Te Atatu Me: A Retrospective

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Abstract
John B. Turner (b. 1943) is one of New Zealand's preeminent documentary and art photographers. This article explores a particular collection of images of the west Auckland suburb of Te Atatū Peninsula, which Turner took over a period of seven years (2005-2011), and which were published in the book *Te Atatu Me: Photographs of an Urban New Zealand Village* (2015).[1] The focus here is on how such photography can contribute to the historical archive as visual evidence through the intersection that it is able to achieve between documenting scenes in the form of photographs, and using the aesthetic dimensions of the medium both to project forms of meaning onto those images[2] and as a device of cultural preservation.[3]

Turner's Photographic Career

John B. Turner's career in photography commenced in the early 1960s. He was involved in the Upper Hutt Camera Club in the late 1950s and became a founding member of the Lower Hutt Photographic Society in 1960, the year he commenced work for the Government Printer as an apprentice compositor. In 1966 he left the printing trade to work as a news and commercial photographer with South Pacific Photos, then as a photographic printer and in 1968 as the photographer for the Dominion Museum. In 1971, he moved to Auckland and took up lectureship at the University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts, where he taught and researched until his retirement in 2011.

In parallel with his lengthy career in academia was his enduring commitment to photography – both his own, and that of others (such as Ans Westra, of whom he was one of the earliest and longest-standing supporters). He was active as a writer for New Zealand and Australian photography magazines, supported Bruce Weatherall as a coeditor of *Photographic Art & History*[4] started in 1970 and its transformation to *New Zealand Photography* magazine, and when Weatherall could no longer finance it, he formed PhotoForum Inc with *PhotoForum* magazine as its centrepiece, based in Auckland, with the aim to promote what was termed 'fine photography' through the magazine, exhibitions, workshops, and lectures.[5] Its emphasis was on the category of photography that fitted into that somewhat neglected gap between the sort of commercial work undertaken for newspapers and magazines, and amateur photography,[6] which comprised mainly the type of images found in most family photo albums.[7] As Turner later noted, groups like PhotoForum 'were serious about their photography and focused on two things – firstly, to prove that their means of expression was an art – and secondly to gather more converts. If they had the numbers, they reckoned, they would be taken seriously as artists'.[8]

In Wellington, before he moved to Auckland in 1971 Turner and Desmond Kelly were involved in forming discussion groups and screening documentaries which dealt with new trends in photography – mainly those occurring in Europe and the United States.[9] One of his aims was to see how he could best 'help identify, encourage, stimulate, challenge, and meet the needs of the growing number of independent-minded photographers with something worth saying about life in New Zealand'.[10] Among the other photographers drawn into the PhotoForum orbit in the early 1970s were Ans Westra, Mac Miller, Tudor Collins, Gary Baigent, Richard Collins, and John Daley.[11]

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Turner's own work focussed on documentary photography, which he appreciated from the outset was (among much else) a form of historical record-making. On this basis alone, many of the images that he produced stood out from those of his contemporaries. His photographs often seemed imbued with a sense of anticipation that the subject matter he chose would acquire some sort of historical significance. To a degree, Turner developed what might be called a 'historical eye' – an ability to identify scenes and topics that may have appeared ordinary or unremarkable at the time, but that would aquire some form of historical significance later on.

