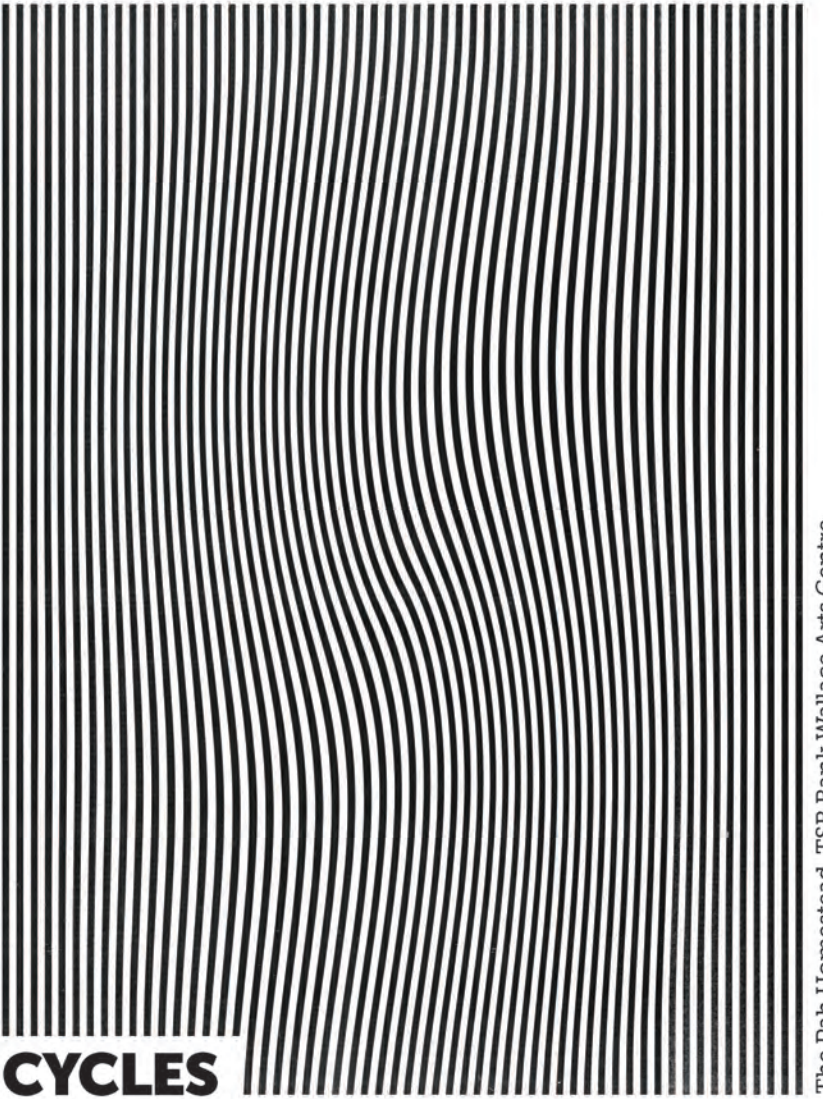

CYCLES
REPETITION & REDIRECTION

Exhibition Opening Tuesday 11 April 6:00-8:00pm

Gregory Bennett, Tania de León, Miriam Harris, Jan Kruse,
Daniela Repas, Johnson Witehira, and Olga Wroniewicz.

