to a feminised past. Wittingly or not the New Napier ushered in a colonial modernity for the simple reason that Māori cultures were not equally involved in the ‘modern solution.’ It can be called a modern solution because the New Napier sought to resolve pre-earthquake urban planning issues. The aesthetic choices that followed earthquake safe reconstruction were fundamentally associated with progress. Representing futurity meant disconnecting somewhat from the past. For instance, Felicity Barnes has argued that the old identity of New Zealand as Māoriland “prolonged New Zealand’s existence in peripheral time. It continued to identify New Zealand with markers of the periphery…[during a period when] the periphery was to be memorialized, not revivified.” The periphery to which she refers is that of a New Zealand on the outer edge of the Empire, still in contact with an untamed past. The desire to obscure this connection is palpable in Napier, where the imperial space was draped in a borrowed American past to serve a predominantly Pākeha vision of the future — it was a change of lineage and shift in focus, even if only on an unstated visual level.

Social behaviours, however, are heavily influenced by the appearance and disappearance of expected signs. Moving through Napier’s heritage quadrant, we are ushered along walls and through apertures. Changing from one setting to the next, we move between shade and light, shelter and exposure, barriers and pathways. At the same time as we navigate this physical space, we are also sent through cultural territories within which the duration and intensity of sensations, semiotics, perspectives, atmospheres and ordered materials tacitly orient and inform the beholder. Since spatiotemporal representation is central to the function of Art Deco and the heritage experience, it is significant that the city’s period facades iconographically situate the past in a ‘former’ space. Time in Napier’s facades is presented as ‘former’ because their construction is associated with a unidirectional, forward moving narrative. In the most physical sense the flat facades – designed with and for an economy of materials, time and function – express the ambitions of modernity in the West. Efficiency, utility, and speed are the concern of capitalism, which deems ephemerality, unclocked time and incompleteness as non-productive and hence

33 Barnes, 92.
worthless. They are wasteful because they cannot be commodified in the same way that objects with identities and purposes can be sold. In presenting smooth plaster walls with big windows and hanging verandahs (Emerson Street) or corporate offices with authoritative body-framing verticals to usher the clients in (Tennyson Street), the conditions of modernity were reaffirmed by the reconstruction of Napier. Western fears are articulated by all that the new aesthetics were designed to resist — the unpredictable whims of nature, impermanence, spatial diversity, aging and eventual collapse.\textsuperscript{34}

In their essay “Maori Time: Notions of Space, Time and Building Form in the South Pacific” authors Bill McKay and Antonia Wamsley observed how the spatial organisation of time has been harnessed as a colonial tool. They argue that whereas Westerners view time as passing irrevocably (like a stream), the Māori space-time construct is integrated and more comparable to a constellation. Where these differing perspectives have not been sufficiently accommodated in the production of public spaces they urge that “Maori are not just physically separated from their land under Colonialism, the Western concept of time serves as a mechanism to dislocate Maori from their culture as well.\textsuperscript{35} This observation needs to be taken seriously and applied to all assessments of, and adjustments made to, New Zealand’s city spaces.

One expression of Te Ao Māori time was encapsulated by senior Ngāi Tahu artist Lonnie Hutchinson’s giant āhikā (eel trap) installation in urban Christchurch. \textit{I Like Your Form} (2014, fig. 76) was created as an ephemeral contribution to the Festival of Transitional Architecture (F.E.S.T.A.) and served as a visual reminder of the urban landscape’s mana whenua (the power that comes from the land/belonging/the Māori territorial rights associated with possession and occupation of tribal land). Upon viewing Hutchinson’s work, Ngāi Tahu designer Kristy Bedi wrote that: “In Te Ao Māori you’ll often hear it said that we ‘walk backwards into the future’– ka mua, ka muri. Our vision fixed on history, learning from those who have gone before us as we forge new paths.”\textsuperscript{36} Bedi observed that by ‘recolonising’ the


\textsuperscript{36} Kristy Bedi, “Toi Iho Ka Mua, Ka Muri” \textit{Te Karaka}, Accessed 4 September, 2018, https://ngaitahu.iwi.nz/our_stories/toi-ihokamua-kamuri/
urban landscape the fifty metre long woven hīnaki “speaks to those who have gone before us, and to those who will follow…it is a clue to the relationship our tūpuna had with this whenua, with the Ōtākaro/Avon River.”

The installation engaged with the transitional architecture of the Arcades, then under construction in the wake of the 2011 earthquake, by temporarily changing the meaning of the space. The ‘empty’ site was reclaimed by taha Māori and invocations of mana whenua held the space. Ultimately, the artist aspired to remind viewers of the cultural traditions and significance associated with the site by offering forms of a scale and context that invites the viewer to “imagine the space, the whenua, and the future.”

The call to be ‘reminded’ of Te Ao Māori and the need to ‘recolonise’ the space marks an inherent lack of tikanga in the previous designs of that site. This rings true for the city space that was established in 1930s Napier. In seeing Māori designs set within the context of historic Art Deco — a set of styles whose vocabulary is openly associated with primitivism, exoticism, nostalgia and novelty, and in a country within which “Europeans have dominated Māori for the last one and a half centuries,” local permutations of modernism cannot genuinely be considered bicultural, especially at the time of their construction. This becomes particularly pertinent in a heritage context that readily sidelines sociocultural tensions in order to applaud architectural modernity. It is both reductive and untrue to say that ‘Māori Deco’ (designed by Pākehā) is wholly pacifying, as Napier does present a rare pre-1970s Pākehā architectural acknowledgement of Māori history. Yet it is imperative to ask whose culture is consoled and legitimized by this small decorative gesture. Why should Pākehā be praised for ‘acknowledging’ the tangata whenua? The use of Māori world symbols in a distinctly non-Māori context draws attention to the demarcation of a Pākehā space and a lack of synthesis between Māori and Pākehā agency in the urban built environment, at least historically. Hence, calling Napier’s designs ‘Māori Art Deco’ is more than misleading.

37 Bedi, “Toi Iho Ka Mua, Ka Muri,” 2018.
38 Bedi, “Toi Iho Ka Mua, Ka Muri,” 2018.
40 There are also comments to be found in newspapers around the time of the earthquake that suggest the Māori community was held in esteem for helping in the aftermath, but the very need to differentiate ethnicity in such discussions pinpoints established views in what was, frankly, a racist society.
Napier’s period facades exhibit the agency of a Pākehā society by removing the living significance of non-Western cultural symbols within modernistic representational schemes. In doing so, time is spatialised and cultures are dichotomously presented as primitive or modern. Yet, while the styles associated with Art Deco place the past behind us by suggesting spatiotemporal remoteness, it is the sole ambition of heritage projects to reel that past back in and place it before us. The past then becomes the fabric of the present in a landscape strongly tied to the future.\textsuperscript{41} Hence, part of the (Western) heritageisation process comprises the decision to either turn the viewer around 180 degrees in order to view history archaeologically (as with museum displays and sites frozen in the past) or to keep the viewer looking ‘forward’ by mobilizing historical particulars (fashions, ideals, images, places, objects) in the present by repackaging and transporting their historicity into active industries and the economic channels of an imagined future.\textsuperscript{42} Napier, branded as ‘The Art Deco City,’ has chosen the latter by developing an active historical space through a citywide aesthetic, the cultivation of mythology, themed merchandise and interactive heritage experiences for tourists and enthusiasts. Formally, the buildings represent a static moment to which we look back, but through performance we recreate a new sense of historical enterprise. While temporal barriers are obscured by contemporary performance and ritual, we get no closer to sensing the lived past — in fact we cloud it further. Hence in a landscape profoundly associated with the suppression of trauma we move ahead without moving on; we acknowledge the historic disaster by uncritically lingering on the moment of aesthetic mutation and we attach to that mutation the notion of recovery. As Art Deco mythologies shape the city’s socioeconomic and visual cultural future, the Art Deco Trust, City Council and vintage-focused retail outlets might also be viewed as ‘walking backwards into the future’ but through commerce and vicarious nostalgia — hence fulfilling vastly different spiritual ends to those evoked by Hutchinson’s hīnaki.

\textsuperscript{41} Historical spaces and historic ideas are reactivated as heritage so that they may be inherited by the next generation; hence these are spaces with tied to future outcomes. \textsuperscript{42} Donald Kunze captured this idea nicely when he wrote: “It’s not the content of the frame, it’s the slight shift in meaning that comes from the shift in the frame’s position”; Kunze, “The Unsung Role of Metonymy,” 21.
Lore and Order: Art Deco as an Organised Landscape

Napier’s inner city buildings are often reproduced in pictures to be seen from particular angles within particular compositions. Examining how the buildings are represented in postcards, posters and film, it is evident that the architecture provides frames for scenery, events, the human figure and complementary objects such as cars, plants and signage. In New Zealand painting buildings are often represented as icons and signifiers of time and place. Grahame Sydney, Robin White, Rita Angus, Kate McLaren, Brent Wong, George Balogh, Sarah Platt, Peter Siddell, and Nick Dempster, to name just a handful, use local buildings as a significant part of their symbolic vocabulary. The juxtaposition of urban and rural is a common feature of New Zealand landscape. The rural is typically portrayed as vast, wild and timeless, and the urban is charmingly dilapidated, quirkily suburban, or picturesquely modern. The city or townscape usually conveys the sporadic settlement of the sprawling landscape or, on the flipside, concentrated settlements featuring built icons. Often quoted is an unsophisticated or earnest shabbiness — the colourful mixture of peopled beaches, dog-walkers, gumboots and café culture; the quaint fish and chip shop and the corner dairy; tomato sauce and Vogels bread; the gaudy hues of stark weatherboards against blue skies, repetitious windows, and peaked rooftops bunched together; iconic skylines seen from afar and set into inlets, bays and harbours, or abstracted into flattened geometries and dotted with pōhutukawa, native birds, or rustic signage (figs. 77-80). The buildings are usually addressed in terms of the juxtaposing shapes they have brought to the landscape and are, more often than not, translated into either highly expressionistic or reduced graphic forms that easily slide into photo-realist. While graphic legibility often rules the composition, an overarching respect for nature reduces modern settings to benign or completely abstracted pockets of activity. Where iconography alludes to ‘progress’ skies, seas, hills, decorative, painterly handling, or an idiosyncratic saturated palette often tempers it. Time is observed in the juxtapositions, the obsolescence of advertising, the wear and tear on the weatherboards, and the sublimity of nature over the parasitical built environment.

Napier reflects this sort of low-key modernity set in the landscape, as we find echoes of both the tamed wild and the condensed settlement in its presentation and representations. Freeman White’s painting View of Napier (2018) easily reflects this (fig. 81). The surrounding landscape — Bluff Hill and the tapering cape that cradles
the bay — is framed by structures that display order and beauty through proportional harmony and rhythmic symmetry. The sheer cliffs and sweeping sunrises basking in aerial perspective evoke nineteenth century sublime landscape painting. Received traditions in English landscape painting, the kind that have been brought forward in time to frame the majesty of Mitre Peak and Mount Taranaki, have contributed to popular romantic conceptions of New Zealand as Arcadia.\(^{43}\) Napier’s stripped classical structures continue to frame views of the sea, cliffs and bluff. The Doric columns and rectilinear glassless windows rein in any sense of expanse that might, outside of, become an indefinite stretch of untamed wilderness. Where the sublime landscape might otherwise induce, in Slobodan Marković’s words, “a distortion of the sense of time and a loss of self-consciousness” our continuous apprehension of the streets from which we view the seascape keep our domestic reality close at hand.\(^{44}\) Napier’s streetscapes serve as self-referential frames through which the observer is oriented in time and space. The literal framing of the sea by pillars and viewing platforms, the historic site signage, the period fonts on street signs, the plethora of vintage stores, and so on, assist abstract conceptions of place to materialise upon the site itself. Simon Unwin wrote in *Analysing Architecture* that while the frame is a structure and a boundary, it is also a frame of reference according to which “one develops an understanding of where one is.”\(^{45}\) This is particularly true in Napier, which moulds its aesthetics to promote the Art Deco brand. In contrast to the frequent occurrence in New Zealand painting of built environments that are secondary to vast, sublime, or wild landscapes, Napier sees the buildings frame the landscape, not vice versa. One can stand and view the Pacific Ocean from the ends of Tennyson or Emerson streets. One can look out onto an uncomplicated body of water; an immeasurable expanse of sparkling turquoise that stretches all the way to South American shores. This view evokes romantic maritime mythologies and great visions of nature, but these associations are anchored by the frames from which they are viewed — by modern precepts and manicured precincts.

The bestowal of civic order was highlighted in the post-earthquake town planning. The new aesthetic choices, like the hung verandahs and conjoined frontages, helped clarify the roads and pedestrian and thoroughfares. The overall layout employs

a grid format; a manner of organizing that is in keeping with British colonies and even longer traditions dating back to the marketplaces of ancient Rome. As an anthropological composition the streets show signs of a rational society that makes sense of itself with western capitalist priorities. There is a predictable flow of movement because foot traffic is perfectly led by plant-lined sealed pavements. As performance spaces stand empty and slow zones prioritize pedestrians, there emerges an expectation of pageantry and display which, when not in action, creates a peculiar sense of absence. The built forms are still. As markers of civic identity they appear to await animation.

The aesthetic identity of the heritage quadrant creates an expectation of visual, if not ideological, unity. As such, the facades are a site of interpretive tension. There is no visual or ideological unity; there are only vying moments of meaning being cognitively projected onto their surface by the Art Deco spectator. That which truly unifies the built environment is their site, the ongoing occupation of the land below. Art Deco presents outward-looking, externalized, aesthetic (skin deep) markers of place identity. Ties to the land below are reduced to lamentations of the earthquake or the community’s triumph over it. The aesthetic landscape thus plays out spatially as the facades become the only recognized residues of the past in the urban setting. Imagined accounts of the Art Deco City are mobilized by the visual layering of history on the site. This is echoed by the sequences through which people and materials pass through its spaces and the chosen vistas to be framed or recalled. The frequency and intensity of people’s movements speaks of the perceived significance of the site, the

47 There is of course literature on Ngāti Kuhungunu’s pre-settlement histories and the region’s and agricultural establishment and my comments here are not to overlook the obvious importance of the extensive knowledge gleaned from the 1931 earthquake. It is instead to suggest that the architecture is on but not of its site, and its outward-looking explanations and ties to the international Art Deco phenomenon are not homegrown or internally reflective.
48 Henri Lefebvre wrote about the commodification of space and the anthropology of urbanism. He highlighted the relationships between architecture, urbanism and politics and from a Marxist perspective, he argued for the collective management of space; Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009); Lukasz Stanek, Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
availability of meaning, its utility, and the legibility and resonance of its symbolic arrangements.⁴⁹

This brings us to W.J.T. Mitchell’s work on the ‘Imperial Landscape,’ within which landscape is conceived as an active cultural process that we might read and decode rather than an object that exists independently of humans.⁵⁰ Mitchell argues that landscape is an instrument of cultural power and representations of it function as frames for space and producers of content within those frames. A landscape’s ‘readability’ normalizes itself as processes of exchange (visual appropriation, social vocabularies, semiotics, perspectives) actively produce histories, historical moments, cultural relations and hierarchies. As a dynamic construction, he argues, landscape is not a genre but a medium through which culture asserts itself.⁵¹ This is precisely the condition of Napier’s Art Deco phenomenon as it ties the proposed history of the buildings to their living surrounds, especially through the production and reproduction of their image.

In addition to providing a visual vocabulary for the landscape, Art Deco also stages space and pins down a temporal order. If we view the facades as spatiotemporally performative, as I believe we should, then we must approach the renowned ‘Art Deco atmosphere’ with a view to its power, taking seriously, for instance, how architectural displays and representations of the past might be internalised. Attention must be paid to who it is that is mobilized for a positive experience. For instance, who has a sense of security, protection, and immunity on this site? Who is made to feel comfortable or excited (or indeed peripheral, unsettled, and defensive)? And which behaviours, beliefs, understandings are supported or deterred? These questions — “whether in a material, social, or ideational sense” — constitute the spaces through which we move and, as such, must not be subsumed by mere aesthetic discourse.⁵² Kenneth Tucker has argued that “to ground aesthetics in

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⁵¹ Mitchell, 5.

everyday life and socialization one must develop its ties to play and emotion.”53 This complements John Dewey’s aesthetics within which art objects are seen less materially, in favour of their expressivity as mediators of experience.54 As generators of atmosphere, Napier’s period facades and representations of their ‘Art Deco’ context “bring about the conditions in which the atmospheres of a particular character are able to develop.”55 It is not that particular ways of being will emerge but that some ways of being are made welcome and that space is provided for their development. Possibilities for action can be extended or hindered by the heritage atmosphere, and trajectories can be nurtured or quashed by its boundaries. To be clear, this is not an argument for architectural determinism but a push for the acknowledgement of the role and notable agency of architecture as heritage within wider networks of visual, cultural and spatial discourses.

On Napier’s streets demarcations of time – imperial time, modern time, and virtual time – become agents of territorialisation as various cultures are entwined in, or overlooked by, dominant narratives. In personal accounts, tours, souvenirs, published literature and daily newspapers, cultures are visibly distributed, distorted, reduced or aggrandized through representations and their explanations. Napier’s Art Deco landscape echoes its Pākehā makers’ cultural (pre-) conceptions and expedites our cognitive mastery of a highly specific aesthetic experience through street furniture, signposting, language, lore and law.56 We see Napier’s landscape collapse into caricature as its reality blurs with simulation in the performance of its ‘Art Deco spirit.’ Within the performance of Art Deco, the facades, or the idea of the facades, are visibly heightened. Their modern ambition is commodified as their historical reality is classified, standardized and quantified to fit the tourist industry and domestic interests in preservation (the two industries of course, work in close parallel).

As ideas about the significance of the facades materialize in physical space, time and space become territorial issues. This calls to mind Doreen Massey’s

visualizations of what exactly it is that constitutes space.\textsuperscript{57} Massey suggested that space is not necessarily a “surface on which we are placed” and that the reduction of space to “a dimension for the display/representation of different moments of time” is erroneous. Space, she argued, is a product of interrelations; it is constituted through interactions and might be visualized as something more akin to simultaneous trajectories.\textsuperscript{58} This is not to replace representations of a singular history (what I have referred to as the dominant narrative) with no history but rather to visualize many histories — a frustratingly difficult notion to pin down but a profound realization in its acknowledgement of the ‘fact of other realities.’ We cannot, of course, represent or consider the all the content of all realities at once, but we can recognize their equal presence in history and their relation to the geographies of our imaginations.\textsuperscript{59}

In Napier, an aesthetic preference has been transformed into an aesthetic experience. Patterns of behaviour have emerged as social spaces have been temporalized, signposted and made familiar through visual reproduction. Massey argued that “the trajectories of others can be immobilized while we proceed with our own” and that once an idea is represented, it becomes static.\textsuperscript{60} This can be linked to the concretisation of Napier’s imagined past as Art Deco imagery increasingly ossifies antiquated hierarchies. Further, Massey argued that space is temporal but it is the relation of various trajectories to one another that creates the ‘constellation’ of ideas that inform a space. Here we can contemplate how Art Deco has become a frame for apprehending Napier and comprehending the city’s (and at times New Zealand’s) relation to the rest of the world. Art Deco is explained as a visual manifestation of the city’s historical modernity, its response to disaster, and an expression of the 1930s interest in American trends. Art Deco is also situated in the context of New Zealand’s evolving sense of national identity. As these restless notions are represented in postcards, posters, and bodily performances, they are woven into the pool of imagery that gives meaning to the spaces through which we move. What must be urged, therefore, is our ongoing attention to the embedded notion of ‘settled relations’ in the social landscape. This requires a decentring of Napier’s Art Deco narrative that has for

\textsuperscript{57} Doreen Massey, \textit{For Space} (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015).
\textsuperscript{58} Massey, \textit{For Space}, 8, 9.
\textsuperscript{59} Massey, \textit{For Space}, 80.
\textsuperscript{60} Massey, \textit{For Space}, 8.
too long revolved around the arrival of a modernist timeline. The problem with this historically ingrained timeline is its linear bookmarking of history, and the spaces in which history operates. There is a tendency to bond disparate experiences in order to rationalise them from a singular perspective, especially in a city where all tales of the past are anchored to crisply clear ‘before’ and ‘after’ moments. It is of course necessary to allocate things a place so as to comprehend them but our placements are inherently hierarchical and specific to our worldview.

In accepting Mitchell’s notion of landscape as a medium through which culture asserts itself and by contemplating Massey’s conception of space as simultaneous trajectories that operate relationally, Napier’s heritage quadrant may be viewed as a spatial and spatiotemporal construction (the first orbiting sociology and the second philosophy). Art Deco, as it is translated in literature on Napier today, tacitly poses the idea that we had or have in common a singular ambition for twentieth century modernity, a shared trajectory. It asserts that our sense of a ‘modern’ future, both in the post-earthquake era and at present, was/is unanimous despite our differing pasts. The danger here is that it is only through this sort of cultural hegemony that it is possible to celebrate ‘the foresight’ of Napier’s 1930s architects in making sweeping changes to the urban landscape. While the styles of the rebuild were more democratic or inclusive than their Edwardian predecessors and thus may mark a moment of progress, the agency of the cultural hegemony itself remains unaltered. Through the daily manifestations and annual rituals that Art Deco incites, the past is openly genericised and diversity is subdued, even if only briefly or for fun. Hence, the embedded practices we enact and empower as we produce and perform heritage landscapes must constantly be reassessed.

When contemplating the collective expression of Napier’s built surfaces in this way we are inevitably moving from materiality into abstraction, from the given fact of the built forms to interpretations of them. An awareness of this shift is significant in the development of the heritage landscape because modes of interpretation, and subsequently representation, are socially constructive acts. The institution of social agendas, the dissemination of isolated and invented histories, and the physical

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preservation of spatiotemporal arrangements are what Edward Soja refers to as the ‘heritageisation’ process. The heritageisation process points to heritage as a product that facilitates the inheritance of an imagined past for current use and promotes selected notions of what should be passed on to an imagined future. In a similar vein, David Lowenthal has said that society is in fact “a pact between the living and the dead and those who are not yet born.” What is important here are the suggestion of heritage and the processes of heritageisation as creative acts. Heritage is not preordained but an idea that is fabricated to help publicise and sell a commodity.

What is poignant about the fact of heritage as an ongoing construction in Napier is the style’s wonderful capacity to mutate and evolve with the times while remaining recognisable and, better still, popular. Napier’s appearances endure while their meanings change. Thus, in dealing with an art of appearances and not predestined meanings, we are well positioned to consider and re-consider the ever-shifting locus of Napier’s Art Deco identity and its rolling appeal in popular culture. The sociologist Kenneth Tucker observed that aesthetic experience itself is “…an ongoing discovery and recovery of integration and harmony through participation in a life context characterised by resistance and tension. Aesthetics thus is the struggle to overcome obstacles and reach shared fulfilment – after which a new process of creation begins.” The Art Deco veneer, generally speaking, seems to shift and adapt to sociocultural and economic circumstances, as well as commercial fads. This shapeshifting points to its capacity for renewal and the style’s immersion within the wider rhetoric of discovery and recovery, revival and decline, endangerment and preservation. Using conveniently timed visual cultural moments as vectors, the lifespan of Napier’s Art Deco leaps from its post-disaster celebration, through several decades of invisibility, into fashion through new historicism, into the realm of heritage tourism and into the present day, which is developing a strong sense of self-referential...