Stylistically, Turner's work encompassed scenes that range from spontaneous to staged, with the influence of photographers such as John Thomson, Eugene Atget, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Paul Strand, Wayne Millar, Josef Sudek, André Kertész, Bill Brandt, Ed Ruscha and Henri Cartier-Bresson evident in some of his images.[12] His approach was also inspired by key nineteenth and early twentieth-century pioneer New Zealand photographers such as Dr A. C. Barker, William Harding, Burton Bros, D. L. Mundy, James Bragge, the Tyree brothers, and G. Leslie Adkin. In regard to the documentation of West Auckland, the local historian Jack Diamond was the most prominent early example of someone who used photography to document the area for the benefit of future researchers.[13] Turner drew on these influences, but was consciously looking to develop a distinctly New Zealand style. When it came to subject matter, among the many areas Turner showed an interest in was the 'typical' New Zealand suburb, nestled in the ordinariness of the country's urban expanses, where something of the essence of the nation's identity could be located. His first significant exploration of this territory was featured in the James Gilberd-curated *A Walk Down Johnsonville Road*[14] – an exhibition of forty black and white images Turner took between 1966 and 1969. This emerged from a conscious desire to document the essence of a New Zealand suburb on the cusp of change. Turner foresaw that what was regarded as unremarkable would be a sort of community that in a short space of time would be unrecoverable. Changes in employment, residential living, and retail patterns were about to alter the character of the Wellington suburb of Johnsonville irrevocably, and what started out as a series of carefully-composed images of shops and houses later served as a memorial to a type of New Zealand 'suburb-scape' that was common then, but that half a century later would no longer exist in that form. *Te Atatu Me* was another venture into this area of documentary photography, offering viewers not only a social and aesthetic survey of a suburb, but also preserving visually aspects of that suburb which even just a decade later were already in the process of disappearing or altering irreversibly. Although he was critical of what he describes as 'the unsophisticated and pretentious nature…the crass commercialism of' some of the subjects he captured, he later expressed his 'bemusement that the response of today's audience is mainly one of nostalgia'. He attributed this, in part, to the way in which his documentation of Te Atatū Peninsular was 'gentler and more accepting than the often ironic tone of the Johnsonville essay'.[15]

Documentary Photography

There are several aspects of documentary photography that can be summarised in order to give some conceptual framework to the sort of images that Turner chose to include in *Te Atatu Me*. The desire to capture and preserve images of scenes has existed for millennia. Initially, various forms of painting were the principal means by which that act of preservation was accomplished, with artists' mediation of the resulting images inevitably ending up as a form of manipulation, however mild or inadvertent. The advent of photography, though, achieved two important advances in this process of visual production: it enabled a degree of precision in representations of the physical world that the existing forms of art could never quite approximate to the same degree; and it allowed for mass reproduction of the exact same image. Photography came to be linked more with topographical painting rather than 'high art'.[16]

Developments in photomechanical printing, and, later, in electronic media, also gave photographs a privileged position among the viewing public by virtue of the volume of content able to be produced and disseminated. Yet, if anything, the ability to enable sentiment and vitality to emerge from the mechanical processes of photography – without most of the contrivances available to those artists working with paint and brush – represented an even greater aesthetic accomplishment for photographers who were sufficiently skilled in this medium.

Photographs have also excelled in another area: preserving countless millions of moments in time, in a way that all the artists working with paint or pencil had no hope of matching. Traditionally, the time and expense involved in producing a painting of a scene dramatically affected the selection of subject material for artists. Those working in the field of photography, however, could sometimes make more images in one day than most artists could produce in a lifetime. A record of the ordinary and even mundane was now possible, but with the profusion of photographs being taken, how could the work of one person be elevated above those of the masses?[17] Again, the technical and artistic capacities of the photographer were central to this process.

Part of the enduring attraction of photography has been its presumed optical accuracy. What is seen in the image is a two-dimensional representation of what was captured on the film (or more recently, in digital form). This is true in terms of the process of image-capturing and retention, but is also only part of the story.[18] Through choices involving composition, framing, lighting, the use of angles, the selection of subject matter, and keeping an eye on tonal ranges in an image, photographers are able to direct the scene that will emerge as a photograph. And for those proficient in the science of these techniques, and who also possess that artistic sense of what constitutes a 'good' image, it is possible to conjure up a range of emotional reactions to their work. At their best, photographs can prompt reactions in viewers that perhaps all except the greatest paintings can struggle to achieve to the same extent.[19]