The Pah Homestead TSB Bank Wallace Arts Centre
Open Tuesday - Friday 10:00am-3:00pm, Saturday & Sunday 8:00am-5:00pm
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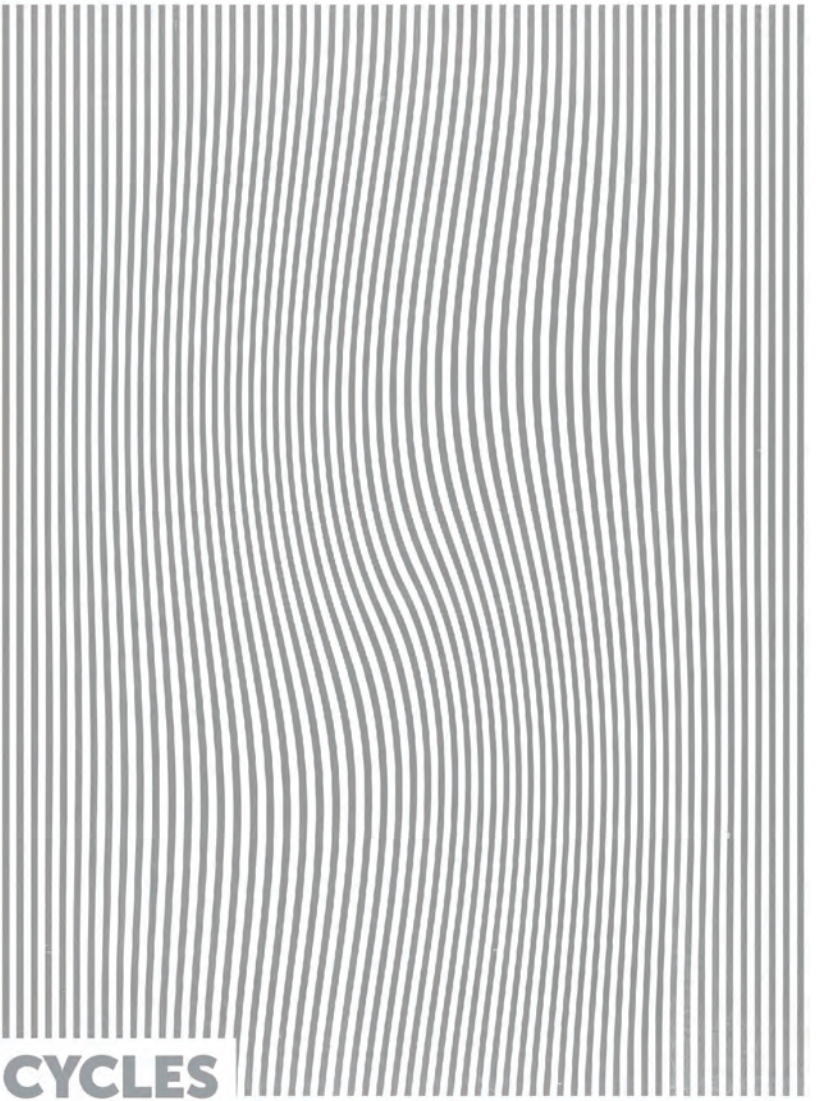


CYCLES
REPETITION & REDIRECTION

Introduction

by Miriam Harris

This exhibition explores themes of cyclical repetition and redirection, in an immersive 360-degree animated installation arising out of a collaboration between seven artists/animators located in different parts of the globe. Animation as a medium has strong associations with the circular and cyclical, in the form of looping, 'walk cycles', optical toys such as the zoetrope and praxinoscope, the panorama, and the emerging media form of virtual reality. Software studies and media theorist Lev Manovich has drawn attention to the loop and the database as engines of (non-linear) narrative within digital media work, writing in his essay 'Generation Flash' that 'left to their own devices, Flash animations, QuickTime movies, the characters in computer games loop endlessly - until the human user intervenes by clicking.'

On the human level, cycles of repetition play a prominent role in our domestic and personal lives, as well as within societies and cultures. Such circularity has spawned vernacular expressions such as being stuck in a 'vicious circle' or sounding like 'a broken record'. On the recent contemporary political stage, Donald Trump's fear mongering and scapegoating of minorities prompted a sense of déjà vu, a reminder of the mass rallies and demagoguery that took place to devastating effect in Germany in the 1930s. George Santayana's dictum is often quoted

> 'It has been said that those who do not learn from history, are condemned to repeat it'.

Further, there are patterns of causality and habit that operate on an unconscious level. It could be said that there are inter-generational legacies of trauma absorbed by the psyche which manifest themselves in various fashions, both personal and societal. Within the academic arena, the field of trauma studies has arisen in response to these issues over the last three decades, encompassing a range of disciplines such as literature, ethnography, psychology, medicine, cultural studies, and the visual arts. Focusing initially on the catastrophic reverberations unleashed by the Holocaust upon survivors and in turn their offspring, the field's explorations have extended to the ravaging effects of colonisation, war, exile, violence, the oppression of minorities, abuse, corruption and inequity, disease, natural and industrial disasters, and environmental damage, together with their attendant cycles of repetition. In order to break such cycles, an awareness of the source of the damage or 'wounded-ness' needs to occur, and new directions and patterns established.