64 David Lowenthal. Heritage Research Group Seminars, University of Cambridge, Department of Archaeology, November 3rd, 2011,
65 Tucker, “Aesthetics, Play, and Cultural Memory,” 201
kitsch with a metamodern tinge. Art Deco flourishes in its occupation as a visual passage to another age, thus demonstrating its flexible and inexhaustible representational (and commercial) strength.

As a brand, Art Deco has fallen into a spatial mode of historical consciousness whereby one approaches the subject via ties to geography and nationhood. Site-specificity establishes “British Art Deco”, “Miami Beach Deco”, “Japanese Deco” “New Zealand Deco” long before one approaches the individuality of the various production. Our relation to, on the other hand, modernism is a relation to its self-proclaimed and distinguished founders, protagonists, authors and advocates, in other words, to people and their ideas. Patricia Bayer wrote: “Art Deco architecture is not an architecture of personalities, of star architects…few members of the general public in the West can name an Art Deco architect, but most are more than familiar, for instance, with the Empire State Building.” In most cases our relation to Art Deco marks a relationship with objects, and more often than not, they are objects without fighting words attached. Therefore, the spaces that Art Deco occupies often precede Art Deco itself.

Art Deco and the Ongoing Production of Meaning

As a mode of representation that deals in surfaces and which deals in concealment, Art Deco operates as a container whose walls are hemming in notions of culture, time, progress, history. The rubble from the fallen Edwardian city of Napier was neatly overlaid by the bright sealed world of the concrete new buildings. Notions

66 The metamodernist manifesto defines metamodernism strictly as a “structure of feeling” emphatically stating that it is not a movement or perspective. One must be careful to observe this in applying this to the Napier’s Art Deco phenomena.
67 We can easily call to mind the names of Clement Greenberg, Ezra Pound, Georges Braque, Gertrude Stein, André Breton, Roger Fry, Marcel Duchamp – and in New Zealand Katherine Mansfield, Theo Schoon, Colin McCahon, Rita Angus, Louis Hay, and Ernst Plischke. Art Deco has no such people. It is not a genre associated with spokespeople, or which champions names. There are makers that have come to be known as Art Deco icons – René Lalique, Josef Hoffmann, Eileen Gray, Erté, Suzie Cooper, Tamara Delimpicka, Greta Garbo, Cassandre, Raymond Hood, Fritz Lang, even Brancusi has been associated — but this is not of their own volition and rarely occurred within their working lifetimes. Certainly, these artists, actresses, architects and directors could never, without great hesitation, be called Art Deco ‘protagonists.’
of a romantic untamed Māoriland were settled into a formalised landscape within which its presence was historicised. The built forms of the new city did not mourn for its fallen past. There were no aesthetic reconstructions. In grappling with Napier as a ‘product of disaster,’ one must remember that there are cognitive, emotional, and generational delays in the processing of experiences, especially traumatic ones. The manifestation of trauma in creative arenas is no means a given, in fact, the repression and denial of trauma — the refusal to process or even acknowledge the experience — is equally portentous in the wake of disasters, publically and privately. In the anthology Life on the Edge: Survivors’ Stories one earthquake survivor suggested that for many years the people of Napier did not talk about the earthquake, as it was too soon and the memory too real.

This might be related to the manner in which the two world wars have been dealt with in film. During the 1960s, films like 633 Squadron (1964), The Dam Busters (1955), The Great Escape (1963), or Sink the Bismarck (1960) sought to retell fairly horrific stories of violence and destruction via relatively bloodless narratives about war heroes. Several decades later such films as The Memphis Bell (1990), The Heroes (1989), To End All Wars (2001) or Saving Private Ryan (1998) could tell similar stories of the same war with a greater reflection of the distressed humanity of such situations — of the futility, gore and emotion that accompanied such atrocious circumstances. These later World War II films, of course, were emerging at a time when American films such as Full Metal Jacket (1987), Platoon (1986) and Apocalypse Now (1979) were dealing with both the fantasy and reality of the Vietnam War. More recently, we can look to The Marine (2006) or Hurt Locker (2008) to observe the war in Iraq being dealt with in a manner that maintains mythologies that bolster the experiences of those still participating in, or dealing with, the violent realities of that conflict. We can predict that in time alternative perspectives will emerge.

In Simulacra and Simulation, Baudrillard wrote: “Myth, chased from the real by the violence of history, finds refuge in cinema.” Cinema provides shelter for the romantic daydreams of utility; it consoles the lost and provides chaos with momentary meaning. Cinema revels in the overarching fantasies and underlying vulnerabilities of

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69 Barnes, 149.
audiences with a readiness to normalise or distort our experiences. As vivid reconstructions of battlefields manifest as gritty portrayals of dehumanizing dogmatism, vanity, bloodshed and waste in the twenty-first century, we finally witness the death pangs of ‘glory in war’ mythology. Thus we see the popular imagination being led through phases of recovery, recuperation and reflection within these films. Firstly we are encouraged to admire the courageousness of those involved and feel somewhat healed by notions of honour. Subsequently, honour is replaced by horror as we see the faulty plight of soldiers, rebels, prisoners of war, and veterans represented on screen. As generations pass and values change, the distance between the lived reality and the romanticised story has grown enough that we may finally confront some of the colder facts. The desire to remember and represent the extent of the pain experienced then becomes the primary display.

While watching yet another film set during World War II, I observed how closely the leading lady — a smart military woman with her beret cap, curled locks, red lips, gloved hands and sensible shoes — looked like one of Roald Dahl’s loved but feared witches. It dawned on me, after approximately twenty years of looking at Quentin Blake’s illustrations, just how heavily 1940s fashion influences the adults he still draws. While The Witches was published in 1983, the depicted women’s gloves, hats, handbags, wigs and full-fur coats are characteristically vintage. While the artist clearly has a vivid imagination, a diverse repertoire, and a spontaneous though practiced style, Blake’s characters often reflect the era in which he was a child, a time when the A-line silhouette, collared blouse and two-piece suit were indeed everyday wear for some women. The delay we witness between Blake’s lived-experiences of these fashions and his artistic renderings of it shows that it would be a mistake to pick up a copy of The Witches and deduce that it was published in the 1940s. The reality of not judging a book by its cover might in the context of this thesis translate into some new adage about one’s trust of the representational value of architectural facades, especially commercial ones responsive to depression and disaster. Bearing in mind our changing representations of war in film as time distances us from the trauma, we might be moved into deeper ruminations of how the creative expression of lived experiences, like those of the 1931 earthquake, can have a late or protracted effect on the cultural aesthetics that follow it.

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As the aesthetic of choice in the post-disaster architecture of the city, Napier’s period styles have gone through various stages of popularity and expressivity. Their generational processing, the delay between experience and expression, demonstrates the problems that can arrive with style being retrospectively used to demarcate the realities of a particular period and the error of reducing a whole age to just one or two styles that were, in reality, operative only in some media. Meyer Schapiro has discussed the way that dominant styles, such as the Baroque, functioned across diverse media. However, he also observed that at various times there are certain media that do not parallel the predominant style of the time. From this he deduces that “the various arts have different roles in the culture and social life of a time…[and] the dominant outlook of a time does not affect all the arts in the same degree, nor are all the parts capable of expressing the same outlook.”

Accordingly, while the modernistic 1930s styles in Napier are prolific in architecture for the reason of the city’s mass-reconstruction, manifestations of a Spanish Mission aesthetic in other media, say painting, are simply not there. Likewise, Prairie Style decorative arts or stripped classical runway fashions never eventuated (anywhere, let alone here). This brings home the expressive diversity and stylistic adaptability of Art Deco as the chosen aesthetic for representations of Napier’s period architecture while drawing attention to the extensive impact this aesthetic has had on the town’s mythology. It is in many ways absurd to think that the new architecture would provide insight into the community’s social outlook at all, particularly when the rebuild was such a top-down, expert-led affair. Speaking for myself, I do not feel connected to the architecture of my local bank nor do I feel that that the new housing estate down the road represents my feelings about contemporary suburban design let alone my political stance or taste in music. Nevertheless, the idea that the built form is primarily a vehicle for social content remains prolific, and the social intentions that are reflected by or projected onto Napier’s facades are continually being extracted and expounded in present day narratives. Ironically, if the buildings did not originally reflect lived events, then, they do now.

Napier’s architecture is most often, and almost automatically, understood in metaphysical terms. While I have not yet encountered literature that straightforwardly

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suggests that Napier’s architecture is didactic or ideologically ambitious, such stances are often intrinsic to explanations of the various styles’ character and content in this post-disaster, depression-era context. Moreover, a correlation is made across the board between style and content, where the style itself becomes the content. This correlation is almost psychoanalytic in nature with meanings being drawn from, or conferred upon, non-representational forms. Character is construed (if not diagnosed) by associated content. Consider for instance the association of whitewashed walls with futuristic utopias, the gendered analysis of the ‘feminine’ French styles and ‘masculine’ streamlined styles, or the way that buildings are perceived to exhibit or even house a Zeitgeist. This is not identity through use (especially in Napier) but character derived by association and vicarious memory. The buildings are perceived anthropologically, reflexive and symptomatic of their time, echoing the way the psychoanalyst looks to the childhood of his subject to understand their adult behaviours.

Art Deco as a genre is in this way embedded with Freudian fantasies — the conferral of meaning upon inanimate objects, fanciful dreams of an exotic other and the thrill of the curiously different, not to mention the production of nostalgic, escapist fantasies around decontextualized symbols. In Napier, it is the streetscapes that collectively provide a theatre of fantasy rather than a singular grand monument or edifice and it is the overall impression of a style that is the driving force behind the cultural phenomenon rather than the specifics of observable iconography and content. To clarify, Napier’s 1930s architectural forms were in no way related to the Freudian school of psychoanalysis. The Art Deco phenomenon that has been cultivated as a response to those forms, however, functions subliminally, metaphysically, and largely to serve notions of desire. The vicarious nostalgia upon which the whole construction relies — that is, the shared memory of a time that we were not part of — solicits an unconscious gaze, the associative mechanisms of human subjectivity, and the provocation of temporalized, gendered and caricatured social relations. Objects are linked to phenomena in a way that rouses symbolic public gestures and expressions (photographic poses, archaic figures of speech, re-enactments, period illustrations) and the built heritage becomes animated and socially active in the present era.

73 Schapiro, 85.
Indeed, the endowment of serious heritage value on Napier’s period buildings places a lot of weight on their continued capacity to transmit such emotive significance to an ever-changing public. While the kind of psycho-iconographical understandings described above may not have been an original ambition of their design, it has certainly become central to their survival as heritage tourism flourishes in the city. This change in the measure of Napier’s buildings means that, in moving from form to content, they do not physically reveal or describe as much as one might expect. Contrary to the numerous commentaries about their allusions to modernity, the facades do not necessarily communicate experiences of modernity — perhaps just the architects’ flirtations with iconographical exchange and new materials. Architectural historians will be much clearer on precisely how Napier’s facades came to look as they do. Yet from a visual cultural point of view the zigzagged faces also depict post-disaster catharsis, with the sealed veneers projecting seismic zigzags into the public sphere as if to conjure the security of the unbroken surface and a reduction of the geological shaking to mere decoration.

From another perspective, it could be argued that the zigzags, which are commonly said to evoke standardization and mechanical production, look festive in the same way that bunting looks festive. In fact, this is not too far removed from the tone of the reconstructed facades, at least on the professional level, with young architects using this rare opportunity to celebrate their own identities as modern architects. On an individual level, however, the community was enduring the horror of lost loved ones, dislodged memories of a vanished place and significant material loss, and people were in a state of private mourning. In keeping with the notion of generational processing described above, a public face for private trauma was designed by architects who were a step removed from the suffering. These interpretations are conjectural but no matter how one approaches it, we are dealing in the semiotics of disaster — even if the signs do not directly denote the earthquake.

Unlike the semiotic studies of Mustansir Dalvi on Bombay’s Backbay Reclamation buildings, the ornamentation of Napier’s facades cannot be read as rational texts that chart a narrative of the architecture. Rather, they signal a moment of discontinuity and a rapid departure from a traditional aesthetic, and the initiation of

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a lasting visual cultural mutation. Hence, in keeping with my observations on the psychoanalytic aspects of Napier’s Art Deco phenomenon, the buildings cannot inherently “tell us about their time through the expressions employed on their surface,” as Dalvi succeeds in doing for Mumbai’s Art Deco architecture. However, their representation in other media can be read as directly reflective of contemporary cultures with approaches to time, space, identity and use being carefully considered, filtered and aestheticized by a broader range of makers. This is a more democratic and social production than the initial expert-led construction of the buildings, in that it is produced by and responds to a wider audience over a longer period of time, and moreover, in contexts that are less controlled by the preconditions of constructional policy-making. Whereas the buildings upon their erection could not exceed height limits, were to be made of particular materials, allocated to specific spaces, built within a pressured timeframe, and within a highly directed and emotionally charged atmosphere, representations of the buildings as they have emerged over time have been cultivated more freely from the vantage of hindsight and within the parameters of particular trends in visual culture. The latter is much more indicative of the status and meaning of Art Deco in contemporary domestic culture than the buildings are when considered in isolation or when linked continually to international ideas about what Art Deco is, because it embodies the active role of the architecture in various media—a topic that will be explored in the next two chapters.

Art Deco in Napier is not past tense but an active “contextual habitat.” From our shores to the gilded doors of New York’s Chrysler Building, authors and enthusiasts and historians and preservationists have boxed Art Deco and put a lid on it (‘Art Deco was…’). Despite its emergence as an interwar style Art Deco is currently performative. Scholars have broken it down into its formal characteristics and themes and labelled it decorative in contrast to modernism; it is striking, but only a past tense consumerist frill on the edge of serious art and architecture. No matter how small the virtual image, canvas, or monument, or how vague the expression of commerce and industry, Napier confronts us in the present with surfaces to be experienced and read: here we are contemplating this, now. Origins aside, Art Deco artefacts have ongoing cultural presence, and we must attend to this ‘nowness.’ In doing so, one is acknowledging the full lifespan of the style, its origins, its maintenance (or lack

75 Soja, Seeking Spatial Justice, 18.
thereof), its uses, appeal, offences or neglect through time. Hence, I would like to divert us from ‘Art Deco was…” to ‘Art Deco is…”

This can be hard to swallow if one tries to keep down digested notions of authentic production, for instance, by clinging to the idea that the Art Deco style produced during the interwar years is more authentic than the style in production today. The tendency is to chalk up the present day as some kind of ‘afterwards.’ One could go so far as to argue that it is actually more authentic now for the sole reason that it is self-consciously produced; it is only now a recognized style, named and grouped as it falls off the assembly line whereas ‘originally’ it existed spontaneously and in a generalized, derogative relation to modernism. The previous chapter addressed this tenuous temporal bracketing and perceived demise of Deco with the onset of World War II, so here it will suffice to note only that such bracketing is symptomatic of the twentieth century desire to conceive of categorical movements in a lateral sequence of fixed moments rather than conceiving of a more spontaneous output filled with aesthetic mutations and ongoing influences.

Napier’s buildings derive heritage value from their collective presence. At the streetscape level their facades — as surfaces marked by humans for other humans — have become social mediators. Their surface markings are signifiers of the buildings’ relations to their sites and communities and, bearing in mind their ongoing use and legalised upkeep, must be understood as objects with social agency. The concentrated vintage appeal of Napier’s streets have made for a highly performative social setting within which an ‘Art Deco atmosphere’ and civic brand are nourished. On the collective scale of citywide branding we encounter an amalgam of strategic adjustments to the public space and the ongoing production of social contexts. On the private scale we establish spatial markers from which a sense of time and place may be apprehended, internalised and, subsequently, performed.

The capacity of style alone to connote meaning may spark contention in the Napier context. I do not believe that anyone studying Napier’s architecture would try to suggest that the genesis of the styles on view was local. Although there are some regional adaptations, there is a consensus that the varied architectural styles are imported (as of course were the Edwardian styles that preceded them, but they were they were more predictably so). Despite this consensus it has been the perpetual

76 Knowles and Sweetman, *Picturing the Social Landscape*, 167.
ambition of authors to linger on the concrete reality of the buildings. The formal features of the heritage surfaces are in constant reproduction as continual affirmations their stylistic authority are given priority. This approach has failed to yield a convincing public report on the heritage quadrant’s spatiotemporal existence. The focus has always been on the architectural styles rather than on our relation to those styles. We must, then, release the architecture from its built forms.

Some thirty years after the establishment of the Art Deco City, we are in a position now to marry architectural fact with architectural performance. ‘Releasing’ the architecture, as it were, begins linguistically as vocabularies and semantic lenses become enmeshed with the ‘Art Deco story.’ Discourses are internalised and abstracted as the buildings become characterised in a poetic composition of myth and memory. The buildings move from their built reality into the realm of representation and associated imagery, and as representations are embodied social ideas become enacted. Significantly, constructions of Art Deco — as either a set of styles, an era, a mood, or network of ideas — are paused indefinitely where the performance of ‘modern capitalistic optimism’ is deemed redundant or excessive, for instance, with a grave return to the earthquake memory or when one decides to focus on the region’s other lucrative industries. The operations of real time thus mark the boundaries of Art Deco Napier’s reach. Its attachment to frivolity is embedded and its superfluity reaffirmed with every flick of the faddish, seasonal, economic or emotional switch. As such, we can observe that the buildings are no longer living contracts between vendors, architects and the public, but collectivised historical props for recreational apprehensions of time, space and place. Like lyrics hovering on a melody, temporal semiotics dance on the urban grid, synchronised with its structures but separable from its uses. Releasing architecture from its built form means leaving the field of architectural history and the 1930s phase of construction, in order to confront the arguably greater contemporary life of the buildings in art, language and performance. This points to the liberation of Napier’s genius loci from its precast origins in open acceptance of the fact that its virtual life far exceeds the static utility of the built forms.
Chapter 4

On the Abstract City: The Poetic Spaces of Napier’s Art Deco Heritage

Architecture belongs to poetry, and its purpose is to help man [sic] dwell. But architecture is a difficult art. To make practical towns and buildings is not enough. Architecture comes into being when a “total environment is made visible.”

Christian Norberg-Schulz, 1996

Napier’s period buildings have well and truly left the architects’ hands. The heritage quadrant is now firmly established and the streetscapes are imbued with an atmospheric duty. The facades have always been culturally mediated. As the civic centre is ever more vividly defined spatial identities are developed, embodied and ingrained. The buildings have been transformed into a romantic idea that daily manifests as an ‘Art Deco experience’ and the move from architectural fact to cultural encounter denotes a shift from the concrete world of objects into the abstract realm of interpretation. More than this, it is a move from the static properties of the facades into the metaphysical realm of association and cognitive pairing. Relations to Napier’s Art Deco identity move from the past tense into real time. The buildings do not act as containers for history so much as they provide a theatre for the display of contemporary vintage subcultures. In our performances of Art Deco —which can be taken to mean any mode of display and exchange that is in operation as a result of the buildings’ perceived character — the inanimate and relatively unchanging facades are given conditional and contextual meanings. By operating on different scales (international, national, regional, city-wide, private) the transcendence of physical form is a process that extends upon and overrides original architectural intentions. In its contemporary condition, therefore, Napier’s Art Deco is not an eclectic style of the past but an agent of culture belonging to the present.

The 1931 earthquake shattered Napier’s urban landscape. The clean, sealed and beautiful facades that stand today are an expression of recovery, but the heritage signposts remind us of the historical wound that is etched into local geographies. In representations across media the facades operate metaphorically by making visual connections between an imagined past and present forms. As a result, the buildings

occupy a space that is markedly different from their original 1930s context. Art Deco in all its forms operates by using semiotics to connect poetically with the pool of imagery and historical conditions that were discussed in the previous chapter in terms of ‘Deco-by-association.’ Hence, the use of iconography or expressions pertaining to, for instance, jazz music, women’s liberation, prohibition, the Great Depression, streamlined forms, or ‘exotic’ figures relies upon the viewer’s frame of reference and historical knowledge. The array of imagery that is called upon to make sense of Napier’s Art Deco — as a style, an era and an atmosphere — requires the viewer to be adequately equipped with peripheral period knowledge. The viewer must be culturally prepared for an ‘Art Deco experience’ in order to entertain one. A sentimental resonance with historical archetypes, for instance, will help in the sense-making process as one observes the vividly themed yet ambiguously informed city. Within Napier’s Art Deco culture knowledge is generated via art historical pastiche and kitsch. Narratives unfold through the weaving of sometimes completely unrelated imagery, using visual metaphors to generate an emotionally satisfying and lucrative ‘end’ to the earthquake story. In the 1930s the cityscape represented progress and possibility. Eighty years on, it represents a future preoccupied with an embroidered past.

This chapter observes how Art Deco operates as an atmosphere and a style by means of mental association. The first section demonstrates the way that contiguous imagery stimulates an enlarged experience of place as the viewer cognitively situates the symbolic forms of the Art Deco City within wider discourses. It is argued that in order to have an ‘Art Deco Experience’ one must bring a relevant frame of historical reference to the city. The second section is concerned with perceptions of time and the heritage industry’s preoccupation with reviving (not just documenting) the past. We see how Art Deco has framed Napier’s past in a way that is difficult to step away from while noting the way in which the heritage quadrant has become a stage for anachronistic, often uncomfortable, kitsch. In the third section, the ‘Words on Walls Project’ is briefly explored in terms of how the city moves into the realm of metaphor. The notion of the city as an abstracted concept that was released from its bricks and mortar emerges, as the fallen city became aligned with an opportunity for progress and expressions of social optimism. Ultimately, this chapter deals with the representational mechanisms of Napier’s heritage quadrant underscoring the significance of the viewer’s private cognition in recognising and making sense of Art Deco’s
spatiotemporal semiotics. This is not a comprehensive overview of the city’s visual culture but a glimpse of the poeticism at work in ‘reading’ vintage artefacts.

**The Visual Mechanics of Art Deco**

When an object is presented in a public space an idea is posited. A process of expression and suppression begins in order to accommodate the object’s inherently spatial life. When that object is then represented — presented once again in a different medium — it enters a greater symbolic and perspectival universe within which original forms are anchored by intentionality and function. Themed iconography around Napier represents the city while simultaneously constituting the fabric of the city itself; hence the urban environment is highly self-referential. By existing on the heritage site in question, signs and images both promise and frustrate meaning as the apprehension of symbolic forms conflicts with the direct communication of ideas; symbolic forms are vividly presented, yet they are not self-explanatory. What, for instance, does a plain alley wall with a mural depicting a stylised door, lamp-post and window say except for “*Ce n’est pas Art Déco?*” (fig. 82). It may superficially be understood as a continuation of the city’s architectural styles, but of course it is not architectural styling at all: “*C’est un tableau.*” Much like Magritte’s pipe, it is a painting emulating generalised forms with some illusionary devices. Such simulacra of Art Deco in Napier arguably serve to highlight the facades’ innate absence of atmosphere, or, if not an outright absence, then a deficiency of substance and a deficiency of the vitality and performativity that is now expected of the style.² If an Art Deco atmosphere exists, it exists as a contemporary construction construed in physical space through accumulated iconographical fragments. That which is liberated by the decorative schemes around the city are contemporary impressions of the past and not the past itself. The architecture alone only goes so far as to plot an architectural geography; the facades are an aesthetic access point but they do not contain the spatial experience (this is analogous to Alfred Korzybski’s “the map is not the territory”).³

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² And to be clear, as the Art Deco City, Napier does not bolster the Spanish Mission or Prairie styles around the urban spaces; it is only the zigzag style. Cloche hats have defeated sombreros.