But just as viewers feel that they are beginning to empathise with the emotions contained in a photograph, another realisation can dawn on them: the images they are looking at are a snap-frozen moment in time. The people and places that appear in them have been embalmed in various chemicals which through a process of scientific transformation have become a record of the scene that remains, while all those in it have long since moved on (and eventually have died or will die). Photographs can therefore serve as an act of resistance to the relentless progression of time – a way of showing fragments of life free from their subsequent decay. They can also be an act of deception, however, taunting viewers to try to recover an irretrievable past. And in a few instances, the scenes represented in photographs can capture and then convey aspects of people (and to a lesser extent, places) that are deeply personal, and that maybe even possess what some might identify as a spiritual dimension. This potentially adds a layer of complexity to the role of a photographer: they are not only documenting subject material that is filtered through their own particular cultural understanding of the world, but the ensuing images then end up instructing a wider audience on how to see that subject material. Consideration also needs to be given to the fact that viewers impose their own interpretation and meaning on photographs, and these are seldom uniform. Each viewer brings their own experience and preconceptions to bear when looking at an image, and the result can be a wide variety of interpretations of the same photograph depending on who is viewing it.

Te Atatū North

In 1996, Turner moved to Renata Crescent in what was then still known as Te Atatū North. At the time, it was one of the more affordable suburbs that was still relatively close (approximately ten kilometres) to the city centre. It was also an unusual suburb in that it had been built on a peninsula (so was not a thoroughfare to any other part of the city) and had a high rate of what were known as Māori Affairs houses (a name derived from a government scheme to assist Māori into home ownership)[20] compared to neighbouring suburbs, which gave it an above-average proportion of Māori residents.[21]

Unlike so-called 'greenfield' suburbs – where housing is constructed on previously unsubdivided land – in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, this part of Te Atatū was undergoing a rapid period of transition from its formerly working-class, older-styled, predominantly single-level housing, typically with one dwelling per section, to more intensive, modern, and expensive housing.[22] In the course of this change, there was an inevitable state of flux in the social make-up of the suburb, and a corresponding sense that aspects of its identity were being swiftly transformed.

Sites of such rapid transition present a paradox for documentary photographers, in that through capturing images of an area, they are literally producing a snapshot of the surrounds at that point in time, with the sense of transition inherent in some of these images only evident with the benefit of sufficient hindsight. A photograph that might appear to be of only marginal documentary importance at the point when it was taken could later acquire much greater significance depending on the changes that have occurred to the subject it depicts.

Te Atatu Me

Te Atatu Me is a 176-page hard-cover book in landscape format, measuring 290mm x 220mm, and containing 174 photographs, all of which (apart from around ten historical images) are by Turner. The work consists mainly of full-page colour photographs providing a social documentary of the suburb, is accompanied by an opening text written by Turner, summarising his reasons for making this book, and concludes with a more substantial text surveying Te Atatū Peninsula's history, written by local historian Grant Cole. *Te Atatu Me* is rare in that there are practically no other publications on this scale, and with this quality of photography, anywhere in the country documenting a suburb in the early years of the twenty-first century.

The title is instructive. *Te Atatu Me,* inspired by a cropped sign for 'Te Atatu Meats', alludes to the fact that the work is very much Turner's personal perspective. There are no claims to it being a comprehensive, systematic visual study of the suburb, nor one that is shaped around any specific theme, but instead intends to more or less replicate the experience of walking around the peninsula. The subtitle – *Photographs of an Urban New Zealand Village* – introduces an element of ambiguity into the work. On one level, the idea of an urban village seems paradoxical. Urban areas are typically identified as being part of a city, whereas a village tends to be a small settlement which by definition is isolated from other settlements rather than connected directly to them. There are various conclusions that can be drawn from this: that the suburb is a form of village because it exists on a peninsula; that there is room for aspects of villages and suburbs to overlap in cases such as Te Atatū Peninsula; and that the implications of a particular form of social life present in villages can also apply to certain urban areas. This last point this is particularly the case in the way that Turner represents the nature of the community in Te Atatū Peninsula through the selection, sequence, and juxtaposition of images in the book.