These themes of repetition and redirection – both personal and cultural – are explored by seven artists who have exhibited internationally and work in the field of animation/fine arts/new media. **Gregory Bennett**, **Miriam Harris** and **Jan Kruse** (all lecturers in Digital Design at AUT), AUT Communication Design lecturer **Johnson Witehira**, Portland/Bosnian animator **Daniela Repas**, Polish animator **Olga Wroniewicz**, and Mexican animator **Tania de León**.

Creative process

Coming up with a quick-fix response to issues of traumatic repetition, through an immersion in animation and sound, would be absurdly pat. In the course of this project, what we have been interested in however, as a group of artist/animators, is the chance to listen to each other - exchanging digital files, thoughts, and perspectives through social media and the Internet. Geographical shrinkage occurred through collectively gathering on a Facebook page and uploading creative work-in-progress; greetings were shared from different time zones that ranged from Portland to Poland, Auckland to Mexico City. As Chicago-based digital artist and educator Claudia Hart has expressed in an interview: 'The virtual highway, meaning the virtual space we find on the Internet and in shared virtual worlds, allows a special kind of meeting of minds between people whose bodies may be scattered all over the world...'

In a 2013 paper published in the European Journal of Psychotraumatology, the authors discussed the importance of resilience as a means to work with the effects of trauma and stress, and that resilience can be enhanced through a sense of community - 'having lines of communication with other people' and 'knowing where the resources are.'

As curator of this project, I was interested in establishing a community with artist/animators who were already exploring issues such as memory, identity, trauma, political and cultural disruption, and the animated loop. I invited people with whose work I was already familiar, and whose backgrounds reflect a variety of experiences that are intertwined with the traumatic events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These experiences include living through the collapse of Communism, the effects of colonisation upon indigenous communities, the Bosnian war, the subjugation and alienation of queer communities, the legacy of the Holocaust, the rise of neoliberal capitalism, the consequences of climate change, and the impact of US policies - and Donald Trump - upon Mexico.

Trauma and resilience also occupy a more personal and local sphere, and every human being must draw upon resources of resilience in the face of life's vicissitudes, accidents, and the levelling nature of mortality. Each artist has contributed to the animated installation two looped sequences - one speaks to more collective and global issues, whereas the other is personalised and local. A gamut of animation approaches has been explored, and different visual styles have been incorporated, like a personal signature. 3D animation and motion capture, vector graphics, collage, printmaking, projection mapping, and drawing.

A viewer of the animated installation will observe that there are sequences in which different visual styles occupy the same space and the narrative structure evinces certain changes - this is because having completed their initial two sequences, the artists worked in pairs. Communicating with each other through social media, they discussed the stories informing their loops, states of repetition, and 'stuckness'. Through mutual agreement and the exchange of digital files, the other artist then sought to bring an empathetic response by making visual and animated changes, whether it be just through the comfort of an additional presence, finding issues in common, or providing a shift in perspective.

