

Freeville

David Cook and Tim J. Veling

5 - 27 June 2014

The Freeville Project is a photography-based project developed in collaboration with students and staff of Freeville Primary School in New Brighton, Christchurch, NZ. The result of an intensive workshop with 67 students; discussing ideas of community and future vision for the school environment in light of the impending closure of their school (due to regional earthquake damage).

In November 2013 artists David Cook and Tim J. Veling spent a week with two classrooms at Freeville, taking photographs and running creative workshops. Rather than dwell on the nostalgia of loss, the children were asked to imagine the future of their space. The students wrote stories and created visual proposals for future developments of the site. Free from the restraints and practicality of adult thinking the results are highly imaginative, visionary and at times out-of-this-world propositions for what the future of the area might look like. Cook and Veling collaborated with teachers in facilitating this process, and also created a series of photographic portraits and landscapes.

Prior to the February 2011 earthquake, Freeville School commissioned the 'Freeville School Landscape Concept Draft Plan' (Rough & Milne landscape architects). This plan incorporated a wildflower bed, native trees, native shrubs and children's artwork. With a clear agenda to educate and engage the community in the school's surrounding ecological landscape, this plan could never have foreseen the dramatic events that followed its conception. As a result of the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes, the plan has gone unrealised, as New Brighton's landscape changed forever and the community's understanding of the complex relationships between the natural, built and social environments was suddenly tested.

Freeville School is situated on what is now highly contestable land. In 2015, the Freeville School site will be abandoned and operate solely from an alternative school site in New Brighton, where Freeville and two other local schools will be merged. Freeville School buildings and facilities, situated on land sold

to the Ministry of Education by the Free family for the purpose of building an education facility, are scheduled to be demolished soon after.

The built environment that constitutes the school will disappear, but the future for the land itself is uncertain. It is especially ambiguous if allowance will be made for the school's surrounding community to contribute ideas to inform the redevelopment. This project aims within the current ambiguous space to collaborate with remaining students and staff of Freeville School and help them re-imagine and articulate their own vision for the land's future. Cook and Veling's documentation of the students and site that accompany the students' own work, provides a stark and honest account of a school community and period in time which will soon be lost. As many have noted since the 2011 earthquake and subsequent wide-scale demolition of the built environment, it can be startling how quickly we forget what was once there. The markers, maps and meeting places that create the co-ordinates of our day-to-day experience and provide the context for the memories that we form (none more so perhaps, than that of the primary school) have been disrupted on an unprecedented scale in Christchurch. The Freeville project recognises an important psychological gap that exists in the rebuild of Christchurch - while there is no doubt orchestrated documentation occurring of Christchurch's CBD and other landmark areas, who is accounting for the smaller less monumental, but no less significant spaces - schools, community halls and houses, before they are lost to recollection and memory and then entirely to time?