Documenting a location and community on the cusp of change was certainly one of the intentions of *Te Atatu Me*. Publicity for the book, ahead of its launch in April 2015, referred to how the images in the work portrayed 'the often surprising pace of change, as new houses pop up, shops change hands, people come and go, and familiar sights are changed forever', and made reference to 'preserving' aspects of the suburb's character in the face of 'the pressures of Auckland's rapid growth and fundamental changes in New Zealand society'.[23] This, then, would be an undertaking in visual preservation: assembling and publishing images that would represent a contemporaneous impression of the suburb, documenting facets of its social character and physical form to enable comparisons to be made in the future. In a way, the book would have a similar function to that of a personal photo album, in which the viewer looks back at themselves at a previous time in order to gauge what sorts of changes have taken place in the intervening period.

Turner's self-conscious documenting of aspects of the suburb that were on the brink of disappearing was also made explicit in the opening to his book, which commenced with a quote from Cartier-Bresson: 'We photographers deal in things which are continually vanishing, and when they have vanished there is no contrivance on earth which can make them come back again. We cannot develop and print a memory'.[24] And yet *Te Atatu Me* is precisely the sort of 'contrivance' that does preserve those things that otherwise would vanish. In this sense, Turner defies the enforced forgetfulness of history, using documentary photography as his means of preservation.

Turner's conception of the scope of his documentary photography for this book was determined both by the limitations of the number of images that could be included in a single book, and the seemingly conflicting requirement to have a sufficient number of photographs to represent adequately the essence of the suburb. However, although he believed that Te Atatū Peninsula was compact enough to enable a comprehensive photographic survey to be undertaken by one person over a relatively limited period of time, rather than publishing thousands of images in an effort to provide an encyclopaedic representation of the suburb, his approach was more impressionistic. He sought out images that in his mind captured the essence of the location, rather than relying on a profusion of literal detail. The result was a form of visual rhetoric, in which he selected photographs which emphasised the essence of reality rather than offering a purely literal depiction of that reality (which would also have the effect of narrowing the possibilities for viewers' interpretation).[25] Turner described his biggest challenge in undertaking this task as capturing 'something of the diverse, ever changing social interactions of its [Te Atatū Peninsula's] inhabitants'.[26] How to document this social history in a coherent and relatively representative way was one of the principal challenges he faced when preparing this work.

Of course, defining the 'essence' of a place in photography involves the photographer having already established the parameters of what constitutes that essence. However, the process is never entirely prescriptive, as it involves a dialogue with the viewer. If the photographer's sense of the essence is misplaced or too narrow, it is far less likely to resonate with the implicit consensus held in the imaginations of viewers of what that essence is. This, in turn, requires the photographer to be conscious of the audience. In the case of *Te Atatu Me*, Turner understood that most of the viewers of his work would be New Zealanders who were familiar with some of the visual cues that people from outside the country would not immediately pick up on. The dialogue is thus between a New Zealand photographer and a New Zealand audience. However, one of the variables in this relationship is the passage of time. Viewers perhaps half a century hence looking at the images in *Te Atatu Me* may be drawn to different visual cues, and most

likely will overlook some of those features that resonate with contemporaneous viewers . The dialogue between photographer and audience therefore changes in tone over subsequent decades.

On the matter of representation. *Te Atatu Me* was a departure from Turner's earlier preference for black and white photography. Monochromatic images had been favoured by Turner and his contemporaries in the 1970s, and dominated his documentary photography of Johnsonville from the late 1960s.[27] The move to colour photography in *Te Atatu Me* represented a shift for Turner. One effect of this was that it sidestepped the implicit nostalgia that, by the early twenty-first century, was associated with monochromatic photographs.[28] Colour was contemporaneous for Turner, and if there was eventually to be any nostalgic patina to his images of Te Atatū, this would accrete gradually, rather than be foisted immediately on viewers through relying solely on black and white imagery.

A particular area of interest for Turner (and one reflected strongly in *Te Atatu Me*) was the ordinary, everyday aspects of people's lives that typically do not get noticed much, let alone photographed. In some cases, their ubiquity seems to make any recording of them redundant, but to a trained and experienced observer, their documentary value (at least in the future, if not the present) was obvious.