Napier’s heritage quadrant initiates a spatiotemporal experience. The present moment is tempered by residues of the past as we try to access a space other than the one in which we stand. Fully immersive moments are rare and fleeting since our relation to the city’s Art Deco subject is always external and always cognitively (rather than sensorially) understood. This is not to say we cannot be immersed in the immediate experience of the buildings, but our experience of them as part of an ‘Art Deco City’ is a contrivance that is vicariously known. The heritage facades register as meaningful because our immediate experiences in front of the buildings bond with and are authenticated by an existing knowledge of the Art Deco subject. Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* lucidly observed: “Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences.”\(^4\) Hence, we may apprehend the presence of the buildings with sensorial immediacy, but we comprehend their Art Deco qualities in a secondary process. We perceive, for instance, the warm hues and arched windows of the Provincial Hotel, but we conceive of its temporal character by recognising broader ties to nostalgic Spanish revivalist history. When we look at the streetscapes, therefore, we are always aware of likeness — the likeness of the facades to preconceived ideas about what Art Deco should be. Notions of likeness thereby diffuse aesthetic immediacy.

The broader contextual associations that the buildings are likened to both frame and disrupt the present experience. Instead of observing how peculiar it is to decorate New Zealand buildings in this way, culturally prepared viewers comment on the city’s ‘natural’ continuation of international styles. Art Deco’s perceived geographies preclude and normalise their local presence so that it appears to make sense that the style made it here eventually. This preclusion does not make sense, but sense has certainly framed their historicity.

As the Art Deco styles of Napier are delivered in iconographical fragments a visual ensemble accumulates. The beholder is oriented amid motifs, fonts, murals and monuments, and the city becomes a discernible, bounded site.\(^5\) In its existence as an historical atmosphere The Art Deco City largely exists as a generalized mental picture within which the physical world and its immediate sensations are met with peripheral knowledge and emotional attachments. The availability of Napier as the Art Deco City

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depends on the ease with which its various parts can be organized into a coherent whole by its beholders.\textsuperscript{6} The aesthetic project has thus gone beyond the basic need to structure and organize the environment, to develop a macro topography that can be synesthetically perceived. While the Art Deco Trust and local council anchor the theme via permanent displays, however, it is no longer a top-down venture. The city’s Art Deco subject emerges ubiquitously. From day-care centres through schools, clubs, retailers, artists, bloggers, vintage enthusiasts, office workers, musicians, and all sorts of professions, including morticians and dentists, Art Deco has found gainful application. Individually, a lot of this is no more than superficial styling, but collectively a \textit{mise-en-scène} is created. So while there are multiple producers of the overall Art Deco effect, and hence no singular perspective of the subject, the pool of imagery in allusion is strikingly consistent with a British-American interwar Zeitgeist.

The notion of vicarious memory, the shared memory of a time that we were not part of, was established in previous chapters, where it was suggested that the Art Deco phenomenon being cultivated in Napier functions subliminally and metaphysically to serve notions of desire. The vicarious nostalgia that the Art Deco construction relies upon for its legibility and experiential satisfaction solicits an unconscious gaze and the associative mechanisms of human subjectivity. We can now add that for associations to be effective — that is, for imagery to effectively connect viewers to the desired material — visual devices must mobilize predetermined connections. To generate notions of twentieth century modernity from a dislodged zigzag, for instance, the beholder must have correlative understandings of mass production or ‘zigzag moderne.’ These notions must be cognitively available to the viewer in order to make the shapes meaningful as Art Deco; otherwise they are not Art Deco at all but autonomous, literal forms. Yet the iconography itself is not literal. The collective presence of mismatched motifs only has in common the poetic space in allusion; the pool of imagery of the ‘World of Art Deco’ is the invisible connective tissue. Absent to the eye is the part where Napier’s barley twists and lotuses make semiotic sense. Absent to the eye is the connection between the Herschell Street site and the Navajo designs on Parker’s Chambers. As much as the buildings present us with a material reality that is explained by the fashions of the time, the correlation between the architectural iconography and the world of Art Deco exists within the beholder. That

\textsuperscript{6}Lynch, \textit{Image of the City}, 3.
one could grasp broad (usually nostalgic) content from such lose semiotics points to the pervasive pool of imagery that so readily generates the temporalized, gendered, geospatial caricatures of Art Deco. It is not always the iconography or symbol that ultimately engages the viewer but rather the manner of their displacement or abstraction. It is the very process of symbolic extraction and resettlement that does the communicative work. For example, it is not the koru or the lotus that counts. Rather, it is the modern and thus spatial, temporal, archaeological, imperial, commercial or simply decorative framing of them that is allusive. Modernity — the spatiotemporal agency of the modern condition — is expressed in the very act of situating cultural signs. In this way, Art Deco depicts one thing so as to represent another. A zigzag might be depicted, but modernity is expressed. Thus contiguous imagery is the mechanism by which Art Deco exploits and distributes vicarious memory and nostalgia.

Contiguity denotes two ideas that sit side by side: when you say knife, I say fork. We are conditioned to associate one idea with another. How can architecture so tremendously dissimilar as the Scinde Building and the Chrysler Building be related when they are so obviously different? How are the Hoover Dam’s angels related to a Bakelite radio? Less specific than actual iconography, the answer has to do with associated concepts, and just as knife is to fork, so is ‘Art Deco’ to interwar glamour and technological progress. Napier’s Art Deco is about superstructural qualities. Ideas about place and identity are derived from connections to collectivised memory and nationalized nostalgia. The formal reality of the edifices gained popular status when their association with the past came back into favour. Their representational capacity returned when viewers became newly receptive to the signs displayed. One’s ability to perceive Napier as an Art Deco City, therefore, depends on one’s familiarity with the pool of imagery from which it derives its atmosphere. Art Deco icons are only emblematic if you are familiar with the cultural history in which they are set. A ziggurat does not necessarily connote the glamour of the jazz age. Why should a fountain represent a culture of youth? In the same way one approaches kiwiana by learning something of twentieth century New Zealand culture or, arbitrarily, the psychobilly subculture by first understanding something of punk rock and rockabilly, one understands Art Deco by learning about any combination of Art Nouveau, film noir, period travel posters, the Ballets Russes, the social impacts of World War I, the Great Depression, technological innovations, archaeological discoveries and so on.
When symbolic forms are put side-by-side under the Art Deco umbrella they are rarely read literally but rather contiguously and poetically. Fragmented ideas are swept into a pool of signs that create a mirage of sentiment and content. Just as poetry condenses and liberates ideas through onomatopoeia, phonaesthetics, metre and metaphor to create incantatory effects, so Art Deco abbreviates, juxtaposes, patternizes, dislodges, accentuates and arranges visual forms to temporalize and culturally position objects.

The air of enchantment that Art Deco continues to inspire among admirers, the gravity of its historical presence and, significantly, its cultural endurance, lies most specifically in its broad associations with and conservation of desire in a less than settled world (both historically and presently). The bricks and mortar, or steel and concrete, of any given Art Deco facade has an immaterial and increasingly virtual life that has become an inextricable part of their expressive identities. A chevron is not a simple display of geometry but a reference to mechanical rhythm, and a sunburst is not a celestial body but the dawning of new age. The buildings are legible because they arrive with visual mythology, and we are culturally prepared to look at them. In Napier, for example, *Deco Terminus* (fig. 83) asks us to comprehend a composition by calling to mind what we already perceive to be true about Art Deco. We understand why this woman is dancing because we have preconceived knowledge of the proposed interwar Art Deco Zeitgeist. There is nothing in this image to actually describe music but we are familiar enough with the Charleston and images of flappers dancing to know that her pose denotes jazz or swing music. We also know from previously instilled experiences that her fashion is contemporary to the 1930s. If we know Napier, then we also recognize that the doorway behind her is in fact the entrance to the Tobacco Building located in Port Ahuriri. Where we recognize the latter, we are asked to suspend some logic as we note that the Tobacco Building was an operative factory inhabited during the day by working women and not neatly composed festive dancers shod in heels (fig. 84). In the same vein, we note that the entrance in allusion has no such greeting or city name inscribed upon it. This fictional but descriptive inscription gives the tobacco factory a newly fabricated character over and above the character it has actually developed through use while simultaneously providing allusions to a ‘New Zealand Deco’ with te reo Māori greeting “Haere mai” added for geographic and cultural impact. Thus, we recognize the touristic rather than informational function of the image as we harness contiguous concepts in order to deduce meaning from its content.
When we move away from Napier’s facades and into their urban contextualization we meet with Art Deco’s poetic space in full operation. In terms of the city’s history there is little that is unexpressed and much that is described, quantified, documented and narrated. Literature has been duly concerned with the collation of individual histories and the origins of the exhibited styles rather than bringing to bear the cultural impact of the periodised aesthetic. In Napier, we encounter a broad array of histories: public, cultural, geological, urban, oral, economic, and world. We also have the histories of local clubs, groups, industries and schools. We have no information about the social operation of Art Deco. There is little discussion on the tacit knowledge that has been naturalised in its wake and those values and ideas for which Art Deco, just one aspect of local culture, has become a vehicle. This may be expected of a recently developed culture within a comparatively young nation – New Zealand has “moved from settlement to cell phones in less than two lifetimes”— but the Art Deco story is now established enough that we are able to step out of a state of self-immersion in order to look back in upon it.\(^7\)

Authors have developed a coherent story for the development of Napier, in which themes of progress and courage culminated in the new cityscape. However, the metanarrative – the narrative about the processes of historical understanding, experience and transferal of knowledge – is less immediate. The historical theorist Anton Froeyman suggests that “people constantly distort what really happened by telling stories about it and by fitting it into predetermined representational schemes.”\(^8\) From a similar perspective the architectural historian Gülsüm Baydar observes that it is the function of a narrative to impose “consistence, coherence, regularity, and fullness on phenomena, which might otherwise be disparate and incommensurable.”\(^9\) Baydar is pinpointing the processes of mediation by which difference is translated into similarity, discontinuity into continuity and, as the next chapter observes, metonymy into metaphor. Highlighting agency and the regulation of normativity via storytelling, Cronon writes that:

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Narrative succeeds to the extent that it hides the discontinuities, ellipses, and contradictory experiences that would undermine the intended meaning of its story. Whatever its overt purpose, it cannot avoid a covert exercise of power: it inevitably sanctions some voices while silencing others. A powerful narrative reconstructs common sense to make the contingent seem determined and the artificial seem natural.\(^{10}\)

In Napier, the mediation of aesthetic difference is wholly enabled by Froeyman’s notion of ‘predetermined representational schemes.’ Explicitly, the imported Art Deco and ‘city as phoenix-rising’ discourses have normalized the presence of a jazz age Zeitgeist as the dominant interpretation of post-disaster architecture. Choosing to develop the Art Deco atmosphere (over, say, that of a Spanish Mission fiesta) asserts connectivity with a very specific sort of modernity and in so doing denies their greater, more authentic, cultural disparity. This is significant because that which the facades are taken to represent, is not the lived culture of 1930s Napier but an imported romantic ideal. What is more, in approaching Art Deco as an agent of cultural continuity — an arbiter of reason amidst historical mutation — we are not souveniring or rendering visible the vanished landscape but bolstering the present one with surplus replicas. Continuity is achieved by furnishing the present landscape with self-referential symbolic forms rather than by tying it to the departed Edwardian scene.\(^{11}\)

Preconceived ideas about the appearance of Art Deco provide a value-gauge on local architecture while the emergence of associated symbols on walls and windows, drains and street signs provide latter-day confirmation of those ideas. These urban affirmations of historical fiction may eventually come to obscure the starker reality of the buildings – their authentic and unpretentious quiddity as well as their spatial complexities. If we were to genuinely revivify history, for instance, we would camp on the shoreline in post-traumatic distress while getting angry about a lack of funding and adequate information regarding the city’s reconstruction.

In the realm of heritage the (architectural/art/social) historian plays the role of legitimator, arbitrator, and storyteller but there is a role for existentialists too. The various channels for discourse inevitably cause epistemological mutations; language builds fences and images impart perspective. Ongoing constructions of Napier’s


heritage must include the character of the buildings prior to the onset of Art Deco (especially in their ‘invisible’ phase between 1940 and 1980). Meanwhile, critical accounts of the heritage quadrant need to acknowledge the hefty cultural influence and intensive interests of the local institutions whose authority depends upon and whose very obligation it has been to establish an appealing and explicable urban landscape from a set of atypical and anachronistic streetscapes.

**Buying Time, Selling Heritage**

What, then, is time? I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled.

Saint Augustine, AD 397

All objects are temporal in that the physical occupation of space has duration. How the individual is positioned in relation to time, or vice versa, innately affects the habits of people as they rush ‘through’ their daily lives. Teaching a child about time is to teach something invisible but measurable, abstract yet predictable. The ‘Mississippis’ counted as the apple falls from the tree, the inevitable sunrise after the evening’s sunset, or the return of the spring after winter’s snow provide our lives with pace, cyclicality and certainty. Yet our personal experiences of time are thoroughly unstable. Despite the fact that “The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of sixty minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is,” our sense of it is susceptible to change. Our experience of time varies according to psychological condition — it flies when we are happily engrossed and it slows upon an accident. Where time is perceived as static (as depicted in Walter Sickert’s *Ennui* or any Victorian glass-box taxidermy display) it is suffocating, but where it is perceived as flowing (in dappled sunlight or upon New Year’s Eve) it is compelling and can appear quite dynamic — if it can be said to ‘appear’ at all.

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The abstractions of time seem to manifest through movement, sound and light, that is, via sensorial phenomena that exist in constant flux. Visual artists have long been responsive to shifting time, imbuing natural events with portentous feeling. We see temporal profundity underline Claude Monet’s fleeting light, Lucian Freud’s aging bodies, Vincent Van Gogh’s wilting flowers, or Frida Kahlo’s *memento mori* while Salvador Dali’s melting clocks have become a household reference for the bizarre surreality of our temporal perception. Language is inherently temporal and has likewise seen poets bring immediacy to memory and eternity to brevity through linguistic devices. The ravages of time over life dominate as we are frequently reminded that “nothing ’gainst Time's scythe can make defence.”\(^{14}\) Perceptions of the present moment are stretched like elastic in the profound whimsies of Lewis Carroll, Dr. Seuss or A.A. Milne as picture books from a young age pull us away from calendar units into vivid abstractions. Meanwhile, on screen, films like *Donnie Darko* (2001), *The Butterfly Effect* (2004), or *Back to the Future* (1985) have filled our minds with perspectival anomalies — not time as it is measured but time as it seems.

Civic and cultural manifestations of time draw much less upon internalized temporal sensations in their call for external and constant measures. Public time is impressed via quantifiable portions of visible, memorable, and cyclical moments — celestial movements, seasonal changes and historical events often dictate these. School terms, university intakes, public holidays, festivals, harvests, or nine-five work days set the rhythms by which human groups communally function. They usher us through life in predictable cycles pinpointing milestones while offering reassurance in the daily, monthly or annual return of recognizable temporal signifiers (sunrises, full moons, Matariki rising, or flowers in bloom). Yet, despite seasonal returns, the years are counted as continuous and compounding. The ancient poet Virgil suggested in his *Georgics* that time’s passing is linear and irrevocable (*tempus fugit*), and Benjamin Franklin famously suggested that “lost time is never found again” — linearity, progress, and loss.\(^{15}\) Humankind is moving ahead and every advancing moment is a new untainted one. It is as though every day that is crossed-off the calendar marks an

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\(^{14}\) William Shakespeare, “When I do count the clock that tells the time” (Sonnet 12, 1609).

obsolete space and those blank boxes that lay ahead are tangible spaces we are yet to fill. By this logic midnight marks the Rubicon as we continually press into new territory. Every day we leave behind spells of existence in an unreachable yesterday. As we stand in the present the Red Queen’s advice to Alice echoes: “Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!”

One can sense how insidious these linear conceptions of time are by observing contemporary trends in personal archiving. As Instagram would attest, we photograph, document, save, celebrate and record everything: mealtime, hairdos, kitchen sinks and teacups, sleeping pets or trees that look like people. We stay visible virtually and can even set Facebook to post on our behalf once we are deceased. This is a form of social connectivity that extends into obsession as bodily presence is groomed for virtual presence, to be acknowledged now lest tomorrow we forget the nuances of today.

Active self-representation and pre-emptive visions of oneself in hindsight (‘this will look good in the photograph’/’we will save this memento for her twenty-first birthday’) have become neatly interwoven in the daily experiences of the developed world. In popular, certainly commercial, discourse our lives are time-lines being filled and, as such, even more pressing than a loss of the past is preparation for an eternally absent future. “Live in the moment,” announces the meme that was automatically posted while the account holder slept. “Live in the moment” read those staring at screens that psychically remove them from the spaces they presently inhabit. Despite the irony of losing the present to the future for the very reason of preparing souvenirs of it, tomorrow weighs in on the creation of today as heritage. Moreover, as material traces of our pasts continually disintegrate the desire for, not just historical knowledge but historical experiences gains cultural momentum.

The heritageisation process distributes moments and promises experiences. Ferrymead Heritage Park in Christchurch “allow[s] visitors to experience life for the...”

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17 This is not to override vanity, which is almost indisputably the primary notion being indulged but it is to stress the desire to record-keep and save ‘evidence’ of select events; Virtual presence is a turn of phrase adapted from Michael Windover: Michael Windover and R. W. Liscombe, *Art Deco: A Mode of Mobility* (Québec: Presses de L’Université du Québec, 2012), 64.
early residents of Christchurch.”

The Goldfields Mining Centre in Otago is “Where the Past and Present Meet” and Northland’s Gumdiggers Park and Ancient Buried Kauri Forest promises the experience of “real NZ gumdigging history” that “REALLY WAS HERE, [and] was almost EXACTLY LIKE THIS.” Ray Cumming may have blithely suggested that “time…is what keeps everything from happening at once” but, in a serious turn, the heritage industry vies for the ‘nowness’ of everything. Historical representations have the capacity to bridge and collapse fragmented, random, and disparate events by delineating, grouping, framing, naming and then placing them. Doreen Massey argues that the reduction of space to “a dimension for the display/representation of different moments of time” is reductive — yet this is very much the act of heritage tourism. Time is administered within a present that, upon apprehension, is also always our immediate past. Visualized like this, time is an unattainable folly being suffocated by the traps of its own conflicting chronology. When history becomes heritage, however, human temporality is recognized, distributed and characterized by climactic moments (instances of transgression, progression and mutation) so much so that the quotidian steadiness of the place ballet can easily be drowned out or disproportionately elevated.

It is, therefore, a task of the heritage industry to find balance between the state of being so progressive and inclusive that it adequately represents nothing, and so intensively detailed that representations are too narrow in scope to be nationally significant (compare the representational ambitions of Te Papa Tongarewa with a smaller institution like the Castle Pamela, a doll museum in Tirau).

When the fabric of heritage is Art Deco there is a double impression of time. There is time as it is represented by the given artefact, and there is time as it is measured in the space surrounding that artefact. This might be the duplicity of a Clarice Cliff teapot in a twenty-first century kitchen, or the streamlined Public Restrooms in the middle of Palmerston North. In this manner, Napier city deals in ‘Art

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21 Monotony not being of a negative sort but rather the uncelebrated daily rhythms of life.
Deco time’ and ‘Napier time.’ This is a distinction between Art Deco as a periodising device and The Art Deco city as a heritage space — one is past tense, one is present tense, but they inexorably coexist. The pool of historic imagery that accompanies Art Deco has merged with the pool of imagery belonging to present day Napier. Hence there is a peculiar play of interwar stereotypes and modern recreational associations as visual cultural references merge in the locality of Napier. Signifiers of spatial difference — palm trees and planes or fashion and buildings — sit side-by-side in contiguous reference, semiotically bridging human geographies while advancing an antiquated image of a first-world modernity (fig. 85-86).

Art Deco’s iconography (its representations of cultures in time and across space) demarcates the conception of a shrinking world both historically and in the present. This is beneficial in New Zealand, where Napier — promoted as “Deco on the Edge” when the city hosted the International Coalition of Art Deco Societies (ICADS) World Congress in 1999 — has had to contend with geographical isolation in both its claims of stylistic authenticity and in its recreational appeal to international tourists. In light of its strong connotations of place, mobility, discovery, and cultural exoticism, it is unlikely to be coincidental that Art Deco, rather than the other modern styles and their ‘atmospheres,’ is the aesthetic of choice for Napier’s heritage tourism: Art Deco is always a spatiotemporal issue. In the 1930s increased mobility meant that human movement across space (space as surface) overlapped with ideas about human movement through time (time as space). People from the ‘modern world’ could visit the ‘old world’ and geographical distance was neatly, visually, abridged. Modernity itself was impacting upon perceptions of time and space. The 1930s was an era where the world, for some, began to seem smaller with air travel and ocean liners, motor cars and railways cutting through the earth’s geography and it is easy to see how this affected ideas about what seemed possible and what was in reach were changing. Travels to Giza to see the pyramids or to America via the Panama Canal were all very compelling leisure time activities for those located in Central Europe. India was a cultural adventure to those from Japan. A Bakelite radio brought the city home for rural dwellers. With many areas of the globe becoming increasingly accessible to anyone who could afford a ticket it is also easy to see how the exchange of ideas would have multiplied.

This ‘shortening’ of time and space — as compelled by reconceptualised distances — is analogous to the spatiotemporal revolution brought on by the Internet
and the present era’s increased immediacy of communication in real time, across time zones. Douglas Rushkoff has discussed the fragmentation of time and the present obsession with keeping up with endless streams of nowness (largely online) in fear of falling ‘behind.’ This connects contemporary compulsions to ‘keep up’ with the Victorian fear of stagnation, whereby cultures could ‘regress’ to a state of ‘savagery’ should they not continue to progress ‘ahead’ at pace. Darwinian perceptions of time as a unidirectional road to the physical and moral evolution of civilisation are still surprisingly prevalent in the digital era and are entirely in keeping with historical interests in the territorialisation of time. It is no coincidence, for instance, that time-travel was making a prominent mark in the science-fiction literature of the early twentieth century. Nor is it incidental that the imagery of that period is in high circulation in the present day given the popularity of vintage fashions and hybrid genres like historical fiction or alternative history. From the nineteenth century time travel was increasingly linked to three-dimensional understandings within which the human passage through time was explained by quasi-scientific theory (as opposed to antiquated mythological fantasies that used paranormal or supernatural explanations). Time travel in science fiction, a genre that still readily adopts Art Deco aesthetics in film and literature, overtly parallels the territorial and geospatial operations of empire as well as archaeological interests in human cultures from an ‘advanced’ perspective (even if it is aliens who are the advanced ones). The early fascination with reformed and ‘scientifically informed’ representations of time and space are also visible to different ends in twentieth century advertising (figs. 87-88) and the artistic movements of Modernism — consider the philosophies associated with Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, and Surrealism. The Cubist idea that we might document three-dimensional objects in two dimensions, for instance, has a profound correlation to the conceptual and compositional flattening of time and space that we witness as cultures are reduced, aligned and represented in Art Deco both past and present.