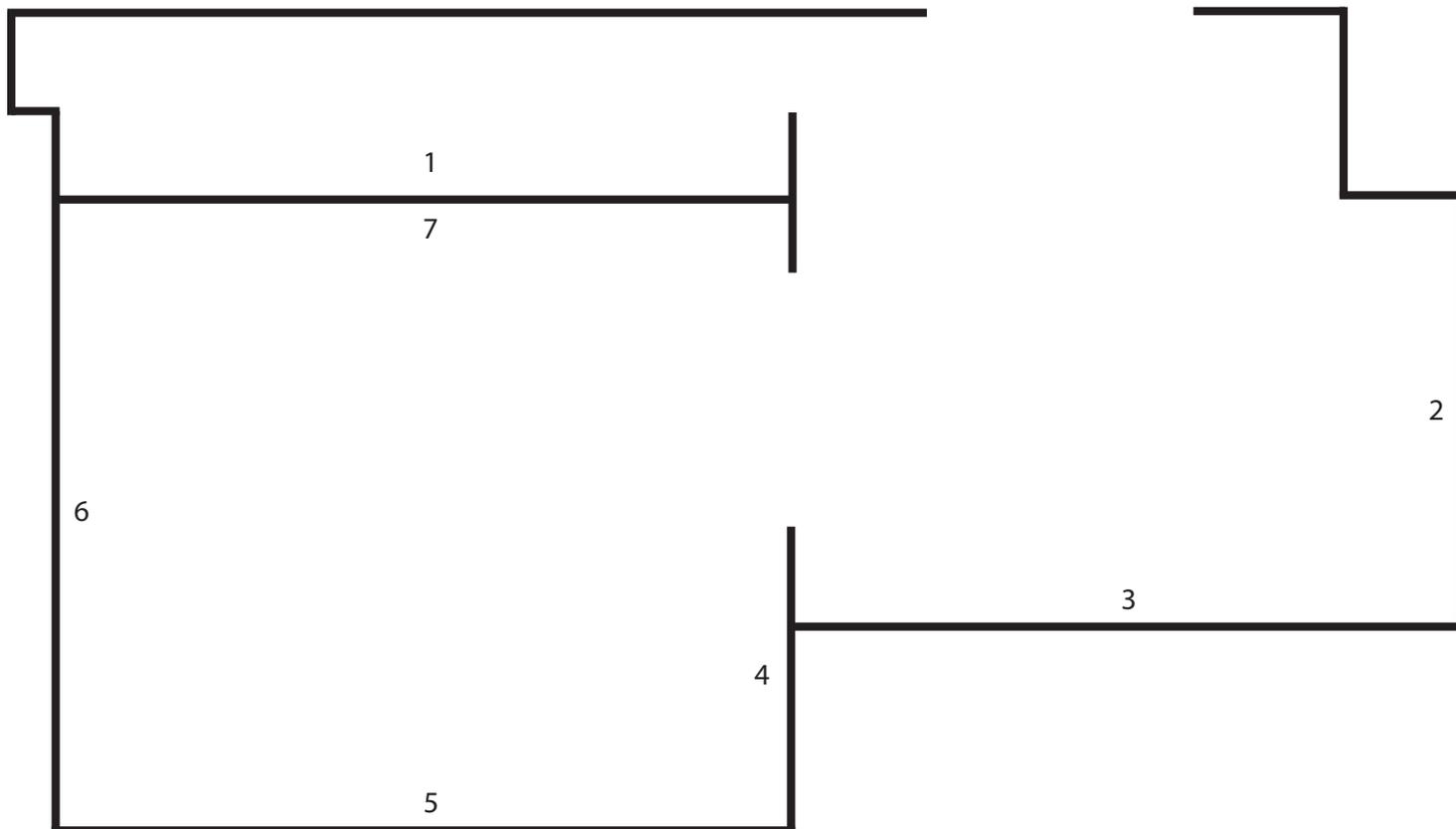
This finished body of work was first exhibited as billboard-sized prints in the local New Brighton shopping mall, as part of the TEZA (Transitional Economic Zone of Aotearoa), produced by Letting Space in November 2013. The RAMP exhibition is a reconfiguration of the show incorporating new work. The final body of work will be kept within Place in Time's digital archive at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, NZ.

Project commissioned by TEZA: <http://teza.org.nz>
Produced by Letting Space www.lettingspace.org.nz

Collaborators: 67 Freeville Primary School pupils / Teachers: Tracey Barber, Nicole Cunningham, Bernice Swain & Sharon Thompson / Facilitators and photographers: David Cook & Tim J. Veling / Assistants: Bayley Corfield, David Draper, Hannah Watkinson & Karl Bayly / Thanks to Mark Harvey (Productive Promises)

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RAMP GALLERY
COLLINGWOOD ST ENTRANCE



1. Lowering the flags. Tim J. Veling.
2. NewZealandGazette-noticeofschoolclosuresandmergers.
- 2 - 3. Wawata and stories. Freeville Primary School students.
- 3 - 5. School environment. Tim J. Veling.
6. Proposals for the future of the school grounds. Freeville Primary School students.
7. School portraits. David Cook.