The timescale of this project was also significant. Having spent seven years photographing 'the look and pulse' of the suburb in more depth than he had done elsewhere previously, and doing so for the first time in colour,[29] Turner was able to incorporate a degree of nuance in the collection of images that had no equal in photographic studies of any other suburb in the country. The end result – around 164 photographs – were drawn from a vast pool of 20,000 images which Turner took during his preparation for *Te Atatu Me*. Having several years' worth of images to select from inadvertently allowed hints of some of the transitions taking place in the suburb to appear in the book. At times, there is almost a visual momentum in the work, as sets of images document incremental changes that were to become more rapid and dramatic in the years after its publication.

Inevitably, there was also an autobiographical strand to this work, as Turner conceded: 'the pictures also say something about me as well. Viewers are seeing not only an optical rendering of what I noticed when I made the picture, but perhaps also some meaningful details, correspondences, or revelations discovered and approved of after the event'.[30] The fact that Turner lived in the suburb undoubtedly gave him a degree of familiarity with the area that an 'outside' photographer would not have possessed. He was attuned to the sort of details, including even the most granular forms of change that were occurring, and this informed much of the selection and composition of his images.

It is also worth noting that Turner regarded Te Atatū Peninsula as a microcosm of the nation,[31] and to that extent, *Te Atatu Me* serves as a portrayal of a seam of New Zealand national identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century as he saw it. This, in turn, makes the images in the book a reflection of their creator's sense the 'pulse' of New Zealand society, as he put it.[32] Inevitably, such works inevitably end up mediating reality through the perceptions of their creator.[33] This point is important because it emphasises that 'documentary' photography, despite its objective-sounding designation, is fundamentally a subjective genre. Therefore, *Te Atatu Me* remains a personal rendition of the suburb, but one that through the careful selection and sequencing of photographs simultaneously resonates with viewers.

Now living in China, Turner enjoys showing *Te Atatu Me* as an alternative look at a different aspect of New Zealand everyday reality, in contrast to the 'New Zealand is so beautiful' perception derived from tourists and would-be visitors to its well-publicised tourist spots such as Queenstown and Rotorua.[34]

The Photographs in *Te Atatu Me*

This section surveys a representative selection of photographs from *Te Atatu Me*. The categories are arbitrary to some extent, and often overlap, but have been devised to enable an analysis of the book as a whole within the constraints of space of an article. The six categories are: culture; businesses; residential buildings; community; leisure; and the environment. Two broadly representative photographs from each of these categories are considered here as a means of drawing some general conclusions about Turner's approaches to documenting the suburb.

a) Culture

The term 'culture' is applied here in its broadest sense, and relates to the way in which people identify themselves, the groups to which they belong, the customs and traditions that they might participate in, and how these are manifested in their lives.[35]

Fig. 1 John B. Turner, *Youth group, corner Te Atatu and Wharf Roads, 6 March 2005*[36]

Lit by a low sun, a group of six teenaged Māori and Pasifika males in front of a car encapsulates various cultural strands that were apparent in the suburb at this time. The person on the far left of the image is wearing a lavalava, which is a hint of a more traditional Pasifika influence, contrasting with the clothing worn by the others, which reveals the influence of American youth culture, as does a hand sign shown by one of the youths.[37] There is a strong suggestion here of

cultural confluence morphing into cultural miscegenation, and to this extent, Turner has presented a snapshot of this transition phase. The image also alludes to the ethnic composition of the suburb, with its relatively high Māori and Pasifika population.