Visual culture is a pervasive distributor of spatiotemporal knowledge. When we observe representations of things we have not witnessed firsthand, like space-

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23 Time travel was a fashionable theme in both modern and postmodern eras fiction. It was popularized by H. G. Wells’ epic novel *The Time Machine* (1895), although Edward Page Mitchell’s "The Clock that Went Backward" (1881) predates it.
24 Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) embodies this neatly.
travel, a given work will often provide the initial framework by which we later measure or remember the subject. Oftentimes this means unlearning ridiculous compositions and characters that hold little relation to reality. This has resonance both spatially and cognitively. T.V. and film are particularly relevant here. Whole generations will tell you that it was by some combination of *Star Wars*, *Mork and Mindy*, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, *Red Dwarf*, *Star Trek*, *Alien* or the *X-Files* that they formulated their fantastical constructions of space travel. Likewise, *The Beverley Hillbillies*, *Northern Exposure*, or *Home* and *Away* may have loosely informed initial impressions of Appalachian, Alaskan, or Eastern Australian lifestyles in the same way that *Dynasty*, *Goodnight Sweetheart*, *Mash*, *Happy Days*, *That Seventies Show*, *Poirot* or *Boardwalk Empire* may have concocted the go-to imagery for imagining other eras. This is not to suggest passive viewing or gullibility on the part of mass-audiences. Nor is it to say that we accept these viewings as factual or inherently significant. However, the illustration of spaces that were hitherto unconceived in viewers’ minds has the capacity to create influential and lasting mental structures. New imagery carves out spaces that will later be filled with comparative knowledge.

The visual vocabulary of Art Deco has formulated a view of Napier’s past that is now so ingrained and singular that it has become difficult to distinguish its parameters. Its constant representation and its sustained relevance has allowed for credible and incredible overlaps to coexist. The pool of imagery at work in Napier comes to a head every February during the Art Deco Festival, when representations of the past thoroughly transcend the abbreviated architectural detailing presented. The festival presents Napier’s Art Deco as a weave of British imperialism fused with American notions of glamour, the combination of which negates geography while simultaneously generating an anachronistic sense of time and space. The actor Steven Wright joked that he “went to a restaurant that serves ‘breakfast at any time’ [and so] ordered French toast during the Renaissance.” In passing this remark, Wright

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humorously subverted the contiguous imagery/meaning associated with the language presented so as to draw on an unexpected (yet equally valid by literal translation) frame of reference. With a similar freedom of semiotic interpretation, one no longer tries to read the symbols on Napier’s facades literally. The iconography available is instead absorbed into the synthesis of a new composition, namely, the ‘vintage character’ of the city. This is where pastiche, kitsch and our metamodern relationship with Art Deco begin, because we read the facades with renewed spatiotemporal knowledge. Just as Wright knew that ‘any time’ referred to the twenty-four hour cycle, we know that speedlines and ziggurats refer to visions of an antiquated future — yet we optimistically project onto them anyway.

Through semiotic revival, kitsch objects and pastiche in architecture situate us existentially. It is our revised and removed relation to historical objects and media derived from them that tells us we have moved into an altogether different time. Sentimental objects that are enjoyed ironically pose a reaction to history and to the historical context. Kitsch is often a fun revival where the past simply represents a time that is foreign to the beholder, but it always also marks a reaction to sociocultural, and hence spatiotemporal, change. This is pertinent to the processes of heritageisation. Art Deco Napier, which presented architectural pastiche in its 1930s production and is now selling kitsch in order to contextualise that pastiche, has become tied to an anachronistic image of New Zealand’s past, one that is heavily associated with the ‘golden age of advertising’ — complete with its chauvinism, racism, and middle-class consumerism. This may reveal a cultural maturity that allows New Zealanders to detachedly look back on its exploitative and romanticised history. However, based on daily observations as a New Zealander, I would suggest this is a generous conclusion.

Despite overdue institutional changes and respectful ambition, New Zealand, in its daily manifestations, is not yet enough removed from cultural, sexual and gender-based discrimination to coolly resell the conditions of historical inequity. Current interests in kitsch are more akin to a metamodern return to the consumer landscape within which sentimental, idealistic, and naively optimistic sources have renewed

symbolic appeal because of an assumed departure from their original conditions. Claudia Bell has observed that kiwiana, a New Zealand-specific type of kitsch, has recently gone ‘upmarket.’ She argued that kiwiana sidesteps politics that were formerly considered inappropriate in order to recontextualise associated imagery. It is this recontextualisation, however, that is utterly ambiguous, and the suggested ties to metamodernism described above wholly depend on the reality of an intellectual shift. At what point is an image recontextualised? Where are the visual signifiers of change? Often there are none; the viewer is the assumed difference as imagery is viewed through a revised and politically engaged lens. Theoretically, this allows evolved ideals to play out via antiquated semiotics since the viewer responds with progressive cultural awareness. There is of course no single answer to where cultures stand or where the agency lies, but the extent to which current presentations are removed from original exploitative practices is questionable – something not unique to Napier. It is thus important to be open minded about how informed, renewed and empowering the revivalist practices of kitsch and pastiche are for different groups.

As a generalised image of a bracketed past, however, kitschy New Zealand kiwiana aesthetically complements Art Deco even if only by using the period style to stage the dance of vicarious nostalgia for international audiences. Bell argues that raiding the past is a non-historical way of knowing the past. Regardless of ethical integrity, unwitting disparities or cultural intention, this is certainly the baseline of Napier’s imagined past in its association with all things vintage. As a category, things vintage have been reclaimed and, ironically, the epithet ‘kitsch’ now has the capacity to increase both the value and appeal of related objects. Theodor Adorno concluded that:

People want to have fun. A fully concentrated and conscious experience of art is possible only to those whose lives do not put such a strain on them that in their spare time they want relief from both boredom and effort simultaneously. The whole sphere of cheap

commercial entertainment reflects this dual desire. It induces relaxation because it is predigested.\textsuperscript{32}

The pre-digested imagery of early advertising is deceptively ‘easy.’ While not being passively received as fact, it contributes to the pool of imagery that aligns Art Deco with material progress and the metaphysical connotations of first world optimism and progress. In many ways Art Deco looks like success and any ‘vintage’ manifestation of wealth, consumption, glamour, liberation or frivolity may occupy that space neatly. In Napier, this space extends to ‘local’ anachronistic references to British soldiers, nurses, steamrollers, and penny-farthings. In noting the lack of inspiration derived from actual history and the iconography on the actual buildings — eagles, cherubs, lotuses and koru — understandings of Art Deco are clearly poetic. Individual parts collude in the production of an atmospheric and fanciful whole.

Hayden White described this creation of a ‘fictive space’ in which the past might function in his book \textit{The Practical Past}. White writes that the practical past

\textellipsis is elaborated in the service of “the present”, is related to this present in a practical way, and from which, therefore, we can draw lessons and apply them to the present, to anticipate the future (or at least the proximate future) and provide reasons, if not justification, for actions to be taken in the present on behalf of a future better than the current dispensation.\textsuperscript{33}

The practical past arrives in opposition to the historical past. The historical past is the domain of the objective observer and offers no lessons of interest to the present. The historical past is the past as constructed objectively by historians. It consists of discrete events that have no historical causation and is informed by archival material and empirical evidence. In contrast to this, the practical past is made up of “memories, illusions, vagrant information, attitudes and values which the individual or the group summons up as best they can to justify, dignify, excuse, alibi or make a case for actions to be taken in the prosecution of a life project.”\textsuperscript{34} It can be argued that, spurred on by a very real past, Napier’s Art Deco culture operates within a fictive space that


\textsuperscript{34} White, \textit{The Practical Past}, 16.
explains and sustains an interest in the preservation of Napier’s architecture and the heritage tourism that surrounds it. The distortion of reality in the service of Napier’s mythification explains its style of construction whilst imbuing it with moral value and social significance.35

**Earthquake: Catalytic not Cataclysmic**

Poems, quotes and metaphors are dotted all around the Art Deco quadrant, and there can be no mistake in grasping a sense of history on the site. One of the most explicit examples of public historical commentary is currently situated on the facade of the OPSM building on the corner of Emerson and Hastings Streets (fig. 89). Taken from the prose of Peter Wells’ film *Newest City on the Globe* and presented as a poem in cursive font, the wall reads:

Any town is more than its property
any place is a collection of memory
habits
of all the connections
between daybreak and dusk
on hillcrest lovenest bus stop
this is the enduring sense of place
as is the sense of all
that has happened
of history
heartbreak
backache
the stories of our grandparents
sing for us
What makes one town different from another?36

Within this text we see ‘place’ emerge as a site marked by the residues of experience and memory. Our sense of place relies upon the habits exercised there, our memories of those habits, and our knowledge of its history. These are the qualities that transform a mere set of decorative edifices into a set of signposts. We are connected to worn concrete by stories, by words recounting events, chronologies, our forbearers’ intentions and the outcomes of their efforts (history, backache, heartbreak). We are not to forget that this particular town is distinguished from others through its fateful earthquake story. The existential question of what it is that makes one place different

from another resonates with eighteenth century French writer, historian and philosopher Voltaire’s response to the Lisbon Disaster (also an earthquake) and his rejection of the trite axiom ‘All is well’ (*tout est bien*). In the following excerpt from 1755, Voltaire laments the cataclysmic disaster that befell the city on All Saints Day that year and refuses the idea that it was a reconcilable act of God avenging the sinful:

Unhappy mortals! Dark and mourning earth!
Affrighted gathering of human kind!
Eternal lingering of useless pain!
Come, ye philosophers, who cry, “All’s well,”
And contemplate this ruin of a world.
Behold these shreds and cinders of your race,
This child and mother heaped in common wreck,
These scattered limbs beneath the marble shafts—
A hundred thousand whom the earth devours,
Who, torn and bloody, palpitating yet,
Entombed beneath their hospitable roofs,
In racking torment end their stricken lives.
To those expiring murmurs of distress,
To that appalling spectacle of woe,
Will ye reply: “You do but illustrate
The iron laws that chain the will of God”?
Say ye, ‘er that yet quivering mass of flesh:
“God is avenged: the wage of sin is death”?
What crime, what sin, had those young hearts conceived
That lie, bleeding and torn, on mother’s breast?
Did fallen Lisbon deeper drink of vice
Than London, Paris, or sunlit Madrid?37

Writing in the context of the Enlightenment, Voltaire points out the capriciousness of nature and the meaninglessness of such disastrous natural events. He argues that even if this violence were attributable to God then there is still so much to mourn. He suggests that it is only human pride that would ever attempt to put positive reason to such ‘storms.’38 He later poses that it is a love of man, rather than God, that makes the horror so tragic. Whereas a love of God makes sense of the earthquake’s devastation within discourses of avenged sin and divination, a love of man underscores its utter wastefulness. Voltaire thus spurns the idea that this was a necessary moral act by God’s will and advises that in the aftermath ‘all is definitely not well’ — either

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38 Voltaire wrote about ‘tranquil spectators’ who “calmly seek the reason of such storms.” Voltaire, “On the Lisbon Disaster.”
philosophically (where one’s faith can morally endorse such a gruesome scene) or physically (in light of the human loss and material devastation).

That such an epic moment of historical discontinuity could be moralized or reasoned for emotional consolation (to inspire hope, excuse the tragedy, or to begin processes of comprehension and acceptance) is pertinent to our Napier example – if not via religion, then via modernist idealism and the doctrine of progress. Voltaire was struck by the fragility of human life and the irreconcilability of such a colossal disaster with “the great eternal cause” and was questioning how those who make sense of it through belief in a universal order could seriously claim that Lisbon was deserving while other cities “London, Paris, and sunlit Madrid” were not.\(^\text{39}\) The notion of retribution, against which Voltaire writes, is the inverse of the meritorious approach that we absorb in the Napier discourse, an approach Wells tacitly promotes in his film (observed in the next chapter) and which constitutes the celebratory character of the new architecture.

Napier’s earthquake has been explained as if the city was predominantly fortunate to have experienced the calamity when it did. The disaster has come to be synonymous with an increase in work during the Great Depression and the all-important introduction of modernism to New Zealand, within a tale where progress, aesthetic changes in architecture, a successful emergence from the strain of depression, and a move away from passé Edwardian mores are each seamlessly aligned with each other and then affixed to the current success of Napier’s heritage tourism.

Architectural difference is enlarged to include cultural difference, as if the present situation — within which the city is conceived of as a profitable and glorious Art Deco monument — was not only planned with great foresight by the opportunistic architects but is also somewhat indebted to the earthquake that, in an unexpected plot-twist, hastened the transfiguration of the city while literally producing new ground for expansion on Marine Parade and in Marewa. The buildings appear as the conclusive city product; an eminent manifestation of, and vessel for, the inherent ‘spirit’ of the city. It is as if a face more germane than the pre-existing settler one had finally been given form upon a clean slate.

\[^{39}\text{According to the Protestant church, the earthquake was caused by its large population of Roman Catholics. Voltaire, “On the Lisbon Disaster.”}\]
Literature suggests that the earthquake had a levelling effect socially and materially (as discussed in Chapter Three), and it is commonly perceived that Napier was, despite its loses, now free to expand and develop both its function and appearance in a manner that was, notwithstanding the death and damage, desirable to contemporary modernist architects. In this way, the earthquake is seen as catalytic rather than obstructive, insofar as it sped up processes along desired trajectories. I have already argued the ways in which the Napier site was not a tabula rasa upon which the new architecture might be constructed. I will now add to that argument the idea that there is an ‘earthquake as providence’ discourse woven into the public psyche. So where Voltaire was disgusted by the irrationality of Lisbon as (im)morally deserving, Napier’s ‘earthquake as providence’ metanarrative situates the city in the hands of fortune, not in terms of its losses of course, but in terms of the unusual opportunities that could be forged in its wake.

In the text from his film that is painted on the OPSM building, Wells does not allude to a sense of providence, but his poetic interpretations do frame the post-disaster architecture as vehicles for identity. Unlike Voltaire, Wells focused on the post-disaster place-making processes rather than on the physical and ethical trauma of the event itself. Admittedly, the two rather disparate authors were working and thinking in the wildly different circumstances. Their ambitions were vastly different and a comparison of their differences would be meaningless. Nonetheless, the city subject and earthquake experience in discussion can be correlated in two valuable ways. Firstly, in both instances we see a devastating earthquake, albeit to different scales, wipe out cities (Lisbon was actually one of twenty cities to be struck down), take lives, see bloodshed and trauma made visible, and township become a collective identity. While one author was writing at the time of the disaster (Voltaire) and the other retrospectively, we get the impression that where Lisbon or Napier are concerned, disaster is bound to a revised sense of community – especially the private ‘self’ in the public space. We are presented with two instances of a displaced civic identity in the wake of sudden physical disruption. In both life and literature the disruption caused by the respective earthquakes enabled each city to become an abstracted concept; the genius loci was released from its built forms. In being unexpectedly and catastrophically uprooted from a familiar environment, communities were forced to see from a new position where they had previously stood. This is much like looking back on one’s footprints in wet sand, where hollows in the ground harbour all the
connotations and weight of a body now absent. The footprint in our case was that of a city, and the lifeblood removed was the people that dwelt there. Hence, between the two authors we can glean an impression of the human need for post-disaster place-affirmation and some consideration of the lives that made the space a place.

Secondly, the question of whether or not a town could possibly deserve such calamity occupies the same intellectual space as the notion that a town could be “more than its property” insofar as a precondition of ‘township’ in each case is its collective identity. In both poems we are not dealing in mere bricks and mortar but engaging with the weight and sentimental worth of the sites, be they heretical, holy, apathetic, romantic or nostalgic. In both cases there is an emphasis on trauma and physical toil in making a space ‘place’ and this, be it deemed wasteful or heroic, leads to enquiry over our historical consciousness of the post-disaster experience. This enquiry is a matter of the shape given to cataclysm in order for rehabilitation to take place. For Voltaire destruction marked an opportunity to categorically question blind faith. For Wells it was a chance to question what it is that makes a space a place. Hence where Voltaire removes any sense of moral justice, Wells inaugurates notions of soul, sentiment and character so as to construct a sense of meaning (this knowing return to sentiment and myth in the present day once again implies the postmodern metamodern shift).

It is in the cross-pollination of objective fact and the post-production of coherent storytelling that we can situate the retrospective construction of the Art Deco City. Anchored precariously between myth and mourning we meet the illustrated history of Napier and the poetic space in which it operates — the aestheticized past according to a handful of victors.40 The suggestion of myth is more than alliterative folly with the metaphor of Napier rising as a phoenix from its ashes being an ongoing source of allegory for the city. Here we might depart from Voltaire as we note that Napier’s spiritual concerns lay not with the church but with secular ideas about modernity. We see in contention not Christian notions of resurrection but pagan concepts of rebirth discursively used to invigorate the triumphal rebuilding of the city.

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In Greek mythology the phoenix is a bird that continually dies and is reborn, with its new body emerging from the very ashes of its former self. In being closely associated with the sun, time, empire and progression, the phoenix rising is an image that readily complements Art Deco iconography. Its origins in antiquity give it enduring grandeur, and the climactic visual appeal roused by the vital moment of regeneration gives the metaphor allegorical strength and cult-like status in popular culture. As a popular metaphor the phoenix is thus conceptually accessible, legible and graphically striking — typical criterion for the Art Deco genre. In a car park off Tennyson Street, artist Carole A. Stewart ostensibly represented a phoenix in graphic form (this denotation is stated in the title of the artwork, the graphic itself is less explicit). The white plaster wall reads “Amazing that resulting from this terror unfettered, destruction unstoppable – evolved this city of Deco Delight” (fig. 90). The wall is not grand or striking, nor is it a space of particular significance. The small piece of prose keeps the Art Deco idea visible where it is architecturally absent. It makes an unremarkable space remarkable by implying the very presence of the wall is an achievement. This is a unique example because, while it is a frequently used linguistic device in descriptions of the city’s rebirth, we do not see the phoenix graphically represented elsewhere. The *Spirit of Napier* fountain is said to represent the city rising like a phoenix, but this is an allusion to the allegorical content of the sculpture rather than a description of the forms depicted. The sculpture itself presents a woman on a triumphal, if phallic, podium.

The rising phoenix metaphor was quickly employed at the time of the rebuild and as such presents a long standing spatiotemporal spin on the disaster. The architecture, when conceived as a phoenix (explicitly or by implication) means we are able to avoid truly dealing with the full emotional impact of death and loss. These grim notions are made palatable by what was subsequently gained, that which was made possible, made better, and made greater as a result of the city’s collapse. The role of the facades is in this way akin to that of a psychologist burdened with the task of bringing closure, forgiveness, and the ability to ‘move on’ by transferring concepts of trauma from an individual to a collective level.\(^4\) Here we return to the notion of ‘building back better’ as a public strategy for processing such devastating crises.

Such linguistic devices are not empty but have the capacity to create an enduring sense of place and personhood. In Gerard Smyth’s documentary film *When a City Falls*, centred on the two earthquakes that brought Christchurch to its knees in 2010 and 2011, Neil Graham observed how the disaster-immersed communities were introduced to new jargon, such as liquefaction, red zone, aftershock and rehabilitation. In viewing one’s environment through these new frameworks, the ‘abstracted city’ concept mentioned above (footprints in the sand) is further cemented. The new lexicon translates one’s displacement from the familiar, and identification with a new norm can begin. Within new vocabularies — be they disaster-oriented, political, social, artistic, architectural or domestic — previously established mindsets are opened up for revision because the collective sense of security that once anchored them has been significantly destabilized. On a physical level, the material damage that spawns jargon symbolizes instability in the old foundations: ‘damaged infrastructure’, ‘refugee camp,’ ‘recovery time objective (RTO),’ ‘risk assessment’, ‘crisis management’ and so on. The ripple effect of fallen buildings can be emotionally and spiritually profound. For instance, in New Zealand churches and cathedrals built in older masonry styles are generally unfit to withstand intensive earthquakes unless they have been recently reinforced. In their collapse, the imported construction techniques of the settler era fall short (unmodified for the shaky geological conditions of New Zealand) and the moment of their ruin becomes symbolic of spatiotemporal as well as physical change.

The collapse of major churches and cathedrals signals a need for structural and architectural change, but as recovery ensues the question of whether or not to rebuild such places at all can become symbolic of our changing regard for traditional institutions. In New Zealand churches are hugely symbolic of colonial establishment, and when such major icons as the Christchurch Cathedral or the thrice-rebuilt church of Anglican Church of Napier fall, they yield great attention and bring into question the location of civic centres. In 2012 an article in the *Sunday Star Times* discussed the civic and commercial gap left when the Christchurch Cathedral fell. It points to the footprint of the cathedral as a void to be filled:

The Anglican Church is yet to decide whether it will be rebuilt in the same form, but even if it is given the go-ahead, reconstruction is likely

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to take decades. In the meantime a new symbol of Christchurch will need to emerge and fill the vacuum.\textsuperscript{43}

Brand expert Ekant Veer, of the University of Canterbury, states in this article that the city should look at the loss of the cathedral as an opportunity to rebrand, and the earthquakes themselves should be a big part of Christchurch's new image: "It doesn't mean it becomes our marketing tool or that it's on all our propaganda: `come to the city that was munted' but it is something that I think can become a very powerful icon to show the development, the strength and the beauty of the place."\textsuperscript{44} This demonstrates how while the city-concept can be visually destabilized it is also spatially strengthened by disaster as the fall of buildings fortifies place-attachment. Hence when drastically changing conditions are framed by new language and metaphors (like liquefaction and the phoenix) the old patterns of the pioneers and other past communities are compartmentalised and historicised. History is being formulated and heritage is being identified. In Napier, the writing of history is literally on the walls.

Behind Napier’s 1930s facades, when we walk between buildings or around the back to various car parks nooks and corners, we find evidence of the ‘Words on Walls’ project. Officially recognised as ‘social sculpture,’ the project was developed by the Napier City Council. Quotes from both famous and less known authors are painted onto the walls of buildings to promote “Napier’s culture and heritage.”\textsuperscript{45} A few examples, selected because of their prominent placement, include quotations from the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (“History is a cyclic poem, written by time, upon the memories of man”), American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson (“The sky is the daily bread of the eyes,” and “The landscape belongs to the person who looks at it”; figs. 91-92). Less earnest examples include retired American actress Barbara Anderson (“I never know what to do with gossip so I just pass it on”), English poet and playwright, Robert Browning (“Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be.”) and Janet Frame (“I have decided on coffee sponge instead of chocolate as coffee is more intellectual.”).

