

a library to scale

Ann Shelton, 2007

There is a sense in which things become real through their repetition. *a library to scale* records a likeness of a collection of scrapbooks, a visual re-enactment of a compelling collection of books; it engages us in a process of recovery, retrieval, and re-presentation. It seeks to bind Frederick B. Butler's project anew¹, to look back on it from the very particular time and space of the *now*. For a period of sixty years, Butler clipped articles, ads and images from the many newspapers he read; he then pasted these articles — or transcribed them where he was unable to obtain an original clipping — he then ordered them thematically and pasted them into upside down novels. Butler observed, condensed, re-constructed and re-shaped his newspaper archive, which contains some 3,500 volumes. Spanning two world wars, Butler's project forms an alternative mapping of Taranaki. His archive marks out the space of Taranaki's settler history, from conflicts to commerce, politics to land confiscations and its changing social climates.

Much contemporary art is invested in the gaps or spaces of the in-between. *a library to scale* is no exception. The viewer is propelled from record to account, from the 'then' to the 'now', from the personal to the public, from the convention of archive to the idiosyncrasy of scrap booking, and from the known to the

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 23

unknown. This work seeks to reflect on community, history, labour, art and the everyday. It searches not so much for quantifiable answers about Butler's project, but to raise questions and bring it back into the realm of visibility. This excavation of sorts continues the development of my practice. Memory reframed, re-enacted in a sense — history and doubling are again ciphers for meaning in this work.

I have cast the artist as recorder, drawing on the impulses familiar to me from another career; that of the photojournalist. But here also in this work are the forces of the unknown and the unknowable — leaps of faith. As Francis Pound notes, 'few biographical particles have stuck to the figure of Frederick. B. Butler.'²

Butler's project is a record, a resource, a library, a collection. Mine is a portrait, a map, a photograph; perhaps at a stretch something of an after-image, albeit a stammering and incomplete one.

Special thanks to Puke Ariki and to Sereena and Frances Burton for helping make this exhibition possible.

² Francis Pound, 'The Reflecting Archive', *a library to scale*, Rim Books, Auckland, 2007