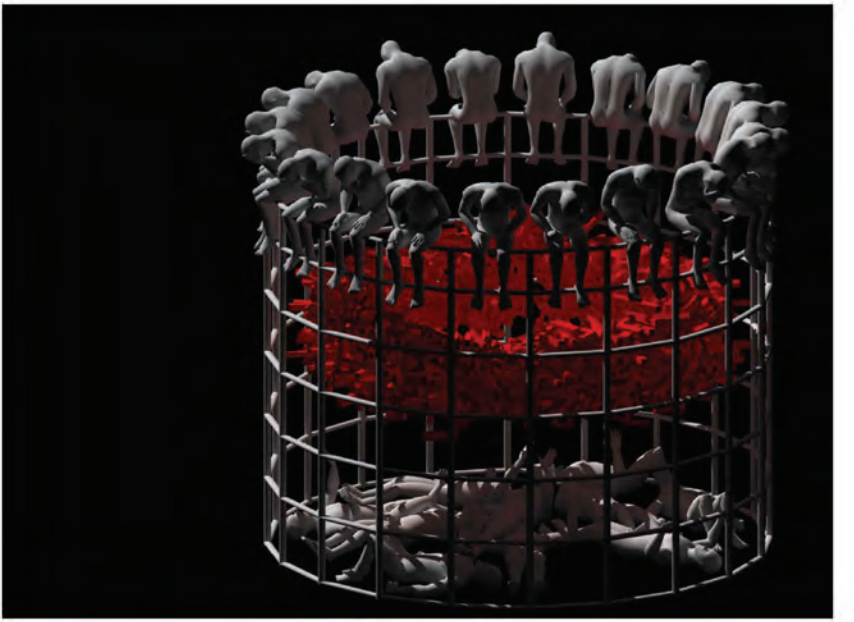
Digital media provides a multiplicity of forums to communicate with different parts of the globe, but in a media-saturated environment, it is also easy to become desensitised to the plight of others. I've found that working collectively with animated material has made the narratives of others much more tangible - and other members of this project have expressed a similar sentiment. For this collaborative animation installation, **Johnson Witehira** in Auckland communicated with **Daniela Repas** in Portland, USA, **Gregory Bennett** in Grey Lynn spoke with **Olga Wroniewicz** in Warsaw, Poland, and I made a Skype connection with **Tania de León** in Mexico City. Further details about each of their backgrounds, and the experience of these creative exchanges are expressed overleaf in the artist/animators' statements.

Gregory Bennett

Working directly into high-end 3D modelling and animation software, and taking the actions of a generic male figure as a point of departure, my animations are created in a modular fashion, building up units of performed movements, loops and cycles (both animated and motion-captured), creating a sometimes complex movement vocabulary. Drawing on and remediating a range of sources including the photographic studies of Eadweard J. Muybridge, the choreography of Busby Berkeley, nineteenth century optical toys, and the contemporary digital video game, these works present figures which occupy a space between the animate and the inanimate, between automata (devices that move by themselves) and simulacra (devices that simulate other things).

My animated loops for 'Cycles: Repetition & Redirection' explore 3D visualisations which aim to re-create a tangible psychological space with arrangements of looped movement cycles in a compressed spatial arrangement driven by notions of the repetition compulsion, and of suggested hierarchies and chains of traumatic transmission.

My collaboration with **Olga Wroniewicz** allows for the creation and sharing of elements within the 3D spatial realm. For me **Olga's** subtle and evocative animations recall the rhythms of breathing and the ribcage as both protective and constricting, and evocative of fundamental bodily reflexive responses and barometers of emotional states. These become protective environmental configurations for my figurative kinematic clusters in a communal spatial-temporal field.



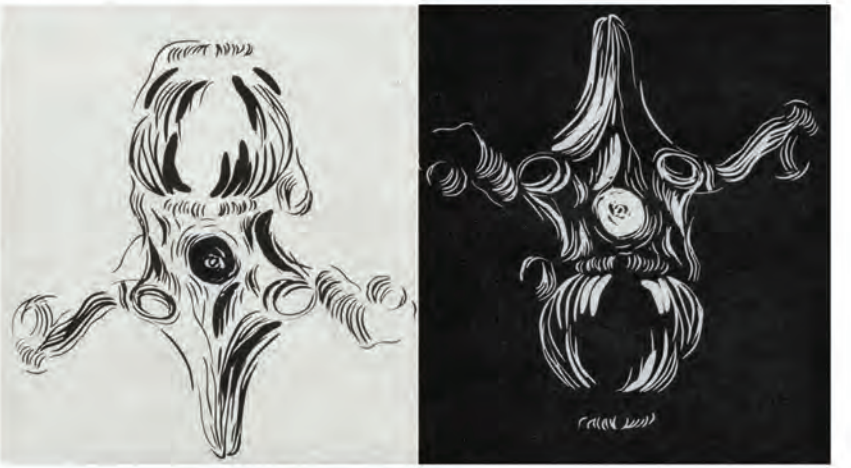
Tania de León

My name is **Tania de León**. I am a Mexican visual artist dedicated to experimental animation, drawing, and engraving. Over the last eighteen months I've been working on 'Cronographs' - a personal digest of time, or a series of animated installations about different concepts of time. I pursued a PhD in Fine Arts, within the program of Expressive, Formal and Spatial-Temporal Components of Animation, at the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (UPV), Spain. Before that, I acquired a Master Degree in Multimedia Production for the Internet at the same university. Nowadays I'm a tenured Professor at the Facultad de Artes y Diseño (UNAM), in Mexico City and I have worked also as professor at the Universitat Jaume I in Castellón, Spain and the Tecnológico de Monterrey CCM, in Mexico City.