\textsuperscript{44} Ekant Veer, quoted in Robinson, “Chalice Stands Tall.”
\textsuperscript{45} “Words on Walls,” \textit{Napier in the City}, accessed June 2017, http://www.napierinthecity.co.nz/words-on-walls/
The choice to quote authors, poets and playwrights on the walls in this way is consistent with the literary character imparted by Napier city’s street names. Nineteenth century Crown Commissioner Alfred Domett, having already exhausted the names “prominent in British Indian history” turned to the “most eminent men in literature and science of [his] day” and then to celebrated English poets for his street name inspiration. We thus see Thackeray, Tennyson, Carlyle, Dickens, Emerson, Byron, Browning, Shakespeare, Milton and Chaucer streets follow on from streets and roads such as Hyderabad, Scinde, Meeanee, Clive, Wellesley, Sale, Hardinge, Coote, Havelock, Hastings and Delhi. These street names echo the pride felt in empire and the transported British culture that acted to tame and diminish Māori cultural values at the time of settlement. The pre-existing Māori names for places were deemed by Domett to be “particularly harsh, discordant to European ears or low and disgusting in signification,” excepting the names of rivers, which appear to have remained in use.\(^{46}\) The standing tradition of employing surnames as street names adds to the ongoing agency of the past, with patriotic achievements being the key criterion for their use. While their pre-earthquake designation means that I cannot argue street names are part of the more recent efforts to ‘repopulate the architecture’ (the subject of the next chapter), they do add to the \textit{mise-en-scene} by setting the tone and character for the poetic space the city makes available. For instance, it would be interesting to know how the character of Napier’s public spaces might differ if Domett had enjoyed te reo.

The ‘Words on Walls’ project operates in conjunction with the architecture and art that surrounds it. The words meet with the character of the site as a place of reflection and memorial while being punctuated with humour that maintains the high-spirited tone of its Art Deco culture. In Napier this dual mood is in permanent oscillation. We feel the tension between reminders of trauma (and arguably the ongoing seismic threat) and the compulsion to celebrate the architectural outcome. We walk down an alley whose extended mural takes us from the moment of destruction through to the rebuild before walking out onto Emerson Street where, nearby, a bronze sculpture of the woman who led the New Napier Carnival parade is posed waving and walking her fashionable greyhound (figs. 93, 95). Napier will not let the passer-by forget its disastrous chapter and will refuse to let you feel anything other than

admiration for the civic response. We see plaques showing destruction of the sites upon which we stand at the same time as we move amidst its happy ending. Do we mourn or be merry? Is this devastated or delighted Deco? The reality is that it is both. This oscillating doublet is evidence of a community that has lived through both loss and rehabilitation, and the increasing vividness and clarity of both processes is a result of the subsequent generational interest in remembrance and the desire to connect with people and their pasts.

It comes as no surprise that while the public spaces of the Art Deco City do not acknowledge the post-earthquake suicides, the irrecoverable losses, the civil upset at the privatised decision-making process, the lack of Māori agency, and the many ongoing financial and infrastructural crises, it does make a show of that which it successfully achieved according to twenty-first century sensibilities: namely, stylistic strength and impressions of civic unity and prosperity within a narrative that lauds capitalist touristic foresight. It is obvious that a city trying to market itself would not dwell on the social struggles of its creation. A smoothly operating veneer is common to most places, especially those that were initially settled by colonisers. In terms of such struggles and, accordingly, our selective cultural remembrance, Paul Walker has suggested that:

All these cooperative activities that have been examined – the emergency building work of Fletchers; the planning activities of the Hawke’s Bay Rehabilitation Committee, the Napier Reconstruction Committee, and the Associated Architects; the legislative measures promoted by the Building Regulations Committee – [are] evidence a kind of paternalistic (fundamentally non-democratic) corporatism founded on technocratic competence. Such corporatism is essentially utopian... And it is essentially modern. The legacy that the 1931 earthquake left architecture in New Zealand, then, is not merely a collection of buildings distinguished by art deco or Spanish mission ornamental motifs of more or less quality, but more importantly a discursive milieu marked by utilitarian and hygienist concerns.47

This critical observation is significant but rare.48 Walker draws upon the spatial agency of the architecture and questions how the Art Deco styles present inviting facades that direct one’s imagination and critical awareness away from conflicted circumstances. It

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is precisely this role — of surfaces harnessed as a mode of deflection in their sweeping
concealment of conflicting conditions, and their irreverence towards temporal, spatial
and cultural chasms — that Art Deco in all spheres of production flourishes.

With concealment and deflection firmly in mind, the answer to the ‘mourn or
be merry’ question in Napier is that we are invited to do both but in consecutive order.
The losses are psychologically separated from the triumphs so that the architecture and
the spirit of Napier are foregrounded by loss though not comprised of it. The two
moments of destruction and reconstruction are set apart while the people who endured
and rebuilt the city are bestowed a ‘spirit’ that allows us to celebrate them for coping
remarkably rather than remembering them as victims. In being synonymous with this
spirit, the new architectural facades exist separately to the experiences of trauma that
were lived and processed behind them. To clarify, the Art Deco character of the
buildings obscures the distress of private and individual devastation while being
inherently sustained by and borne of it. The tendency to separate the trauma from the
triumph (the earthquake from the rebuild), and to marry them in a before-after order, is
evident in literature. When we read about the new architecture we enter the discourse
of modernism and not the discourse of disaster architecture, excepting the development
of earthquake safe building regulations. We read about the new steel reinforced
concrete structures and the reduced ornament and what it did for the architectural
styles, but we rarely encounter how the architecture performed socially outside of the
importation of modern aesthetic ideals. Outside the discourse of the ‘bright new age’
the architecture is not represented as recuperative or engaged with notions of
psychosocial and psycho-environmental consciousness.

An example of this divide in action can be also gleaned from the earthquake
exhibition at the MTG Hawkes Bay (fig. 94). The disaster is kept apart from the rebuilt
city; indeed, the rebuilt city is not featured as an outcome at all, with the exhibition
lingering on the violent moment in which the city fell. The display is utterly laden with
human pain; the sound of Morse code loops and the earthquake documentary playing
in a neighbouring room provide a soundscape of low-key distress. One is unavoidably
met with banners featuring quotes from the survivors, salvaged domestic relics, images
of ruins, excerpts from diaries, rolls of the deceased, maps, documents and photos.
One is asked to step into the moment of disaster and loss so as to fully process how
calamitous and divisive the whole event was. The disaster is isolated as an historical
disruption and its very location downstairs, in what feels like the basement of the
museum building, presents the event as substrate. It reduces the city to cinders, thus providing the lamentable ash from which the phoenix could then rise. It is not literally described in this way, but ascending the stairs to the main foyer upon exiting the visitor meets with the bright and contemporary design of the new museum building, whose enormous glass windows display the Art Deco City outside (the Masonic Hotel and T&G Dome most prominently). One gains the impression that the great earthquake is behind or below them, in a dark secluded, suspended space of memory, reflection, and suffering. For visitors to the city, the natural next step is to cross the road and enter the Art Deco Centre for their upbeat presentation of the city as an artefact forged in an era of merriment and interwar optimism – immersed depression but coping with a twinkle in the eye.

This sort of two-step waltz in discovering Napier’s earthquake history might reflect a deliberate decision to distinguish between historical fact and historical fiction, with the museum attending to the sombre facts and the Art Deco trust openly toying with the 1930s Zeitgeist. The museum’s decision to stick strictly to the moment of disaster could also be out of respect and loyalty to the Art Deco Trust, whose sole business it is to promote and preserve the history of the architecture. Regardless of the rationale behind it, this continued separation maintains the chronology of the disaster and architecture, allowing us to celebrate selected aspects of the era without feeling disloyal to or irreverent towards the survivors’ experiences. If anything, the city is framed so that our celebrations of the period architecture are a form of loyalty to, and reverence for, the survivors’ experiences with the city still standing as a monument to their ‘spirit’ and tenacity.
Chapter 5

Time and Time Again:
The Historical Representation of Napier’s Art Deco Heritage

We routinely assume that our history is behind us. In the sense, however, that after a sublime historical event our worldview lags behind with what was all too possible, our history really is before us. We have to “catch up with it.”

Eelco Runia, 2015

Napier moves forward by curating its past. The desire to document and display every detail that is complementary to the ideas that have become associated with Art Deco continues to escalate in ongoing, city-wide, place-affirming projects. As local heritage unfolds and the past is described through an Art Deco vocabulary, the city becomes a stage set for temporalised experiences. Emblems of time punctuate the urban environment and proverbs scribed on walls and monuments refer to Napier’s enduring spirit and the stasis of place in changing times. The primary purpose of Napier’s all-consuming Art Deco aesthetic, when observed as a full visual cultural ensemble, is the activation of historical sensation, historical presence and historical knowledge. Style is used as a vehicle for the promotion of poetically attached imagery and ideology. Moreover, the Art Deco City is a stage so thoroughly set for temporal interchange that it requires, or magnetically attracts, people in a state of perpetual performance.

This chapter is focused on the presence and absence of historical sensation in the spaces of heritage. The first section distinguishes notions of historical sensation, historical presence and historical knowledge. It becomes clear that while representations that impart historical knowledge can be highly descriptive they are often less affecting than those artifacts and sites which have the innate capacity to conjure sensation and presence. In the second section, we see how heritage tourism aspires to historical sensation and presence through metonym and metaphor and yet how simulacra, no matter how skillfully produced, only seem to further a conspicuous absence of the chronicled subject. The third section of this chapter then establishes the way that Art Deco operates as a mask. It is argued that while the facades conceal a site of trauma the period veneers create an ‘urban interior.’ The fourth section observes

how the poetic imagery that Napier’s Art Deco is attached to has been harnessed in film, specifically Peter Wells’ *Newest City on the Globe* (1985) and two recent music videos that incorporate postmodern and metamodern social content. We see how the buildings have come to articulate spaces for established tropes and generalised vintage archetypes to play out. This moves us into the mechanics of Art Deco as a mask and the idea the facades conceal discontinuity while projecting ‘the white ideal.’ The final section observes the way that, as the city heals, it is becoming repopulated with figures from the past. Not only is the ‘Art Deco atmosphere’ a fantasy of the present, its total embroidery and reinvention in the urban environment vividly asserts that the past, as a lived memory, is losing its lucidity.

### Historical Sensation and Historical Presence vs. Historical Knowledge

Heritage ‘experiences’ tend to treat the past as an absence that must be remedied — a gap in the present that needs to be filled with historical materiality. This perceived gap is frequently filled with metaphorical objects, things that are ‘like’ things from the past (such as Howick Historical Village in Auckland or Southland Museum’s Victoriana display). In viewing historical likenesses, audiences admire verisimilitude and, in so doing, establish temporal otherness. Temporal otherness is a byproduct of temporal difference. Where subject matter is perceived to exist in a different time the immediacy of historical presence and historical sensation is nullified. Sensation and presence are mutually dependent. Historical sensation is aroused by historical presence, yet historical presence is nothing if not sensed. While the presence of history (i.e., an historical object or site) does not guarantee historical sensation, historical sensation is a precondition of historical presence. Ultimately, history is comprehended whereas historical presence is sensed, felt, and known intuitively.

A clear example of historical knowledge that physically describes presence without evoking the sensation of it is Christchurch artist Mark Whyte’s bronze sculpture *A Wave in Time* (figs. 95-96). Funded by both The Kingdom Foundation and Dobson Trust, two parts of the sculpture were installed on Emerson Street in Napier in 2009 and 2014. The first part of *A Wave in Time* consists of a larger than life-size figure of a modern woman holding the leash of her greyhound in one hand while

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2 Runia, *Moved by the Past*, 89.
waving above her head with the other. The sculpture represents Sheila Williams, who led the New Napier Week Carnival in 1933, and her dog, Raven. Appropriate to the era, she is dressed in a three-quarter length dress and Spanish heels and is coiffed with a short bob that peaks out from below the rim of her cloche hat. This 1930s styling may unofficially be considered ‘Art Deco fashion’ and is presented with the graphic clarity that has come to be expected of the aesthetic. Her finish is smooth and sleek. Her upright posture, frozen mid-step, and proud facial expression signal a person who is leading the way. The second part of the sculpture is a little boy, ostensibly Sheila’s son, who is clamped cross-legged upon a vertical pole. He wears a hat but is bare-foot, with braced shorts and a shirt. He appears to have scrambled up the pole across the street, presumably to ascend from the crowds to gleefully wave back at his mother.

The two figures are positioned diametrically and crowds stroll between their interaction. When the street is at its busiest during Art Deco Week the mother-son interaction blends with the activity of the street (fig. 97). Their wave casts an invisible line just above the heads of the people, and their two-tone bronze appearance, when seen from afar, gives the impression of two people drawn out from some historic monochrome photo and placed into a live situation. They are stuck in a constant but frozen moment of recognition, communication, and connection, and the suspended breath of time seems to perpetually bounce between their open, waving palms. Once you have seen the two sculptures and recognized their interaction (the boy is not immediately obvious) to walk between them is to briefly occupy their space, their temporal trajectory. Passersby do not quite intrude upon their exchange but they momentarily occupy it — you do not duck out of their way but you are oddly compelled to move past them so as to look back without interrupting. When the streets are empty, for instance on a rainy winter’s day, the pair persist in a less obvious manner. Rather than energizing the heritage by visibly ‘populating’ it they seem to be temporally displaced; strangely still, they appear abandoned by the past rather than being embodiments of its active presence. This is explained by the fact that A Wave in Time is metaphorical, an external manifestation of historical knowledge rather than a specific invocation of historical sensation. Pastness is not innate to ‘Sheila’ – though she reminds us of it. A Wave in Time is not yet complete. A third figure will soon be added: a male father figure on a bicycle rushing to meet with his family at the other
end of the street. This addition will create a three-way dynamic that further enlarges the human occupation of the heritage space. The two bronze statues as they currently stand, however, *contrast* with the sprightly buildings that inspired them. Instead of emphasizing the age of the enduring facades, the cold metallic figures highlight the occupation, colour, and contemporaneity of the streetscapes. Perhaps this juxtaposition was the intention. In either case, the monuments deal with the notion of historical knowledge rather than sensation or presence.

Historical sensation operates via instinct and memory and is characterized by a heightened awareness of temporality. The Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga argued that “It is the momentary dizzying experience of sudden obliteration of the rift between present and past, an experience in which the past for a fractional moment reveals itself ‘as it is, or was.’” Sensation, in this context, describes our reception of disparate impressions. Disparate impressions are to be distinguished from the unified concepts by which we make sense of them (we sense the ambience of old buildings, but we rationalise their significance via the ‘Art Deco experience’). Sensation refers to intuitive — rather than discursive — knowledge, perceptions, and impressions that are not gained by reasoning or insight. ‘Successful’ heritage sites tend to be those that effectively marry the historical sensation (an internal experience) with historical knowledge (the external communication of details) in the cultivation of an immersive historical moment. This marks the distinction between private and public knowledge. Private sensations, which are operative through the attachment of our senses to memory, tend to be linked to shifting conditions, incidental artifacts and unadorned sites. Historical knowledge, however, operates by means of rational thought and is formulated around facts and events. The externalization and display of abstract ideas for heritage tourism in order to recreate moments of historical urgency, liberty, isolation or opportunity are thus an ongoing source of representational difficulty. Eelco Runia observes that “The past shies away from traveling in primary forms.”

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6 Runia, *Moved by the Past*, 103.
comes to light when we consider how content contiguously travels through (or with) referential forms. On the one hand, ‘Art Deco’ artifacts and events mark the dissemination of knowledge, the distribution of history, and an administering of heritage spaces. Calcified shells from the past (cloche hats, vintage cars, decorative porticoes) remind us of what the past looked like and of what may have happened. On the other hand, the transitional reality of sites (marked or unmarked as heritage) issue the immediate sensory data — light, sound, smell, movement, weight, texture — in which private memory is embedded.

The walls of Napier’s heritage buildings carry with them these transitional realities. They daily respond to the conditions of the street as they resist the sun, the foot traffic, and being worn through use. The slow erosion of the painted surfaces and the casual interruptions of the neat veneers by stealthy lichen and aging stucco innately present their enduring occupation of space over time. The temporalized environment in which they stand, however, marks the intellectual processing of their significance as heritage. Tara Cooney’s A Good Yarn series, for instance, is dotted around the city’s electrical transformer boxes (fig. 98). These small yet visible works translate the idiom of ‘spinning a good yarn’ into graphic designs that are visually united by the metaphorical depiction of an unraveling ball of wool. The city’s history is alluded to through simple white line drawings and, as part of an inner city marketing project, we are prompted to consider “Napier’s relationship to the many heritage buildings [that have] links to old woolstore sites.” The representation of changing experiences upon static sites marks the dissemination of historical knowledge, but we are not moved by the historical sensation so much as we are informed and reminded of the past.

The Millenium Arch on Marine Parade also contributes to the wider memory space of the buildings by inciting contemplation of time’s passing. Designed by David Trubridge, this large steel arch is set against the expansive backdrop of blue ocean (fig. 99). A gleaming metallic circle sits at the apex of the blue steel arch that represents the eliptic (the sun’s annual path across the celestial sphere). Meaning is derived from the arc’s position in relation to the strategically placed rock on the ground before it. When we follow an invisible line from the rock through the centre of the arch to the horizon behind it, we find the point at which the sun rose upon the first dawn of the new

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millenium. This monument charts celestial time; it is a reminder of the planet we are on and a signifier of the psychologically momentus shift into the twenty-first century. It also locates Napier as a landmass beside the ocean. This sculpture is not part of the Art Deco quadrant, and it is situated apart from the buildings. However, much like Cooney’s Yarn, it contributes to the materialisation of time within the public space whereby local history is bookmarked through monuments to specific historical moments. In looking at the ocean we are aware of our relation to the site, and our location in time and space. Memories are activated without mediation. We are immersed and may therefore be moved by the historical sensation because the historical matter in representation (the natural landscape) has been rationalised in a way that conjures contemplation without materially recreating the past.

This state of immersion might be contrasted with the city’s Old/New banners. Design by nine local artists, these vertical banners feature screenprinted graphic designs depicting iconic landmarks from around the city in a reductive Art Deco style (fig. 100). One can stand in front of the historic T&G Dome while simultaneously viewing it as an icon in print. As such, these banners schematise one’s impression of and relation to particular sites. The sunbursts and Norfolk pines featured on the banners reiterate the natural landscape in stylistized form, conceptualising local geography and connecting nature to a predetermined representational scheme.

Meanwhile, in Paratene Matchitt’s Heritage Fountain (Nga Puna Wai Whakapapa), the land, sea, and sky are translated into symbols that transform nature into heritage. This sculpture’s tiers and totems feature motifs that honour “the many of the good things there are to discover in Hawke's Bay” (fig. 101). Located outside the tourist hub of Napier’s i-site centre, it presents us with gannets, fish, the Kaweka mountains, the sun, a star, wave and a heart depicted in metal-cut forms that break the falling water as it returns its ground level pool. One is rarely immersed in Napier’s urban environment without encountering reminders of its inherited, culturally enduring existence.

Collectively, Cooney’s A Good Yarn, the Millenium Arch, and Matchitt’s Heritage Fountain provide examples of independent works that contribute to the overall memory space of Napier’s heritage quadrant. They are allied with a long list

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that includes the Kirk Sundial, The Memorial Arch, the Boer War Monument, The *Pania of the Reef* statue, the South African War Memorial, the Clive Square Cenotaph, the World War II Coastal Defence emplacements, the HMNZS Tui Anchor, and the Reflecting Ball (designed in the ‘spirit’ of Art Deco). Monuments and memorials are everywhere. The landscape is periodically punctuated by interpretations of historical moments. These historical signifiers offer insight as to what has happened locally throughout time. They contribute to the historicity of the buildings by making the surrounding site historically pertinent. The city’s Art Deco atmosphere is initiated by the buildings and then bolstered by the continued, albeit ambiguous, temporality of the wider setting. Tours operate and visitors gaze upon evidence of the past. This evidence amounts to historical representation. The artifacts that harbour bona fide historical presence are the buildings. It is the facades of Napier’s streets that do the least explanatory work while eliciting the greatest sense of pastness. Amidst all the plaques and injections of colourful Art Deco stereotypes, the veneers and facades exist as surfaces that sealed a site of trauma. They are colourful now, and somewhat decorative, but the hyperbole that surrounds them mutes the depth of their silent, emotional impact.

Runia warns that the more complicated and manicured a symbolic system is the less historical presence “has a chance of breaking through.” He thereby argues that metonymy tends to be more effective than metaphor for historical representation. Metaphors create context by explaining likenesses, drawing analogies between the past and present — circumstances are laid out and meaning is generated in detail. Where we rely on metonymy, however, objects draw attention only to the fact that something is — it is not ‘like’ or ‘relative to’ but rather it exists. Because the metonym is not like something else and is not thus described in terms of some other familiar context, and because the metonym substitutes an identity with an attribute actually belonging to that identity, it creates a short circuit between different contexts, namely, the context from which the identity is drawn and the context in which it has been placed. In Napier,

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11 Runia, *Moved by the Past*, 89.

12 Runia, *Moved by the Past*, 90.
temporal stimuli are put in place to take the beholder from one intellectual context to another by reducing the perceived distance between the past and the present. They attempt to inject the current context with a sense of history by minimizing the imaginative effort required to visualize, even to momentarily occupy, the past. Representations of Art Deco are asked to conjure a feeling somewhat equivalent to the historical interwar moment in lieu of being able to fully resurrect it.

Australian film director Baz Luhrmann’s translation of the roaring twenties in *The Great Gatsby* (2013) is a vivid present-led rendition of what might loosely be considered ‘Art Deco history.’ In this film, Luhrmann adopted contemporary music and dance styles, using Florence and the Machine or Beyoncé instead of, for instance, Jelly Roll Morton. He also rather conspicuously replaced swing dancing with crunking. What these sounds and movements do for the modern eye and ear is analogous to the impact the jazz bands and flapper styles might have had on its contemporaries. Historical sensation is located in the immediacy of the impressions invoked, rather than in the development of meticulous recreation.

Where objects of the past are presented in primary form (Frida Kahlo’s corset, a chimney sweep’s brush, an Egyptian scroll, a significant building) or when we stand upon the site of a given event (a battle, a coronation, an earthquake), it is likely that the directness of our impressions tends to be much more compelling than someone’s recreation or transcription of it. This is a process of reduction where the objects become metonyms for the wider conditions to which they belong. Anton Froeyman explains “historical sensations are aroused by seemingly insignificant objects, which look as if they are stolen from the daily life of people of the past…they draw their special qualities from the fact that they seem out of place, and this-out-of-placeness triggers our imagination.” This is the jarring experience of anachronism, narrative discontinuity and historical mutation. With respect to historical presence, therefore, Napier has done itself a disservice by curating the surrounding environment to so completely match and explain its heritage architecture. The buildings are important

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13 There are always exceptions, and the veterans who were shell-shocked in Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* would have something to say on the power of reconstructions. But in instances such as this, the veterans are dealing with memory and not the derivative knowledge and vicarious experiences of heritage tourism.
14 In the cited text Froeyman is explaining Huizinga’s definition of the historical sensation. The wider article, however, is a comparison of temporal otherness in the works of Runia and Ankersmit. Froeyman, “Frank Ankersmit and Eelco Runia”: 395.
heritage precisely because the streetscapes are comprehensively different to everything that preceded and surrounded them. Bolstering the city’s point of difference with semiotic explanation has the same effect as would mock-sandstone formations in the desert around Uluru.