Fig. 2 John B. Turner, *Liu Wiwei (Candy), waitress, Sushi & Bento, 1 July 2009*[38]

In this photograph, Turner explores representations of culture, contrasting a stereotypical and perhaps jingoistic depiction of Japanese women in traditional clothing, printed on a fabric and located in a sushi shop, with a Chinese employee (in contemporary clothing) appearing through an opening in this fabric. The juxtapositions are manifold: two-dimensional versus three-dimensional; historical versus contemporary; moving versus static; Chinese versus Japanese; cliché versus reality; and so forth. In addition, the scene is infused with ambiguity. Questions about what constitutes 'local' as opposed to 'overseas', for example, and what elements are culturally 'authentic' in this image are posed but deliberately left unresolved. It is also worth

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noting that there is nothing in this photograph at all that appears to link it to Te Atatū Peninsula. Rather than labouring direct connections to the suburb, Turner included such pictures to draw viewers' attention to the mosaic of cultures that appear in the suburb, while avoiding being too prescriptive about how they contributed to the area's culture. Images such as these worked as suggestions or prompts, rather than anything more didactic. Turner noted that that he was amused to find that the small restaurant – one of his favourite eating places for Japanese food - was run by a Korean couple who employed a visiting Chinese student seen here posing behind a Japanese curtain. Next door, on the southern side, was a beauty salon run by Korean women, and on the north, a Chinese takeaway.[39]

b) Businesses

Retail businesses were a particular topic of interest for Turner in his Johnsonville collection, and in *Te Atatu Me*, he re-visited this theme, while developing it at the same time. One of the distinctions in this work is that Turner included photographs from inside some businesses as well as depicting their exteriors. Overall, the photographs of businesses in *Te Atatu Me* imply a sense of place which relies as much on the viewer's familiarity with such scenes as anything literal that is portrayed in those scenes.

Fig. 3 John B. Turner, *Mama's Minimart, Neil Avenue, 10 November 2006*[40]

This photograph contains a range of visual prompts that contribute to an archetype of the sort of retail frontage that was commonplace in certain suburbs in New Zealand in the early twenty-first century. It is a dairy, with various advertisements on the window (such as for Big Ben Pies), together with larger signs on the footpath advertising special prices for certain products (onions at 79 cents a kilogram) which can be a useful milestone for measuring change since that time (at the time of writing this article, a kilogram of onions was selling for around $3.50).

There are also several free advertising magazines on racks outside the dairy (a feature that has become scarcer in more recent years) and an abundance of notices and advertisements in the shop window.

However, Turner's composition is key to this photograph. To the right of the image is a dreary shop window, with netting curtains and bamboo posts, under which is a hand-written sign for 'Yum Yum Noodles'. The significance of this pairing of shops, and the prominence given to the dairy, is that the noodles shop appears like an inflection, contributing to the impression of the 'type' of shops expected here, and by extension, the type of suburb that houses them. Turner also included in *Te Atatu Me* photographs of the Indian family which ran the dairy in their house, which was attached to the shop.