The loops I'm presenting in the exhibition 'Cycles: Repetition & Redirection' consider trauma as a repetitive event that affects not only the self but also others. The individual trauma loop is related to a car accident I had in 2012. My head and neck were immobilized for eight months; the rest of my body had little mobility. It was a physical trauma that had repercussions upon my state of mind. Since the core of the damage was in my spine, the mobile elements of the animations are vertebrae. The collective trauma loop uses the same elements. These vertebrae - which in this case represent moving urban elements (i.e. cars, humans, metro, buses, etcetera) - are sometimes ordered, but most of the time are really chaotic in Mexico City. This leads to dysfunction within the society.

I've worked on collective animation projects. But on previous occasions, the artists who animated took into consideration the preceding and subsequent work, and these became mixed in the mind of the spectator. The proposal to directly

modify someone's animation worried me a little. Even though both of **Miriam's** loops were very interesting, I decided to work on **Miriam's** collective trauma loop, because I could relate it to the formal elements of my work. I tried to contrast the sense of death with the feeling of hope (bones have this double meaning in Mexican symbolism), and for the transitions I used a flashing effect with black and white, to break the harmony of movement. At the end the result was satisfying, and the process was very enriching, so that the fear I felt at the beginning vanished.



Miriam Harris

Drawing on a background in fine arts, literature and film studies, together with training in digital animation and visual effects, my animated films seek to combine 2D and 3D imagery, analogue formats and the digital, the indexical image with the imagined, and linear narratives with poetic forks in the road. I'm interested in the way hybridity and collage can evoke different temporal levels within the same space, and thus effectively explore themes such as memory, identity, culture, and the impact of the past on the present.

One of my animated loops explores a Holocaust narrative - the rise of the Nazis, the ensuing upheaval and deportations, horrific trauma and losses, and the efforts to rebuild. The other loop occupies a different geographical space and reflects upon memories of New Zealand summer holidays, and how changing weather patterns are indicative of the global warming that threatens the whole planet. My father is a fifth-generation Kiwi of English/Irish background, and my mother is a Polish Jew, who as a child survived part of the war in Nazi-occupied Warsaw and then a Siberian labour camp - many family members were killed in the Holocaust.

I worked with **Tania de León** on the composite animated sequence, and her vibrancy and Mexican heritage offered a reassuring counterpoint to the troubling activities on the Trump side of the border. Tania added bones to the Holocaust narrative – in Mexican symbolism these reference both death and hope - and provided a greater spaciousness to my sense of inherited loss. In a Skype chat, she spoke evocatively about how swimming in the Caribbean has helped heal her damaged spine, and I sought to capture this mending with drawings in various hues of blue.

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Daniela Repas

My name is **Daniela Repas** and I was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result of the Balkan wars during the 1990's I became a refugee and spent about a decade of my life moving through several countries. I have found home in Portland, Oregon where I practice as a visual intermedia artist.

My two animated sequences attempt to reflect a state of numbness that occurs when external regulations impose on personal will. The depiction of sky and space moving around the portrayed characters is there to give room to breath, beauty of nature and lightness of pain.