Runia has suggested that “A fresh metonymy is like a strange new building in the city – first nobody knows quite what to do with it, then all kinds of interactions get going by which it is integrated into the tissue of the city.”15 Neil Dawson’s sculpture Chalice (2001) in Christchurch might serve as a vivid urban example of a situation in which the shock of the new object was eventually tempered by history and discourse (fig. 102). Chalice initially generated a very mixed response. Dismissive critics referred to it as “the cone of contention” or a “vent to an underground toilet,” while its purported likeness to a marijuana cigarette led to its designation as a “shrine to cannabis smokers nationwide.”16 However, this sculpture’s continued presence, absorption into the daily place ballet, and survival of the 2011 earthquake has now led it to be a contender in the search for a new city icon in lieu of the nearby fallen Gothic cathedral.17 Through modes of discourse, the familiarity of the daily encounter, and the transformation of its symbolism when it became associated with recovery after the earthquake, Chalice has been woven into the fabric of Christchurch — a city that has itself adapted its attitudes to accommodate the sculpture.

In Napier the character of the city has been reinvented at least four times over, from its pre-European occupation, through the settlers, the post-earthquake rebuild and, more recently, in the creation of an Art Deco City. The connection of material circumstances with intangible ideas currently manifests through various presentations of nostalgia and retro styles, the proclivity for commemoration, remembrance, and monuments, and the fabrication of a collective memory to preserve a Zeitgeist. When Napier’s buildings were recognized as precious in the 1980s, the need to highlight their worth for preservation purposes became apparent. When the buildings could not be made sense of in terms of their contemporary cultural context, the context itself was

15 Runia, Moved by the Past, 69.
altered. Simply put, the buildings did not reflect their environment so now we have
adjusted the environment to reflect the buildings. This is where the play of metonymy
and metaphor becomes apparent as our relation to the buildings as historical objects
becomes increasingly deliberated. Metonymy disturbs places and confronts us with
juxtaposed forms and notions of difference whereas metaphor weaves interrelations
and makes places (like Napier) relatable and connected to wider concepts (such as Art
Deco). Runia argues that so long as the metonymy is out of place, it has presence, but
thereafter it is just present.

From Exception to Acceptance: Metonym and Metaphor in Historical
Understanding

Throughout this thesis I have referred to that which ‘Napier’ has or has not
achieved via the Art Deco culture that is sustained within the city. This use of ‘Napier’
is a metonymic device. It is a way of addressing at once the composite groups that
inhabit and contribute to the city space. Metonymy has been harnessed as a kind of
shorthand since the agents of Napier’s Art Deco cut across an array of organizations
and individuals who work privately and publicly to produce the visual ensemble in
reference. A multitude of private trajectories regarding personal fashion, performance,
historical interests, visual arts, antiquing, interior decorating and so on, meet in the
temporalized sphere of the style initiated by the city’s public architecture.

Metonymy is common to historical discourse but should not always be brushed
off as an innocent or inert simplification of terms. Metonymic devices, for instance,
have the power to render invisible the medley of influences behind specific acts and
ideas while crystallizing the presence of an engineered point of view. In claiming, for
instance, that “the Soviets declared war on the Empire of Japan” the abstraction of a
nation-state stands in place of specific people (like Molotov and Satō). In saying “the
Soviets declared war on the Empire of Japan” the acts of people are abstracted and
political geographies are mobilized. This linguistic shorthand keeps text simple and
communication swift. It also serves to obscure the motivations and culpability of the
individuals advocating events while implicating those on the peripheries (civilians or
party members) who are less involved, if involved at all.

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18 Runia, Moved by the Past, 71.
When the device of metonymy is moved from historical discourse and placed into art historical discourse, we shift from linguistic structures to visual arrangements and metonymy becomes an influential agent of cultural mythology. Donald Kunze, a Professor of Architecture and Integrative Arts, has visualized metaphor as operating horizontally in systems of “signifying chains.” He suggests that metaphor operates in lateral chains of semblance within which the introduction of anomalous effects creates the most likely site of morphological breakdown, unless those effects are bent into conformity for “momentary semiotic stability.” Perpendicular to this, Kunze argues, metonymy can be visualized on a vertical axis that intercepts the horizontal flow of signifying chains. The metonym has not yet had its identity collapsed into likeness, and in being brought into the signifying chain from elsewhere, “a distant location,” it is ideologically disruptive. This site of disruption has the potential to be a site of exception — a site that “resists all attempts to resolve ambiguity and restore unity.” Where exceptions are accommodated, however, the metonymy formerly “acting at a distance” establishes its own operations and becomes subsumed by the chain of semblances that comprise metaphor. Through Kunze’s explanation we see that metonymy is fundamental to metaphor in that the dissonance of metonymy comes before the conceptual connections made by metaphor. We also see that metaphor is entangled with ideology insofar as “metaphor serves to sustain ideology, while metonymy serves to challenge it.” Ideology in this sense might be thought of as a representational scheme, like that of Art Deco or the vocabularies of modernism.

At the time of their construction during the 1930s, the modern facades of the New Napier were a direct link to material modernity and their fresh appearance was juxtaposed against the existing cultural and architectural landscape, or indeed what was left of it when the city fell. In being so discontinuous from that which the town had seen before, the new streetscapes simultaneously distanced themselves from and drew attention to both the American architectural milieu from which they were drawn.

and the Hawkes Bay context into which they were placed. This discontinuity, the mutation of the city’s surfaces, was deliberate on the part of the architects. The rebuild was intended to show the rest of the country what the city was made of. As a result, the aesthetic discontinuity of the new architecture, at the time of its construction, functioned metonymically. The buildings were metonymically connected with the conditions of modernity. Whereas the city concept was holistically associated with the vague metaphor of a phoenix rising, the buildings, strikingly new, were not allegorical. The new streets were not symbolic of modernity they were of modernity.

Time has since elapsed and the architecture is fondly viewed as vintage. The modern ideal has been absorbed into post- and meta-modernism and the buildings have come to function metaphorically. Illustrative of old concepts of style and progress, they are likened to Art Deco without necessarily or consistently being Art Deco. The facades no longer provide a short cut to the experience or conditions of modernity though they still suggest to us the aesthetic trends that were expected to pull the city from trauma into prosperity. In the shift from the facades’ metonymical to metaphorical epistemology, therefore, a mutation in our historical consciousness has occurred. The buildings move from ‘actually being’ into the relative state ‘of being like.’ At this point they are set on a newly anchored and deliberated trajectory as heritage. Using the language of Art Deco, modernism, the heritage industry and, most fundamentally, architecture, Napier city has established a link between architecture and culture that is inseparable from how we understand the urban landscape and the social spaces through which we move. This link is not unmediated although it has been naturalized to such an extent that it is difficult to perceive the buildings as anything other than a post-earthquake phoenix.

Napier’s architecture is mobilized as metaphor by the words and images that corroborate the interests of specific agents: the Board of Tourism, The Art Deco Trust, The City Council, local retailers, clubs and hoteliers. Kamila Szczepanska, lecturer in East Asian Politics at Ruhr University Bochum in Germany, defines such ‘agencies of articulation’ as the institutions through which social actors seek to promote and secure recognition of memory and modes of articulation. These agencies consist of the

24 Runia, Moved by the Past, 75.
channels through which memories are revived, constructed and reconstructed: monuments, museums, cinema, television, documentaries, fiction, songs, poetry, graphic design, mapping, biographies and autobiographies, the writings of professional and amateur historians, and the Internet. In saturating these channels with the meanings that are increasingly associated with Napier’s facades we are, in a counter-intuitive move, asserting that our built heritage is not strikingly unique but comprised of sociocultural and architectural likeness.

In this process of drawing parallels, the inherent significance and humble stylistic peculiarities of the buildings have to some extent been lost to the rubric of a glitzy international style. While a concerted effort and established visual cultural points of reference have been absolutely essential in the public realization of this built heritage, spiraling misrecognition is beginning to occur. This is not to say that Napier’s Art Deco culture is anything other than extremely successful and for many people provides a very enjoyable environment, even lifestyle, in which to be immersed. Nor is it to scorn the impressive work of the volunteers and employees who manage the ongoing preservation and conservation of the historic buildings and the colourful city they have produced. Rather, it is to suggest that at this stage in their development we must remember that the buildings have an innate presence and unique history that need not be chained to imported ideologies.

Despite the loss of their metonymical disjunction following the proliferation of urban Art Deco signs, the facades stand as authentic historical forms capable of evoking the sensation of historical presence. They are genuinely of the past, and, crucially, that past is affecting. The Art Deco culture in which they flourish, however, is a fabrication and, as such, wholly referential. It is secondary, mediated, and retrospectively assembled, yet as time goes on it will be concretized as fact. For now, sensations may be derived from experiencing the city’s Art Deco configurations – a ride in a vintage car or a drink at speakeasy burlesque – but those sensations are not derived from proximity to pastness so much as they are reconstructions of its forms. Napier’s facades exist as architectural metaphors that distribute one version of local knowledge. They are surfaces that echo through retrospectively generated ideas.

about the period in which they were constructed. Now forced to conform to an aesthetic category their subversive, at least experimental, origins have been muted.

The ongoing cultivation and proliferation of Art Deco surfaces demarcates the construction of a place-making concept and not the bestowal of an inherited context. The Art Deco theme takes hold of the city-space and aberrant cultural signs (alongside a lack of familiar ones) are justified through the discourses of a style. Further, the city’s visual cultural production is driven by ekphrasis, whereby visual forms emulate literature and embodied performances emulate art. Raphael Samuel in *Theatres of Memory* describes the way that our memory of words becomes “memory refracted through the iconography of things.” Just as Samuel discusses about our memory of words, we can speak of our memory of forms and our memory of our experiences with forms. By the time we speak about these memories they are squeezed through yet another filter of vocabulary — the choice of words available to the speaker or writer at the time. Experiences can only ever be relayed through the frameworks available to the translator; where predigested forms are presented, be they motifs cut and pasted from elsewhere or posters thrice removed from their original context, the interpreter is left to bridge the temporal and contextual gap in yet another round of interpretive ping pong. Paintings, photographs, books, postcards, posters, branded memorabilia, street furnishings, clothes films, music and of course, the careful presentation of the architecture itself, each mediate our experience of Napier’s streetscapes. Indeed, Art Deco is treated primarily as an experience, and the observation of 1930s buildings is the mere material stimulus for a much wider culture of sensory excitations that are justified within chains of recognition.

A glance at the imagery used to promote the Art Deco City clearly displays the chains of ideas we connect to make sense of the built environment. Visual symbols that are laden with social histories are aligned with, or compiled in front of, the architecture as a method of assigning meaning to them. In the printed imagery of Art Deco Napier, for instance, we can observe twelve recurring tropes: 1) isolated architectural details, predominantly around windows and doors; 2) the vintage car in front of a building; 3) the performing body framed by a doorway; 4) the silhouette in the window; 5) the woman with a greyhound; 6) Charleston dancers lined up; 7) the group of men with brass instruments; 8) the war planes over architecture which is

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foregrounded with people; 9) a man and woman in embrace; 10) the sound shell as a backdrop to events (often unrelated ones, such as tea parties); 11) the view of the city through the Memorial Arch; and 12) the upward view of lintels and parapets lined with palm or pine trees. These repeated visual cues, expressive gestures, status symbols, and idealized events are presented over and over. In essence, they reiterate the officially accredited values of an antiquated society. These images inform our perceptions of the architecture by balancing “a montage of intentions derived from a recognizable palette of preconceived forms.” The stylized convergence of dislocated motifs tethers Napier city to the well-established compositions and western histories that are associated with more extravagant international examples of Art Deco.

The more this curated urban precinct is presented and represented in other media as the public face of Napier’s heritage, however, the more we must ask if the history of this built environment could be told differently. Can we extract another story from their eighty-five year history? How is this architecture determined? Is it possible to connect these facades to other stories, images or realities? In the realm of aesthetic exchange during the depression era, Napier’s buildings have come to make sense. The assumption inherent to this sense-making trajectory, however, is that the Western cultural category of modernism was an organic step for New Zealand architecture. In this case, aesthetic innovation has overridden spatiotemporal history, but what story, for instance, might behavioral geographers tell? What would feminist architectural historians draw out from this rebuild? And ultimately: who are we that this is Napier? In his essay on “the presence and the otherness of the past” Anton Froeyman reminds us that “Historical representation is the end point of historical enquiry, and historical experience is the beginning.” This warns of the familiarity that arrives when something enigmatic settles into an established framework: it can be

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32 This question is a modified version of Eelco Runia’s ruminations in *Moved by the Past* where (post-sublime historical mutations) he urges the question of “’who are we that this happened?”
named and so now it is known — *fin*. In the creation of heritage, however, it is worth remembering that the taxonomic recognition of Napier’s period surfaces is only one iconographical impression of their definition and value.

**Art Deco as a Mask: Utility and Display**

Art Deco is invariably a mask. No matter how substantial the object, person, building or composition associated with the style is, Art Deco masks traditional forms and the visibility of problematic times with the promises of modernity. Sweeping surfaces soothe unresolved juxtapositions, ambiguous content and conflicting data together in the greater synthesis of aesthetic affect.\(^{34}\) While the basic forms of objects associated with Art Deco often remain recognisable beneath the style’s decorative veneers, the sheer effort to overlay them is a discretionary act of suppression. A desire to ‘progress’ away from the *status quo* is a prerequisite of the Art Deco idiom. The desired move into futurity informs both the utility and display of the style, as Art Deco expresses modern mobility and optimism in place of the perceived decay and rupture of existing conditions. Smooth decorative surfaces gloss over compositional and social complications.\(^{35}\) Napier’s facades originally masked the volatility of changing times, the destruction left by a natural disaster, and the sadness of the lives and built heritage that was lost. Now, the facades mask the discontinuity of present-day activity as the lives led in and around them increasingly adapt to their historical presence.

Using ‘masks’ to describe the facades has the deliberate implication of role play and the premeditated performance of character. Their speedy construction is evidence of their active role in the processes of recovery, healing, and heritageization of the city. The modern forms of 1930s Napier *looked* like recovery. The construction of the New Napier marked the revised fragmentation of the city space. The fallen city, an all-encompassing civic mess, was a city-wide dilemma. It was everyone’s problem, everyone’s loss and everyone’s future. As the facades rose up, however, sites of division were delineated. Owing to financial crises, the visionary wholistic project of a ‘white city’ broke down and the rebuild became increasingly splintered. Public and

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private domains registered the disjunction between illusions of prosperity and the reality of personal hardship. Yet, despite internal tensions, the facades provided a reasonably coherent public face for a medley of private activity. They masked calamity, economic strain and social despair with claims of civility and cosmopolitanism. The proliferation of aestheticised surfaces was, and still is albeit to a different end, symptomatic of the desire to mask and thereby supress continuous change with the look of formal balance and social cohesion.\(^{36}\) The earthquake was a physical, social, and psychological rupture for those who endured it. The old colonial mask replete with Edwardian frills could not be convincingly put back on the destroyed site, and so the urban surface was approached with different intention. More recently, and following the recognition of the cityscape as potential heritage, the aestheticised surfaces have slid off the buildings to encase the street furniture, art works, and even the people.

The walls of the heritage quadrant do not simply enclose their respective interior spaces; they pose an evocatory representational layer for the external spaces of the street. The facades do not suggest a communication that moves from the private interiors to the exterior so much as an expression that originates from the surfaces of the walls themselves. Hence, at the same time that the poetic space of a period style is delightfully liberated to colour the streets and people with delusions of glitz, the collective trauma which was originally masked by the facades is yet further alienated. From the perspective of the street, the facades echo nothing of the old city and absorb little of their surrounds. In fact, they resist it. The absolute finish of Art Deco surfaces, the sealed quality for which the style is renowned, appears impervious and inflexible. Above the verandahs, the faces of the buildings reject contemporary styling, materials, public behaviour, disorder, and chance. They make claims against nature by reflecting nothing of it. The architect Dorita Hannah observes that:

> Modern architecture denies the presence of black, which obliterates its forms exiling them to the shadows…White, in all its crispness, is the defining ‘colour’ of the modern movement, representing cleanliness, neutrality and an attempt to keep the nightmare of decay and mortality returning to its surfaces.\(^{37}\)


This could not be more pertinent in Napier’s proposed introduction of modernism to New Zealand en masse in the wake of destruction. The city was bound and masked by the white ideal during the 1930s rebuild. The concealment of the buildings’ content — the messy reality of lives lived, works in process, the operations of utility, aging and discontinuity — by sprightly exteriors was an explicit act of representing cleanliness, the sanitary tidiness of modern materiality in place of the black ash and death among the rubble. The stucco surfaces situated the town on the international timeline of progress and removed any visible clamps of the settler tradition.

In projecting selected social content outwardly, namely via a modernistic turn, and by impressing exterior spaces with decorative iconography, the facades have come to envelop the streets, paradoxically transforming the exterior space into another kind of ‘interior.’ The ‘residual’ space ‘left’ by the architecture is, in practice, socialised territory, packed and charged with civic content. The city’s appearances require maintenance and its historical atmosphere, for tourism, must be upheld. This is not spontaneous but deliberate. The facades thereby mobilise social relations, laws, and expectations. To maintain the ‘Art Deco’ situation, there is also a simulation of the conditions, status tensions, values, and tastes that define it. Imagery suggests, for instance, that this is a middle to upper class Pākehā town locked in colonial modes of entertainment. Napier city is not this archaic. However, the historic streets when viewed as urban ‘interiors’ impart a surprisingly confined space that is cultivating the ongoing production of antiquated boundaries and norms. While Napier’s Art Deco phenomena are lighthearted and openly fabricated for present audiences, in so being they could, and should, be developed to accomodate twenty-first century notions of inclusivity. In its current state, The Art Deco City still visibly distributes unsettling, rather antiquated social norms. Ultimately, Napier’s Art Deco facades make claims over space by masking the historical complexities of city life with inalterable surfaces. The mistake is in committing this Art Deco, and the ideas that it masks, to the faraway past. By its own visual mechanics the style’s ability to bridge temporal boundaries by regurgitating, regenerating and dislocating classic motifs, is biting back at its own historical presence.

| Facades on Film |
Napier’s association with particularized forms, those Art Deco ideas that are embodied over and over again, began in the 1980s, when ‘Art Deco content’ was brought home and situated in Napier by writer and filmmaker Peter Wells. Released in 1985, his documentary film *Newest City on the Globe* promoted the city’s preservation and played a key role in making the city’s revival visible. The film takes us from pre-earthquake to post-earthquake Napier, the former in black and white, the latter in colour. There is an eerie sense of place as we see the city stand monumentally in absolute denial of all that preceeded it. The main thrust of the film is the Art Deco imagery being newly attached to the architecture for it contemporary audiences. This is a documentary film but it uses imaginative devices to conjure “Not Napier as it is but Napier as it seems to be.” It is a valuable production not only for its historical role in preventing the destruction of built heritage but also as a visual record of the Art Deco City in its unsselfconscious state. In the film we see the city before it became self-referential. This is a period when the facades were less colourful and the heritage signage was nonexistent.

Wells’ Art Deco is derived from film and theatre and at times verges on Deco Noir. Viewing the symbolic forms in *Newest City* we recognise that the Art Deco phenomenon emerged within a social context different from that of today. As a postmodern spectacle the film comprises explorations of individual desire, the appearance of conflicting identities, and a return to mysticism. Dalliances into nonspecific pasts mark a collapse of temporal barriers as the film’s actors celebrate the many theatrical devices mobilised by the Art Deco stage. Motifs from the past are detached from established identities as objective reality gives way to notions of flux, chaos and plurality. The film’s reflection of the broader sensory experience developing in New Zealand during the 1980s should not be overlooked. Developments in audiovisual technology saw the introduction of New Wave and Synth-pop, which brought new textures and visual landscapes to the fore. Fueled by the establishment of MTV in the United States in 1981, the music video boom tied music and images together in such a way that music was given a face and a narrative expression that allowed symbolic meaning to multiply. *Newest City* employs a contiguity of music

39 Rock performers such as Devo, David Bowie, The Eurythmics, Culture Club, Peter Gabriel, Ultravox, and Queen (to name a mere and arbitrary six) were experimenting with visual forms and theatrical ways of severing form from content while injecting
and social content in the soundscape that accompanies the film, as the buildings connect to a poetic space associated with Hollywood glamour. The suggestive power of gestures, the saxophone music, silhouettes, sparks, balloons, laughter and lights imbue the images of the facades with feelings of jubilation, exhilaration, desire (fig. 103).

The film evokes Napier Art Deco’s duelling play of public and private space, with the facades fulfilling their duty as masks for social content. The outside space is suggestive of a street party, carnival or festive performance. It appears nocturnal, alive, warm, and mysterious. The sensory composition evokes ephemeral sensations moving through the closed forms of style. Sounds, ostensibly from the other side of the globe, arrive as eerie evocations of people past. We are reminded that this is “the site of a vanished city” with the pre-earthquake city being completely insensible, except for its ghostly accompaniment as memory. Then there are the inside spaces, where private lives are lived, and work is conducted. The windows host silhouettes, which imply all that thrives within. One scene showcase The Daily Telegraph Building at night and features shadowed silhouettes of people working around the clock, typing, printing, and taking calls. Sensual pleasure is conveyed by couples kissing, a woman pulling on stockings, and people gossiping, laughing, and dancing (fig. 104). Theatre masks, an ashtray with cigarettes left burning, and half-empty drinks (anachronistically) symbolise the lives halted mid-flow when the earthquake struck. There is a strong element of voyeurism as we look through bars, windows, and doorways, where social and psychological boundaries collide.

Wells’ Art Deco gives rise to the display and consumption of a fantasy culture. Lives lived in parallel are connected and organised by the spaces of built forms. The windows act as frames that segment our view and compartmentalise the activities displayed. There is also a great sense of secrecy and ambiguity, with a fan hiding a harlequin’s face and costume ball-goers leaning on balconies obscured by masks. Human forms are typecast and schematized. Art Deco bodies are organised in space to express, not personality, but lifestyle. The bodies in costume are allegories of the buildings dressed in Art Deco (fig. 105). They perform yet reveal nothing of their identity or intentions. This costumery, festivity, impersonation and dissimulation of the new life into them. One might look specifically to the iconic, multi award-winning video for Aha’s Take on Me, New Zealand’s own Room that Echoes, by Peking Man, or Split Enz’s I See Red, for a taste of clear cut postmodern imagery.
people moving in and around the buildings underscores the concealing duty of the historical facades. The Art Deco veneers mark sites of memory, resistance, and interpretation as transient lives dance across their surfaces.