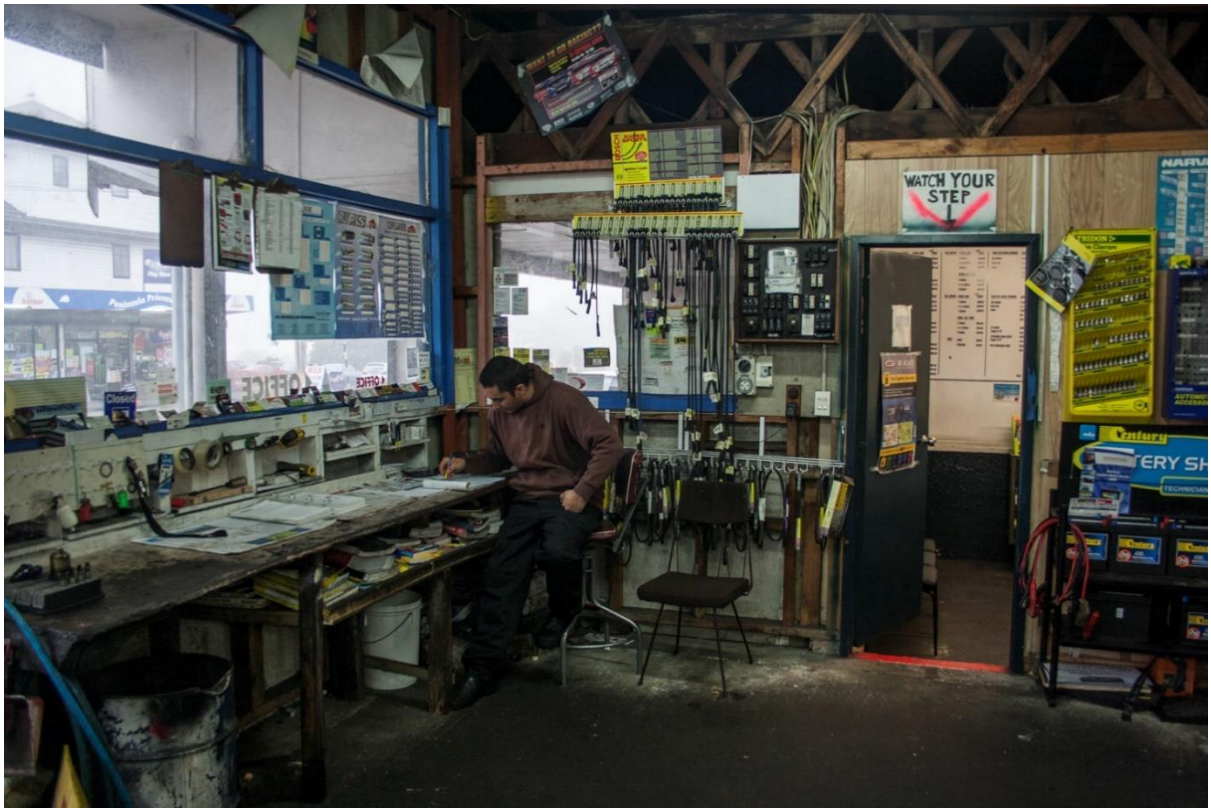

Fig. 4 John B. Turner, *Reece Norman, A1's Mechanical Repairs, Gloria Avenue, 20 May 2010*[41]

The cavernous, cluttered confines of this workshop – which was located in a residential street in Te Atatū Peninsula – offers the viewer an impression of the type of occupation people in the suburb had. The book includes photos showing the inside of gift shops, dairies, and takeaway shops, but none of lawyers' or accountants' offices. This heightens the message that Te Atatū Peninsula is a solidly working-class area. Turner adds additional context to this impression by including photographs of business interiors where there are generally only one or two workers present. There are no scenes of factories with vast numbers of employees. Instead, workplaces are small-scale, owner-operated ventures, with all the insecurities and idiosyncrasies that come with that.

This sort of documentary photograph works on two levels: a micro level, detailing a myriad of features of a typical mechanical workshop of this period; and a macro level, presenting a sort of scene that was already in decline at the time that the photograph was taken, having since been replaced by larger and more modern-looking workshops that are situated in commercial rather than residential areas of the suburb.

c) Residential Buildings

One of the most widespread and visually dramatic changes that was occurring in the suburb when the photographs for *Te Atatu Me* were taken was in the realm of housing. There were a number of trends that characterised this transition, including houses being built on smaller sections, and the displacement of traditional 1950s and 1960s State House dwellings (designed for those on more modest incomes) with more expensive houses, which reflected the changing demographic and income levels in the suburb.

Fig. 5 John B. Turner, *Mrs Brittan mowing her neighbour's lawn, Wharf Road, 3 March 2005*[42]

This photograph epitomises the older style of houses in Te Atatū Peninsula that were still the predominant form of residential dwelling at the time. In this case, it is a small, single-level, weatherboard and fibrolite building, with wooden joinery and a brick chimney (that has been closed in) sitting on a flat grassed section. The foreground of this image is dominated by an elderly woman mowing the verge with an old Masport two-stroke motor-mower (the sort of lawn-mower that was already in decline as four-stroke and electric engines gained in popularity). This photograph has a nostalgic quality, and would have had even at the time of *Te Atatu Me's* publication. It could have been a scene from the 1970s, with the only visual clue of the period it was taken being a Sky TV satellite dish on the roof of the neighbouring

house. For Turner, seeing somebody cutting their neighbour's grass had indeed become a reminder of earlier neighbourly cooperation, like helping one another to lay concrete paths and driveways in new suburbs and sharing specialised tools.[43]