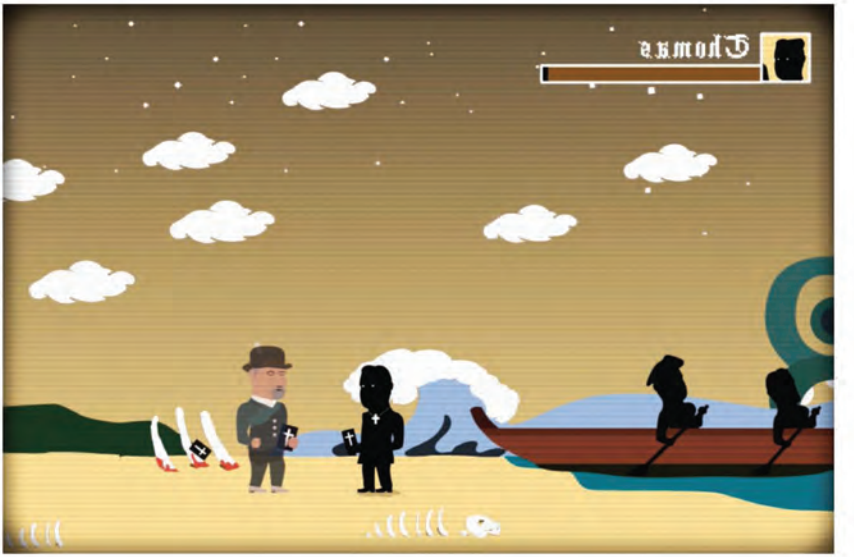
I have approached **Johnson Witehira's** work as a film editor. I saw an opportunity to re-establish the timeline and ultimately change the end result of his sequences. The question of cultural and religious assimilation he proposes in his work reflected my own experiences in many ways. My attempt is to bring to light the multiplicity of outcomes within a singularity of a cultural or historical event.

Johnson Witehira

Johnson Witehira is a designer and artist of Ngā Puhi (Ngai-tā-te-auru), Tamahaki (Ngāti Hinekura), and Pākehā descent. His work often explores identity and the space between being Māori and Pākehā. He has worked on a diverse range of creative projects, from solo and group exhibitions, to public art including murals, light-box works and projected light installations. A key aspect of **Witehira's** work is the use of digital and hybrid media.

His animated sequences reflect upon the trauma caused to Aotearoa by our Māori and Pākehā ancestors. In the first work Witehira looks at the trauma caused to the land and animals by Māori. The contemporary notion of Māori as kaitiaki (guardians/stewards) is challenged by the reality of Māori activities following their arrival from Polynesia. As archaeological evidence suggests that the arrival of Māori had a very damaging effect on New Zealand. In the second work Witehira explores the ongoing trauma Māori experienced through colonisation. The lens in this piece specifically focuses on assimilation through religion. For many Māori, Christianity has been so embedded within culture that it's difficult to see which parts of our culture are 'ours' and which were adopted.

In the collaborative animation **Witehira** looks to combine elements from his own art works, and personal experiences, with the notion of internal struggle portrayed in **Daniela Repas'** animation. Reflecting the forms back in on themselves **Witehira** references the binary and internal conflict that goes with being someone of mixed race. The elements collide and merge with one another in the centre.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Olga Wroniewicz

I am a new media designer and an educator based in Warsaw, Poland. I am currently working on a real-time projection mapping installation that explores similar themes to those within the 'Cycles' project. Therefore, I found the challenge very interesting. In my animations I work with a model of the upcoming installation. In my academic practice, I often draw from the motifs of repetition. Building larger composites out of small loops is interesting on both a high and low level: philosophically and technically.

When creating my first short loop (white) I was considering the idea of the shaping force of pressure. It is only due to pressure that we see the shape. Through a breathing-like rhythm, the pressure is released. In the extreme phase, there is no sense of structure, but a freedom of definition – vast space and void. The corresponding second loop (black) is a view from the outside of the same structure. It is also unrecognisable, until another entity acts upon it. The black cloth slides down over the rib-like structure, in a loop. The smooth, brief contact reveals the black leather texture (reminiscent of the skin).

Gregory Bennett's kinetic sculptures of human figures are compact and complex. They evoke the sensation of an unrelenting, hopeless ring of endless effort. The influences between our works started to flow back and forth in the early stages of the project, thanks to the exchange of our processes through social media. The use and interpretation of common motifs were the mutual inspiration. I found the exchange of animations very inspiring - it was a conversation with no words needed, as it is with animation: re-creations, gestures, movements... The materials were designed with certain ideas of the exhibition in mind, and we discussed more ideas along the way. The combinations reach out beyond classic film reception. Loops are part of an immersive experience.