*Newest City* sets private experiences against the permanence of concrete forms. It is a conjuring of the proposed dreams and vision that lay behind its creation, with one eye firmly fixed on Hollywood. Napier’s relation to a glitzy American modernity is thus rendered diasporic, as if a little bit of glitter was caught in the Pacific winds to dazzle upon the broken city — Wells explicitly envisages Napier as “a lost prism from universal’s Hollywood crown.”

What is essential at this point in Napier’s story, however, is Wells’ clarity of the subject he is representing. He is not educating us on bonafide architectural or Art Deco history but underscoring the human relation to sites of significance. Wells does not suggest aesthetic or moral ‘purity’ but displays the buildings as historical markers and the locus public and private memories. He even acknowledges their dark side, both in relation to the humans that occupy them, their colonial ties and, lest we forget, their origins in the wake of disaster.

*Newest City* is all about duality, and Wells uses strategic effects to enliven the period styles. Wells tenuously connects Napier to Art Deco’s French origins by suggesting the theatrical romance of an illuminated city. The slender figure of a male dancer is silhouetted against Tom Parker fountain, the jets of which are awash with reds, blues and yellows under the pitch-black sky (fig. 106). His generic and impersonal form evokes the imagery of Art Deco figurines, the dancers of the Ballets Russes, and the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (1925). It is the early, ‘high’ Art Deco that is associated with abundance and opulence, not the Art Deco of austerity, the kind that points to a depression-era rebuild. That said, Art Deco certainly has strong ties to the advent of electrically lit buildings, and Wells’ allusions to shifting colour and light are a strategic metaphorical device. The use of light to project changing conditions, movements and moods, animates the built forms and mobilises the abstract play of reminiscence. It is our kinetic memories, our private recollections of bustling crowds, film, drama, dance, and the anticipation of thrilling events, that imbue the static, stylised objects with ideas about lifestyle and

40 Wells, *Newest City*.
atmosphere. The suggestion of time, movement, and moments through light and music animate the stationary aspects of the lit scenes (they are vivid throughout the film), and the composite image is an aestheticized, thematized, narrativized and now heritageized space. Inanimate objects are linked to period aesthetics in such a way that symbolic public gestures, postures and physical expressions are roused and given context.

The film ultimately returns us to “the vanished city,” to Māori ancestors and to black and white photos of the city’s origins. The narration states: “It began as the rushing in of water, Ahuriri, a point of entry for the great white fleet which, like a huge invincible machine, moved through the landscape a nineteenth century Trojan horse claiming Aotearoa for the British race.” So while this is a film about Napier ‘not as it is but as it seems to be,’ it explicitly recognises the unsettling reality of a city managing its disconcerting colonial past. The fantasy of the glamorous streets do not arrive without a revisionist’s perspective. The buildings in the film have a generative quality; we see the buildings used to self-consciously fashion the afterlife of an era rather than engaging with historical fact. The film initiates their new value under the Art Deco epithet.

In the 1980s, a shift occurred whereby the constraints of modernism were deemed problematic. Wells’ film is an example of postmodernism because it employs subjectivity, fragmentation, self-referentiality, and eclecicism to destabilize the homogeneity, universalism and austerity of modernism. It is culturally significant because it provided the first glimpse into the poetic spaces to which the architecture is, or can be, attached. Wells laid down the visual vocabulary that would allow the buildings to be named, identified, positioned and constituted by discourse enough to be preserved as heritage. Meanwhile, the Art Deco Group established their concrete value within the categories of architectural history. Since then, another shift has occurred whereby Napier has become attached to kitsch and vintage culture. We have returned to the complete forms of myth and the comfort of static ideals, only now this is enjoyed in the liminal spaces, the urban ‘interiors’ of the period streetscapes.

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45 Michael Windover has convincingly argued for Art Deco’s potency in providing a
Enthusiasts can be located in doorways and windows looking like they are off to meet Fred and Ginger after a quick quaff of the establishment’s finest — even if that establishment is now a law office or optometrist’s. While this is often wonderfully metamodern, at other times it is woefully untouched by revisionism. This community of vintage interest is bolstered and made profitable by the antique trade and heritage tourism. The willing entertainment of a recycled past marks a desire for something of the old trajectories that were dismissed by postmodernism. It also urges the instability of a style and its mythology as heritage when the fantasy incited revivifies the motifs of inequity.

Generic motifs, the revision of hackneyed narratives, and the metamodern feeling are presented most vividly in two recent music videos directed by Shea Stirling. We see two different interpretations of the Art Deco aesthetic come to light as Auckland-based singer songwriter Teeks performs ‘If Only’ (2017), and Sydney-based New Zealander, Maya Payne performs ‘Lucky Ones’ (2016) in and around Napier city. Both music videos visually register the contemporary association of Art Deco with a romanticized, nonspecific past. The first video, by Teeks, harnesses the static, nostalgic simplicity of a bygone era. Teeks moves around the city, walking down Tennyson Street and utilizing the Soundshell, but it is the Municipal Theatre that provides the ongoing backdrop. We see the correlation of Napier’s Art Deco with the suited male archetype, the familiar postures echoed by brass band musicians, and the vintage styling of a female from no specific era (figs. 107-108). These poses are commonplaces of ‘vintage’ photographs and magazines, and we are culturally prepared to view them with vicarious nostalgia. For instance, the scene with the unnamed girl passing through the gaze of male admirers in the Teeks video resonates with Dutch-born New Zealand photographer, Ans Westra’s photograph Wairoa, captured in 1963 (figs. 109-110).

In a thesis that deals with the surface values and generalized vintage cultures associated with Art Deco, it is worth briefly comparing the way the clothes and the


architectural backdrops in both Westra’s photograph and Sterling’s video manifest as superficial cultural cloaks. The period expressions adopted by the lead singer connect his personal sentiments (conveyed within the song) to matching external descriptions — it is a display that he has deemed appropriately expressive of his musical intentions. Retrospectively viewed, Westra’s image works by flowing in the opposite direction whereby distinctly Pākehā aesthetics appear to impose upon individual expression. This composition is more intensely illustrative of the wider political discourses of the era as the Māori women are reduced to the clothes that adorn them. It presents a two-pronged narrative set in motion by acculturation, on the one hand, and sexual objectification on the other. The same would be said of Teeks’ video, but the vintage aesthetic in this later case merely maintains predigested cultural semiotics while Westra’s photograph captures a moment of yet unprocessed intercultural exchange.

Teeks’ suspension of real contexts in lieu of a romanticized past that belongs to no one, let alone themselves, is symptomatic of the metamodern feeling — that heartfelt desire to enjoy a sweeping idealized narrative while holding an informed historical perspective. Moving beyond comparisons to Westra, however, the whole filmic presentation of ‘If Only’ is one of likeness, to familiar gestures, places, postures, narratives, palates and periods. Bodies are framed by the architecture as the actors sit at tables, on doorsteps, in front of and within vintage cars, and between the pillars of the Memorial Arch. This video presents the Art Deco City and not Napier, the city that survived an earthquake. No historical specifics are presented. Contemporary signage and people have been largely removed. The Art Deco City is genericized by cropping out the residues of current life and instead presenting the streets as colourful and decorative but otherwise uninhabited spaces.

The second video, ‘Lucky Ones’ (2016) by Maya Payne, presents Art Deco as a kitschy, if vacuous, graphic backdrop for quasi-superhero characters whose actions are communicated in the illustrative manner of Pop Art (fig. 111). Whereas Teeks’ video sustains Art Deco mythology by diving back into a former time, Maya Payne’s video places us more visibly in the metamodern present. The difference lays in the mobilization of Art Deco as kitsch. Art Deco is aligned with the actors’ modern styling and humor as opposed to the quasiearnest sentimentality of the Teeks video. The actors in the Teeks’ video align themselves with past time to create temporal continuity, whereas Maya Payne’s actors are openly depicting a superficial return to a fantasy past. The actors might run past a building with the original owner-operator’s name
written in relief, but the word, once active and informative, is now just another sign in
the greater semiotic system of palm trees, sunlight, birds, and vintage cars, all reduced
to storybook symbols borne of vicarious (Pākehā) nostalgia.

Both videos harness the graphic power of Art Deco as a planar backdrop. This
is one of the style’s greatest visual strengths. Its conduciveness to illustration and
photography means that the built forms readily transform real spaces into pictorial
space when actors pose in the voids of the architecture (fig. 112). The Municipal
Theatre feature prominently in both videos, but it is on the strength of that theatre
looking like Art Deco rather than its being the Art Deco of Napier specifically that is
being drawn out. The buildings are harnessed for their graphic strength in two
dimensions and we recognize the symmetry of postures and social behaviours from
other media. The scenes activate liminal spaces within the physical frames of the
architecture. In these frames we are neither past nor present but suspended in the
fictional realm of the narrative. This imagery is not about connecting the viewer with
reality, it is about using the familiar tropes from the poetic space of Art Deco to
remove us, momentarily, from the present. To take us into the journey via a time and
space at a pace set by the city stage.

The Art Deco architecture in these videos provides bound settings within which
each of the narratives, both love stories, can play out. We can identify the association
of pastness in each with connotations of a ‘simpler’ time. This is evident in the pace of
movement set as fast traffic and virtual, even digital, communication is curtailed.
Similarly, uncomplicated compositions hone in on the human figure, with the
performers’ bodies closely dictating the scale of each frame (in each video the couples
are the main figures dominating the space). The period architecture is kept separate
from the chaos of present day life — there are no road cones, buses, cellphones, shop
signs, or city logos — and as such it is their static historicity rather than their dynamic
utility that is activated.

Many contemporary artists, through their visual vocabularies and semiotic
awareness, demonstrate a renewed interest in the sphere of fantasy in their renditions
of the urban landscape. Napier’s historic architecture is enjoyed for its graphic strength
but there is a new perspective emerging whereby artists simultaneously wrangle
cynicism and naivety. This plays out in the work of Graham Kirk, a New Zealand-
based painter and printmaker who mixes realism with pop art by slotting super heroes
into iconic settings. In his painting *Batman and Robin and the Provincial Hotel in*
Napier the familiar is thrown into absurdity (fig. 113). We enjoy the familiar characters standing in their classic poses completely unrelated to the period backdrop. The historic landscape is refreshingly breeched as connotations of the lowbrow, popular and surreal are contrasted with this iconic piece of heritage. This painting mobilizes metamodernity because the iconography has been displaced, reconsidered, and reassembled with all the immediacy of a candid snapshot and all the substance of Batman and Robin’s visual cultural legacy. This iconographical juxtaposition concurrently generates predictability and happenstance. Without visual cultural insight and some connection to a nostalgic poetic space in projection, there would be no juxtaposition depicted at all save for two men dressed unusually in front of a small but fancy building. The metamodern linchpin is not that we observe a juxtaposition, but that we are able to suspend, equally, our cynicism and deconstructive rationale to distinguish and understand a complete and contemporary image.

The influence of film also extends into Richard Wotton’s photographic series Speed lines and Ziggurats (2017) (fig. 114) demonstrates photographic metamodernism. This architectural photographer captured Napier’s domestic Art Deco buildings in black and white film. Reminiscent of Tim Burton’s 1950s suburban California as featured in the film Edward Scissorhands (1990), the houses are manicured, centrally framed and seemingly uninhabited. The monochrome film accentuates the geometry and symmetry of the houses and eliminates the incongruity of contemporary cars and objects while giving the diversely painted houses uncanny uniformity. The photographer harkens back to the kind of photography that was featured in the architectural journals of the 1930s, the avenue through which much of the imagery for the global spread of modernism was initially delivered.\(^47\) Here there is the implication of irony, parody, and replication in what are ultimately pretty pictures. His work responds to modernist idealism while presenting at the same time a contemporary urban myth about the character of Art Deco. We are treated to the aesthetic satisfaction of Wes Anderson-esque symmetry and the filmic, still, set-like character of the architecture. Wotton emphasizes the vessel-like role of built forms as containers for modern life, while tacitly presenting the more contemporary themes of geographic isolationism, globalism, and modernity in retrospect. The photographic

style ties Napier’s architecture to the global Art Deco collection by aligning it with the Californian, mid-century modern prototypes while simultaneously making us reevaluate the contemporary life-blood of these heritage houses that are clearly lived in yet presented as vacant and iconic. We hover between their reality, their history and their myth, but we are never quite sold on either.

**Murals and Mannequins: Repopulating the Architecture**

The social role of Napier’s architecture as Art Deco was initially made intelligible by Wells’ film *Newest City on the Globe* (1985). As a self-generating idea, we keep performing the historic idea to maintain the period identity lest the city slip back into the state of invisibility that it experienced after World War II. In adopting period postures we take on roles that fit a scale that precedes and exceeds us. Explicitly, we personify broad cultural notions that match conditions which no longer exist. This is because the Art Deco style is not individualized in terms of personality but is localized in terms of site, body and context. Napier’s Art Deco architecture does not therefore initiate a process of self-expression so much as demarcate a site of strategic communication. While the human figure is almost entirely absent from the 1930s architectural decoration, with a few notable exceptions, it becomes apparent that more recently the architecture is being repopulated.

In an ongoing series of place-affirming efforts, we see the people of an imagined past repopulate Napier’s streets as stylised characters that illustrate Art Deco style. Mark Whyte’s sculpture *Wave in Time* is a strong example of repopulation, but public murals go even further in suggesting the return of period figures (figures 115-117). The sites chosen for these murals are mundane, including an old tram stop, side alleys, bus stops and public toilets. The figures are shown behaving in manners that are either appropriate to the place, such as holding luggage as they await collection, or reflect notions of an Art Deco city by engaging with depictions of the site through dancing, walking their greyhounds, cycling, playing jazz instruments, or standing near parked cars or incoming trams. They are near life size and exist within landscapes that have been reduced to graphic form for aesthetic effect and then sparingly filled with recognizable, standardized Art Deco City motifs. Iconic aspects of the nearby streets are depicted and condensed into the given pictorial space, sometimes just blocks away from the where the actual icons stand — the dome, the Soundshell, the Tobacco
Building, the Norfolk pines, the street lamps — and perspectival illusion, shadowing, and silhouettes are used wherever possible in an attempt to evoke the occupation of actual space.

The repopulation of Napier’s architecture extends beyond statues and murals through the realm of street furniture and into the sphere living performance. The tops of the viewing plinths may depict the bathing girl graphic taken from the 1933 New Napier Carnival Parade, the Gilray Fountain, and the mythological *Pania of the Reef*. The birds and wildlife that are otherwise absent from the Art Deco iconography here also makes a cameo appearance (fig. 118). As we look up from the decorated plinths and move through the fleeting crowds of summer, representatives from the Art Deco Trust set-off dressed to the nines to greet cruise-ship passengers while pinstriped tour guides wait to entice sightseers into their vintage cars for an Art Deco exposé. Tourists arrive in costume, retailers don drop-waist dresses and boater hats, and annual ‘Deco-themed’ occasions have become locally institutionalized. Where living representatives and painted characters are lacking, moreover, we observe vintage window displays, mannequins, and cardboard cutouts occupying static spaces while photographs on heritage plaques leave disconcerting reminders of the disaster-stricken people who left us their architectural legacy (fig. 119).

If the human figure was originally absent from Napier’s architecture in the context of trauma then it is surely being repopulated as the community heals. Napier’s past, now heritageized, is communicated in such a public way that if we do not have the lived memory we are readily provided with other ways of knowing and remembering the past. Matthew Graves and Elizabeth Rechniewski have noted “It is precisely when memory begins to lose its power and its salience in determining individual and communal daily life that it becomes necessary to consciously promote it, to concretise it in ritual and record, to revive or reinvent it through the construction of ‘traditions.’ ”

Napier’s comprehensive recording of history, the visual affirmations in its streets, the city’s Art Deco events and its annual traditions signal the concretization of a chosen history. While the city’s increasingly palpable Art Deco atmosphere ties the urban landscape to a living Art Deco culture it also takes us further away from the historical sensation, the sense of the past that is innately spurred by the architecture. Runia has argued that “the more we commemorate what we did, the more

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48 Graves and Rechniewski, “From Collective Memory”: 2.
we transform ourselves into the people who did not do it.”

When we commemorate and attempt to reproduce events it is not historical sensation we incite but a rationalized response to mediated representations. Temporal otherness, articulated by the portraits and renderings of heritage, negates the immediacy of historical sensation. Napier’s highly self-referential urban environment suggests a growing sense of temporality, but it is historical knowledge rather than sensation and memory that increasingly inform us. Those who were ‘there’ are becoming increasingly distant and different to us and yet, in a peculiar twist of imagined heritage, their material legacies are even more visible than before.

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49 Runia, *Moved by the Past*, 320.
Cracked Plaster and Chipped Teacups: A Conclusion

When cruise ships stop coming and Autumn rain falls on the palm trees of Emerson Street, the dance of Art Deco tourism relaxes. Infrastructures that exist outside of, underneath, and throughout the Art Deco city regain visibility and the voice given to period festivities is reduced to a murmur. The prosaic sounds of Napier city — beeping excavators, shopkeepers sweeping, corporate colleagues clinking coffee cups and the rumble of school children waiting for buses — return to the patterns of the daily grind. Winter winds pass over the summer facades. Just as rusting pipes line the backs of manicured shop-fronts, and battered wooden doors hang off service alley exits, the imperfect and diverse lives that are lived behind Napier’s facades are neatly tucked away, obscured from plain sight but integral to their function. The generations living their lives behind the scenes and the entrepreneurs working away on new commercial schemes keep pushing onward to make the next season possible; the next round of Art Deco mini putt, the next festival steam ride, the next season of hat sales, of themed dinners, and theatre acts. The heritage is where the capital is. Tourism has shaped the appearance of the city and the focus on a vintage experience has helped in the selection of that which is valuable from the past. We look backwards from the present, honing in on the most performative highlights – the crises, the heroics, the moments of change and evolution. History is routinely reduced to its most dramatic moments and major events drastically alter how the past is known. Lived memory gives way to the heritage experience and embellished fact transforms into myth.

Napier’s highly visible and increasingly concretised Art Deco identity has been orchestrated and synthesised. While it is perhaps a logical socioeconomic development it is by no means a spontaneous evolution of local culture. Over the course of this research it has become evident that there is a fine line between fact and fantasy in both Art Deco as a style, and in Art Deco as the end-product of Napier’s earthquake story. The birth of Napier’s Art Deco identity marks an explicit aesthetic mutation of the city’s surfaces. The period architecture is borne of the post-disaster context but the evolution of its character is heavily influenced by an imported identity. There is a continued choice to use the Art Deco style in service of a genius loci and the social spaces articulated as a result of this ongoing decision-making are highly mediated. Signifiers of time and space are ubiquitously represented by Art Deco in and around the city and their visual resonance extends beyond the built environment into
the virtual realm. It is as though a rubbing of the buildings has been taken in graphite and placed in the centre of a mind map to see just how many fantasies one might one reasonably connect to the smallest of period details. By graphically connecting to the pool of imagery associated with international examples of Art Deco, the social content of Napier City is familiar to visitors before they even arrive.

To architectural tourists Napier City presents a quaint sort of Art Deco that is a generational interpretation of the modern styles. Unlike the urgency conveyed in the Art Deco of New York or Shanghai, Napier’s cathedrals of commerce do not tower into the clouds. Roofs are not pointed, massing is rarely stepped, and the skyline is unremarkable. Gargoyles do not loom, chrome does not glint, and radical cosmopolitanism is not the message. Instead the stucco walls stand quietly with features built for function and stability. Built during the Depression, their function within the place ballet of the living city has always prioritised utility and earthquake safety. In representations, however, we are met with a fusion of retro imagery that has no historical connection to Napier’s history or appearance and little to do with the realities of New Zealand during the 1930s. Despite the fact that one of Napier city’s major claims to significance is its role in the introduction of architectural modernism to New Zealand, the facades are openly informed by the mysticism of a faux-past, branding, low brow advertising, sentimentality, anachronisms, kiwiana, and kitsch—all anathema to the tenets of Modernism. The barriers between Modernism and the historically dreaded ‘modernistic’ now collude in the creation of a generalised vintage identity that is applauded for its epoch-making progressivism and sold to tourists hungry for temporal interchange.

The concrete forms of the buildings have inaugurated a 1930s idea that leans into a poetic space that is neither historical fact nor untempered fiction. Dislodged Art Deco emblems line the streets, and the urban environment manifests as an exhibition of visual cultural pastiche. Motifs on drain-coverings, for instance, ensure that the past is on permanent display. Banners, patterns, tiles, fonts, mosaics, murals, sculptures and plinths ensure that a sense of historicity is explicitly laid upon a bed of cold concrete. The fictive space of Art Deco has been given a stage over and above other aspects of local history. Pre-earthquake memorials such as the Clive Square Cenotaph, the Clive Flood Memorial, or the South African War Memorial stand in classical, even Gothic, monumental styles. These stone memorials are silent. They persist without a voice. The environment does not further or aesthetically bolster their expressions. Nor do the
monuments alter the temporality of the spaces they occupy. However, the earthquake monuments — the facades, the Memorial Arch, the Veronica Sunbay, the Reflecting Ball, the Kirk Sun Dial — have been given a voice. They occupy spaces intended for use by providing seats, sun-shelter, and nodes that define the liminal spaces designed for performance. Their expressions are mobilized by their affinity with the living city, and they lead an illustrated life outside of their medium. Our selection of which memories from the past we wish to make visible makes a strong cultural statement about contemporary concerns. The role of public artworks in this context is hierarchical and instructional. They crystallize our readings of the city forms while curbing divergent expressions. It is true that we need not grieve the tragedies of remote pasts and it is essential to advance through time without the cultural burden of inherited mourning. The Napier example proffers the question, then, of when it becomes appropriate to ‘move on’ from historic losses. It may seem excessive to perform ceremonies for the flu-pandemic, but many more lives were lost to the flu only thirteen years earlier than the earthquake that we annually ritualise. We might also consider which groups are enabled to make decisions about the cultural memories that are mobilised in urban settings. The differences between commemorating the flu pandemic and the earthquake relate to the ‘final products’ associated with the event. If the flu pandemic could mobilise an appealing poetic space it too would be capitalised upon. The contiguous imagery of sneezing and death, however, tends to make one recoil. Art Deco Napier works because it uses well-established tropes to evoke desirable and popular imagery.

The visual culture enacted in the wake of Napier’s Art Deco disseminates historical knowledge but historical sensation is rare. The city is known through metaphor and ekphrasis — highly mediated representations that are materially disconnected from the historic facades. The presence of the lived past still lingers in unexpected places, in the metonymical presence of cracked plaster and chipped teacups, but you cannot sell a metonym. You can sell metaphors but then uniqueness is lost to analogy. On the one hand, metaphor allows for the social content of the city’s walls to be updated and linked to new ideas as traditions and interests change; this is the greatest benefit of understanding heritage as an ongoing cultural construction. On the other hand, shaping an anomalous artefact or event to a known rubric, such as that of the romanticised interwar Zeitgeist, undermines the distinctive conditions of its making. Its point of difference can be weakened and its semiotic potency lost to
hackneyed tropes. To conjure an effective historical presence we must therefore identify the location of the historical sensation and separate it from all the metaphors we use to understand and promote it.