Jan Kruse

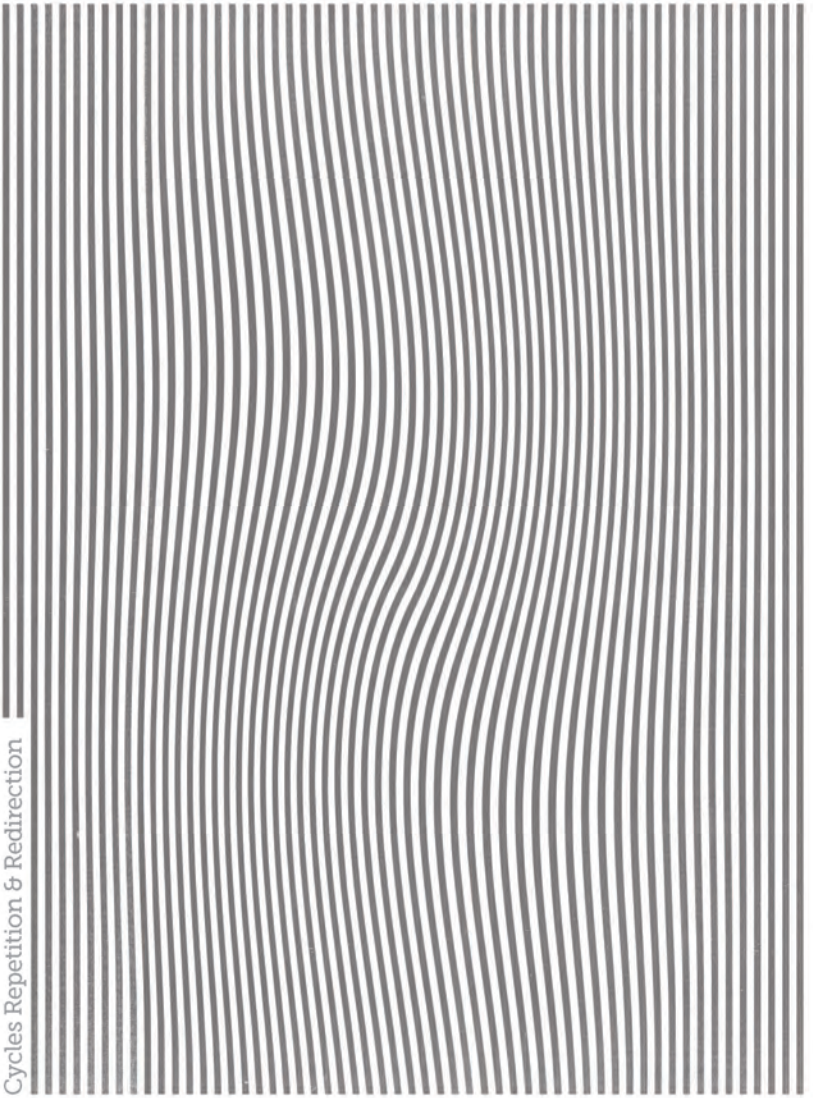
Jan Kruse is a Lecturer in Visual Effects in the Digital Design Department at AUT University. He started his career in Video and Audio Editing, and spent more than 15 years in the Visual Effects Industry, and worked as a Supervisor, Producer and Compositor in various companies across New Zealand, Canada and Europe. His portfolio includes work on high profile projects such as Lord Of The Rings, King Kong, X-Men and Rise Of The Planet Of The Apes.

He recently left his position at Weta Digital in Wellington, New Zealand, to pursue an academic career. An interest in Industrial and Hobby Robotics led him to explore a few projects outside of his area of expertise, including autonomous UAV (Quadrotor) in 2007, and several other electronics and automation ventures.

Jan is currently a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Design & Creative Technologies at Auckland University of Technology. For the 'Cycles' exhibition project, he has worked upon the audio component of the collaborative animation installation, drawing upon his experience in audio, video editing and coding.

Thanks to:

Auckland University of Technology
The Pah Homestead
Sir James Wallace
Nicholas Butler
Anne Pokel
Warren Pringle
Paul Shadbolt



Cycles Repetition & Redirection

The Pah Homestead TSB Bank Wallace Arts Centre
April 2017