It is no small ask for heritage sites to remain ‘authentic’ in the face of epistemological developments and the trends of tourism. Sites have to have an appeal, even where dark tourism is concerned. In other words, it is no simple task for Art Deco Napier as a city-concept to remain open to evolving art historical insights, the expansion of cultural knowledge, and the evolving expectations regarding representations of that knowledge while simultaneously, as a brand, holding fast to its pre-packaged identity. Nonetheless, Napier’s architecture is now well-established. It has been in celebration since the 1980s and discussion on the spatiotemporal agency of the built environment as heritage is not undue. Jacques Le Goff reminds us that “All history is contemporary insofar as the past is grasped in the present, and thus responds to the latter’s interests.”¹ Indeed, Napier’s facades have become a vehicle for a twenty-first century vintage idea. While the buildings in their 1930s context had no ‘transcendental’ subject matter — no single idea to which the buildings iconographically allude — the opposite is true of the words and images that have since come to bolster the buildings. The poetic space in operation is entirely trajectorial. Within the permanent murals, sculptures and signposts of Napier’s central business district, individual contemporary expressions are overlooked in favour of period continuity. That which does not pivot on Art Deco is under-represented in the permanent furnishings of the urban environment, either doomed to fleeting exhibition, as with street performances or temporary installations, restricted to a quiet public presence or confined to an existence in galleries and personally curated spaces.

Eelco Runia, in his book Moved by the Past, wrote that “history is an academic discipline where objects cannot be separated from the subjects who study them.”² He observes: “Remarkably often, form is contaminated with content,” while observing that “the historian can prefigure history but history cannot prefigure the historian.”³ This interrelatedness of form, scholar and subject points precisely to the relationship that Napier’s Art Deco has with history as it continues to be made. The buildings

³ Runia, Moved by the Past, 87, 88.
prefigure the Art Deco phenomena that they are now annotated by, and their forms are
now imbued with our interpretations of, and relationships with, the perceived and
invented past. We are now beginning to historicise Napier’s Art Deco phenomenon.
The Art Deco Festival has become an annual event with its own revivialist history,
record-keeping, and publications. Though it is wonderful to simply celebrate, critical
contributions must occasionally outlast the fanfare if we expect to sustain the
festivities in the long term. We are now in a third wave of Art Deco scholarship.
Accounts of the associated styles are less like categorical surveys and more akin to
socio-historical discussions within which definitions of the genre are increasingly
critical and abstracted. Perhaps unexpectedly for a site preoccupied with imbuing its
streets with meaning, Napier’s Art Deco published histories remain locked into the
second wave of literature in which sources are traced and motifs are located, counted
and explained in broad attempts to outline the formal parameters of the style. The
concerns of this second stage of historical processing is further reflected in local
streetscapes which at every turn enforce the categorical definition and stylistic
continuity of the architecture while our animated interactions with those streetscapes,
our performances of them in art and life, are increasingly metamodern.

From a spatiotemporal perspective, Art Deco Napier excercises colonial
agency. The vintage aesthetic serves as a conduit to the past while the circulation of
Māoriland imagery and kitschy kiwiana alongside imported modernist iconography
places ‘us’ firmly in the present. While the appearance of these visual cultural
traditions is reproduced and performed across media, they are informed by the
knowledge of a society vastly different from that of their origins. That said, it is
difficult to encounter cultural misrepresentation or outright invisibility without then
questioning the agency of Art Deco productions. Here we are returned to our
beginnings: “Who are we that this is Napier?” In answering, we should be forthright.
Looking solely at the Art Deco City and its ekphrastic expansions, ‘we’ are
predominantly pākehā: the Art Deco City expresses the agency of white cultures. This
is not an opinion, it is a fact — an unpopular and much-avoided fact. This is expressed
through the modernist discourses used to explain the city’s surfaces, and further by the
colonial imagery that bolsters it. We increasingly see symbolic biculturalism emerging
where historically it was lacking although we have not yet produced a space that
comprehensively normalises tikanga. Art Deco in general, and therefore also Napier,
occupies a Western commercial space that exhibits the priorities of capitalism. It
should come as no surprise therefore that ‘we’ are historically male and informed by predominantly male institutions, such as architectural history, urban planning, and economics. ‘We’ are also nostalgic and interested in the allure of fantasy. We thrive in the artifice of creative performance and we enjoy displaying ourselves as romanticised tropes —‘we’ are often therefore metamodern. We reclaim aspects of the past as an accompaniment to our modern understandings. We entertain the old narratives selectively whilst simultaneously ‘knowing’ better. ‘We’ are also temporally removed enough that the pain of the earthquake can be graphically represented. Heritage signs depicting the fallen city and its inhabitants would have been enormously distressing in 1933, but in 2018 they draw in tourists. Finally, ‘we’ are preoccupied with the past because ‘we’ are a culture who perceives it to be fading. Dwindling memories are embalmed as heritage while unacknowledged fears of an ephemeral existence are neatly sealed behind facades that will outlast us. ‘We’ are more than this, of course, but other traits are made visible and amply celebrated elsewhere; the present goal is to move the floodlight a little to the left to paint a slightly different portrait of the Art Deco City.

It has been a frustration of this thesis that each theme discussed warrants deeper research. There are whole bodies of literature pertaining to, for instance, Art Deco as architecture, Māori architecture, metaphor in architecture, ekphrasis, the cultural politics of kitsch, and the production of architecture as heritage. The process of refining the present research to fit the given parameters has thus resulted in a narrow and peculiar thesis that raises more questions than it answers. It is hoped that while the content has not always been comforting, or emerges in a frustratingly abstract manner, a few significant aspects of the Art Deco identity have been located. Ideally, we will openly acknowledge the social complexities of the city’s origins, harness the mechanics of its visual culture for nuanced cultural representations, and manage the spatiotemporal agency of Art Deco as a product of the present.

The appeals of this research to Napier can be considered in three ways: The city aesthetic needs to be considered in terms of 1) cultural agency, 2) the treatment of space in service of time, and 3) the preservation of the metonymical fact. Given the city’s preoccupation with preservation and its focus on architectural authenticity it could be argued that toying with ‘traditional’ Art Deco in the creation of progressive Art Deco would threaten the perceived value of the heritage quadrant. Regardless of how important the preservation of the original sites may be, so too is the nourishment of diversity in living communities. It is not that the facades need alteration or that
radical imagery should suddenly be developed, but caution must be excercised in mobilizing unrevised historical tropes as public symbols of people and place in the present. This concerns the complexities of cultural invisibility and under-representation in the face of dominant cultural forces and their desired norms. That which is represented and made visible in the city space is offered a place and granted presence. The opposite is true of those groups denied visibility. Cultural representation is a systemic problem, but visual cultural institutions have sway that should be harnessed.

In heritage tourism, the central practice of sight-seeing means that vendors must set up the visual anticipations that will energise the tourist’s gaze. With that responsibility in mind, the discourse of Art Deco excuses the overt resale of colonial kitsch, gender biases and heteronormative displays. Images of Māori flappers or te reo verse do not adorn the heritage walls or memorials, where English, Scottish and American prose is found in abundance. Napier’s Art Deco culture is not concerned with representing diversity. Rather, a romantic, conservative, gendered, white, middle class, and able-bodied narrative is selected from the annals of history. We do not see racial, economic, gender, or body diversity because the imagery is drawn from an era of prejudiced class privilege. It is true that the Art Deco weekend features a powhiri, lectures from Māori art scholars and tiro haere (tours focused on local Māori narratives and ‘Māori Art Deco’), and enthusiasts can enjoy a working class depression dinner or a ‘Prison Break and Cake’ tour of the prison that touches upon issues of class. ‘Dinner with the Maharaja’ — an ‘Indian food experience’ — touches on cultural diversity, while Art Deco festivities draw in people of all ages. These events, however, occur at the Art Deco Festival and do not represent the daily institutionalization of the Art Deco image. It is unclear what decolonized, inclusive or equitable Art Deco would look like, but understanding the city’s surfaces as culturally patterned sensory screens is a helpful place to begin.

It has also been argued that the city’s metonymical presence has been diffused through the immediacy of its engagement with metaphor. The practical outcome of this is to simply suggest that in presenting heritage, we might preserve the metonym (the

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object’s uniqueness, anomalousness, and innate temporality) while selling the metaphor (its identifiable and explained significance, context and relevance). Heritage is a business and while it is a *faux pas* to say so, historical products must be packaged in a consumable format. The historical artefact, in Napier’s case the buildings, should be separated from recreations of it. What this means will vary, but as a rule we must maintain a sense of temporal otherness. It is usually necessary to prepare viewers and bolster experiences with historical knowledge but then let the object speak through its temporal, stylistic, material, or contextual juxtaposition. The abstract feeling of history should be allowed to transpire. Metaphor and pastiche are useful for the anticipation of an experience, while the experience itself is most evocative where it is least mediated. Of course, not all heritage sites are angling at the evocation of the historical sensation, and it is unclear if Napier’s Art Deco is, at any given point, attempting to conjure historical presence. In the case that it is *not* trying to evoke a sense of pastness, the historical figures that are repopulating the city, the heritage signs, building restrictions and themed events are less easily explained.

In terms of the remedial role of the facades in the post-disaster context, we might consider the relationship between death and preservation. Runia notes: “One might say that the prime concern of a generation that has participated in a traumatic event is to be delivered from an ‘excess’ of memories… for a generation, however, that has not lived through a traumatic event, commemoration means the reverse: to remedy the scarcity or, rather, absence of memories.” 6 This supports the idea that Art Deco once operated as a mask that sealed up a broken city. It also suggests that as the salience of memory fades we make increasingly graphic returns to historical traumas. In this way, Napier’s two-step waltz of earthquake disaster-Art Deco recovery compartmentalises the tensions pertaining to our own mortality. We acknowledge the disaster, and we create objects and enduring spaces that do not die the same death we do, as they outlast us. 7 Moreover, we have recreated idiosyncratic utopias that “reactivate unkept promises of the past” in spaces that we then deem sacred producers of identity. 8 There is a relationship here between Art Deco and death. This is further

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6 Runia, *Moved by the Past*, 12.
7 Runia, *Moved by the Past*.
evidenced by memorials and ominous ‘Dark Deco’ manifestations all around the world. In looking at international examples, it is possible to at times tie the social role of Art Deco to the social function of the Neo-Gothic aesthetic, through the highly decorative imposing sense of doom that is available in both styles. Each make monumental cameos in the architecture of death. The use of the style on the post-disaster, depression-era surfaces of Napier thus resonates with its mask-like role in cemeteries, monuments, film noir, propaganda, mythology and kitsch. The cultural historian Celeste Olalquiaga has argued, for instance, that kitsch satisfies desires for control over death and time in ways that verge on the therapeutic: “Kitsch is a time capsule with a two-way ticket to the realm of myth – the collective or individual land of dreams.”9 Scholarship linking the visual culture of Napier to notions of mortality would likely provide a wonderfully alternative view of the social content that is, and could be, spurred by the facades. This also has application in Christchurch City, still in the throes of recovery from the 2011 earthquakes. It would be radical for this New Zealand city to embrace flux and ephemerality during its reconstruction.

Olalquiaga’s suggestion that the production of kitsch is a “ticket to the realm of myth” might further be viewed as an evocative prompt for enquiries into cultural memory.10 Research that takes the notion of contiguous imagery and applies it to the poetic space mobilised by kiwiana might establish how the old semiotics are operating in the present and to what end. Art Deco is tied to a broad timeframe with the sale of such artefacts as Royal Doulton toilet bowls, Art Nouveau Tiffany lamps, first edition novels, non-descript maritime hardware and glimmering jewellery pouring from boxes like high seas loot among porcelain dolls and novelty egg cups. Among the authentically old are contemporary popular reproductions of old world things of this sort: lamps, tin advertising plaques, wall-hangings, rugs, figurines and furniture. It is significant and uneasy that, couched within the city’s vintage culture, negro figurine lamps and Black Americana is sold. What is worse is that, many of them are reproductions made for a now ‘knowing’ audience who might like them ‘ironically’ or for ‘nostalgic effect.’ Yet an audience that buys them as aesthetic artifacts is in essence fetishing cultures and embracing regressive, exoticist notions of the ‘otherness’ of Indigenous peoples. This is souveniring from the past, and it points to some sort of

10 Olalquiaga, cited in Boylan, 46.
willed amnesia — a selective dissociation from facts of history. While metamodernism may allow for the free movement between modernist and postmodern tendencies — flittering freely between the universalism of the modernism and the deconstructions of the postmodernism — one is not presented with a free-ticket to uncriticality. Research into the relationship between kitsch and metamodernism could be insightful in determining the extent to which cultural memory is in tune with contemporary aesthetics.

Art Deco Napier also serves as an example of the increasingly visible role of social avatars in the proliferation of twenty-first century contexts that suspend reality. Whereas it was a striking aspect of modernism to fragment, abstract and deconstruct the human experience, we are presently witnessing the fantasy of completeness. The human form was once reduced, segmented, spliced and contorted (Picasso’s Demoiselles d’Avignon, Leger’s Nudes in the Forest) and the spaces between the immaterial and material were bridged through colour, line and gesture (Fauvist and Expressionist art). We saw private moments captured be it ecstasy or ennui (Parrish’s Ecstasy, Degas’ Absinthe), decadence or desperation (as in the neurotic afflictions of surrealism) or the presentation of ourselves as voyeurs (Manet’s Bar at the Folies-Bergère, Duchamp’s Étant donnes). Deconstructions of the human form were often held in parallel to the psychological conditions of modernity as the impact of industrialization foreshadowed our dystopian future (Sironi’s urban landscapes). The deconstruction and dehumanization of forms, moments and symbols sought to abstract familiar things and disrupt our self-immersion so as to highlight both our realities and our fears.

The twenty-first century, no less burdened by global conflict and financial crises but more virtually connected, is witnessing a return to the complete forms of history though a revised lens. As originally observed by Vermuelen and Van Akker in The Metamodernist Manifesto and the ongoing Notes on Metamodernism, it has become evident that the current generation, the children of the 1980s and 1990s, tend to function from a default perspective of irony and cynicism. Postmodern deconstructions replete with pastiche and irony have given rise to a genuine return to myth and fantasy (we observed this in Teeks and Maya Payne’s music videos). Somewhere amidst the confrontation and denunciation of traditional narratives, and the emotional requirement for respite from cynicism, is a desire to move with suspended disbelief through old and familiar formats. The romantic appeal of idealism is
rewritten for knowing audiences who crave the temporalising and organising functions of antiquated grand narratives in bounded formats — books, films, gallery spaces, community halls, fashion blogs, magazines and theatres. Moreover, the easy exchange of images, in both material and virtual formats, means there is a heightened call for the externalisation of experiences and sensations in service of public self-affirmation.\textsuperscript{11} Inner abstractions are physically embodied and made visible, through the adoption of predetermined and recognisable facial expressions, postures, locations, clothes, brands, compositions, palettes, platitudes and hashtags. A by-product of this exteriorization and premeditated posturing (the move from spontaneously being into deliberately appearing-to-be) is the grooming of public spaces for social staging. Whether it is the kitchen bench, one’s garden, the café table or the street, people increasingly desire places to document or to create the appearance of lifestyles. The imageability of streets and city icons has therefore become integral to the touristic appeal of certain locations. Everyone is familiar with the image of tourists ‘holding up’ the Leaning Tower of Pisa or ‘pinching’ the top of the Eiffel Tower, and to these we might now add the ‘Charleston pose’ in front of Napier’s buildings. Research on Napier’s surfaces as a platform for the performance of predetermined representational schemes and avatars of the self might proffer insight on the escalating appeal of the Art Deco societies around the world, and in turn, methods of sustainability in an increasingly virtual world.

On a final note, Napier’s needs more feminist scholarship. One must point out that Napier’s Art Deco legacy is set within ‘a history of great white men’ and that historically there is little that is ‘female’ about Napier as an urban setting. From the appointment of two male commissioners to govern the post-earthquake rebuild – a magistrate and an engineer, both of retirement age – to the all male reconstruction committee, the male led architectural firms that formed the Architect’s Association and the influence of a succession of male architects (Frank Lloyd Wright and the Chicago School), the male mayors (first John Vigor Brown and then C. O. Morse), the male dominated Borough Council and Thirty Thousand Club (the latter of which cared greatly for the redevelopment of Marine Parade), to the many men after whom many streets are named (including the very name of the city, after Charles Napier), the reconstruction of Napier in the 1930s was a distinctly male phenomenon. This is not to

downplay the presence of women, especially working women, of whom there were many, or to allow the strength and courage of the women who not only endured the earthquake but aided in the physical rescue and recovery of the city in its aftermath to fall by the wayside, but it is to point out the powerfully patriarchal tendencies of the era. It is also to suggest that the filters through which Napier’s facades were pressed from their conception to their construction (and they were of course built by men) were gender biased. Examination of how femaleness, maleness, femininity, masculinity, sexuality, sex, gender identity and the (problematic) categorization of gender roles are established, interpreted in, and reflected by the built environment would support the cultivation of an inclusive Art Deco.

Napier’s visual culture provides fertile ground for anyone interested in the contemporary play of history and the performance of architecture as it is released from its built form. Faux-history is confirmed over time and sold as experience. Its reenactment is used to keep the architecture relevant and meaningful in an everchanging world. Heritage will never settle because it must always maintain a trajectory that suits the everchanging future — this is a positive thing, and complementary to the Art Deco idiom (itself still evolving). For now, the enduring bottom line is that the 111 new buildings that were erected in the two years after Napier’s earthquake function collectively to create Napier’s Art Deco identity. They are socially and spatially operative and their origins in disaster mean that they are inherently significant — even if only to the extent that they represent an aesthetic response to a singular moment of historical mutation.
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Theatre Lane mural (featuring jazz musicians under a rotunda at the far end).
Paint on plaster
Emerson & Tennyson Street Lane, Napier, 2015
Photographed by the author
Figure 83
Freeman White, *Deco Terminus*, detail (mural continues around the back of the building), 2015.
Clive Square, Napier, 2017
Photographed by the author
Figure 84
Old Rothmans Building with staff in front.
Port Ahuriri, Napier
No year given
Photograph
Sourced online, Napier City Council, 2018
https://www.napier.govt.nz/napier/about/history/
Figure 85
Set of three Napier postcards for The Art Deco Trust showing the city aligned with spatial signifiers.
Stephen Fuller
Postcards
Sourced, 2016
Photographed by the author
Figure 86
Terry Moyle, showing the city reduced to spatial signifiers.
Postcard
Sourced online, Air Classique, 2018
http://byairclassique.com/NZPostcards
Figure 87
Tho-Radia Face Cream, advertisement, 1933.
Poster
Sourced online, Lucy Jane Santos, 2018
http://lucyjanesantos.com/alfred-curie-tho-radia/
Figure 88
Cerulite Sunglasses, advertisement, 1938.
Newspaper cutting
Sourced online, Pinterest, 2018
https://www.pinterest.com/pin
Figure 89
Peter Wells, “What Makes One City Different From Another?”
Paint on plaster
Corner, Hastings & Emerson Street, 2017
Photographed by the author
Figure 90
Paint on plaster
Bayley’s Carpark, Tennyson Street, Napier, 2017
Photographed by the author
Figure 91
Percy Bysshe Shelley quote, from the “Words on Walls” project.
Paint on plaster
Byron Street, Napier, 2017
Photographed by the author
Figure 92
Ralph Waldo Emerson quote, from the “Words on Walls” project.
Paint on plaster
Emerson Street, Napier, 2017
Photographed by the author
Figure 93
Mural depicting the disaster and recovery narrative.
Paint on plaster
Dalton to Emerson Street Accessway, 2017
Photographed by the author
Figure 94
1931 Earthquake Exhibition.
MTG Hawkes Bay, Napier
Sourced online, Hello Hawkes Bay, 2018
https://www.hawkesbaynz.com/assets/Uploads/DSC1873-1-800x600-earthquake.jpg
Figure 95
Bronze
Emerson Street, Napier. 2017
Photographed by the author
Figure 96
Bronze
Emerson Street, Napier, 2017
Photographed by the author
Figure 97
Bronze
Emerson Street, Napier, 2018
Photographed by the author
Figure 98
Tara Cooney, *A Good Yarn* (series), 2013; series can also be spotted in figure 83.
Paint on electrical boxes
Various locations, Napier Central, 2015
Photographed by the author
Figure 99
David Trubridge, *Ecliptic/The Millennial Arch*, year not given.
Marine Parade, Napier, 2016
Photographed by the author
Figure 100
Artist’s Collective, *Old/New Banners.*
Screenprinted banners on steel masts
Emerson Street, Napier Central, 2018
Photographed by author
Figure 101
Marine Parade, Napier, 2018
Photographed by the author
Figure 102
Cathedral Square, Christchurch
Sourced online, Christchurch City Council, 2018
Figure 103
Photographed from film by the author
Figure 104
Peter Wells, two frames showing the Daily Telegraph Building. 
Newest City on the Globe, 1985
Photographed from film by the author
Figure 105
Peter Wells, frame showing costumed figure as allegory.
*Newest City on the Globe*, 1985
Photographed from film by the author
Figure 106
Peter Wells, frame showing male dancer silhouetted against an illuminated Tom Parker Fountain.
Newest City on the Globe, 1985
Photographed from film by the author
Figure 107
Frame, showing non-specific vintage styling. Teeks, *If Only*, 2017
Photographed from video by the author
Figure 108
Frame, showing Municipal Theatre as a backdrop within a vintage aesthetic.
Teeks, *If Only*, 2017
Photographed from video by the author
Figure 109
Three frames showing a woman passing through the male gaze.
Teeks, *If Only*, 2017
Photographed from video by author
Figure 110
Photograph
Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa
Sourced online, Te Papa, 2018
https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/38025
Figure 111
Two frames showing contemporary Art Deco/Pop Art integration.
Maya Payne, *Lucky Ones*, 2016
Photographed from video by author
Figure 112
Representation and reality in Theatre Lane.
Maya Payne, *Lucky Ones*, 2016
Photographed from video by author
Figure 113
Acrylic on board
Sourced online, Graham Kirk, 2018
http://grahamkirk.com/prints/Napier.htm
Figure 114
Photograph: Richard Wotton
Sourced online: Eventfinda, 2018
Figure 115
Ellison & Duncan Façade featuring murals by Brenda Morrell — note the resemblance to figure 104.
Barry Street, Ahuriri, Napier
Sourced online, Napier City Council, 2018
https://www.napier.govt.nz/napier
Figure 116
Old Electric Tramstop, Waghorne Street.
Painted weatherboards
Ahuriri, Napier
Sourced online, Tiki Touring NZ, 2018
https://tikitouringnz.blogspot.com/2016
Figure 117
Mural on a public toilet, representing icons from the immediate environment.
Marine Parade, Napier, 2016
Photographed by the author
Figure 118
Viewing plinths displaying graphics of local icons.
Emerson Street, Napier, 2016
Photographed by the author
Figure 119
Shadow of local Art Deco character ‘Bertie’ in cardboard.
Art Deco Trust Shop, Herschell St, Napier, 2015
Photographed by the author