Fig. 6 John B. Turner, *Foundations, Bella Vista Apartments, corner Gunner Drive and Te Atatu Road, 14 May 2006*[44]

From the old to the very new. The foundations for the Bella Vista apartments were still being laid in 2006, but already the apparition of a very different and much more expensive form of housing in Te Atatū Peninsula was on display. Turner also included a photograph in the book of the partially-completed apartment block, but this image contrasts the grim, muddy present with a promise of an almost utopian residential future, with the exposed earthworks seen through a wire fence – a fence that has an artist's rendition of the finished building attached to it. There is a tension here between the physicality of the site as it presently stands and the ephemeral suggestion of the completed apartment block – a promise that is made to appear slightly less assuring by the ruffled appearance of the poster depicting the anticipated building. This ephemeral nature of the new apartment block proved to be prophetic as the building subsequently had to be partially reconstructed as a result of weathertightness issues.

d) Community

Documenting the intricacy, scope, and diversity of Te Atatū Peninsula's community can be tackled in a number of ways. In *Te Atatu Me*, Turner eschewed providing a large inventory of images covering as many facets of the suburb's community as possible in favour of an approach which relied on just a few images that gave viewers an impression of the breadth and diversity of the community, leaving gaps to be filled by the viewer's imagination. The two examples here illustrate one of the methods Turner used when conveying this diversity. He included

photographs of a large gathering of various types of people from the suburb, and contrasted this with images taken from a particular event which involved a singular subset in the community. This approach was effectively an exercise in boundary-marking – revealing the extent to which the communities that occupy the suburb differ in some ways, with groups that are not shown perhaps suggesting as much about the community's composition as those that are included.

Fig. 7 John B. Turner, *Te Atatu Music Festival, Harbour View, Te Atatu Road, 11 February 2006*[45]

This photograph, taken at dusk, documents a music festival held in 2006. In the middle ground on the far right of the image are some musicians performing, but most of the photograph is taken up by scenes of the crowd, the majority of whom are preoccupied with socialising with each other. Turner emphasised the location of this festival by selecting an angle for the scene which includes in the background the skyline of Auckland city. This is an act of orienting the viewer's geographical perspective, and positioning the scene in Te Atatū Peninsula. It is one of the very few photographs in the book that relies on this technique to establish the location within the context of Auckland. The portion of the crowd captured in this photograph reveals a broad mix of ethnicity and age, which as with other images in the work, alludes to diversity of the community in this suburb.

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Fig. 8 John B. Turner, *Veterans' lunch, RSA, Pringle Road, Anzac Day, 25 April 2005*[46]

In contrast to the social diversity on display in the photograph taken at the music festival, Turner included in *Te Atatu Me* a series of images documenting a Returned Services Association (RSA) Anzac Day gathering. This is a social subset within the suburb, and Turner's images captures the comparative uniformity of its membership. In this particular scene, those in attendance are largely elderly and Pākehā – a stark contrast to the examples of diversity evident in most of the other photographs in the book dealing with the community. Turner was careful not to juxtapose these categories of images to make the contrast too laboured, but instead positioned such scenes strategically throughout the book in order to remined viewers that Te Atatū Peninsula was a community made up of diverse constituent parts. There is also a contrast in these two photographs in average age, suggesting that the RSA might be an part of the community that is likely to dwindle in membership over time. Again, this is implied rather than made explicit in the book.

e) Leisure

Community leisure activities involve interactions between members of the community, and occur in particular places, times, and locations. They are also an important manifestation of what is sometimes referred to as 'community spirit'.[47] Turner included a careful selection of leisure activities in *Te Atatu Me* in order suggest to readers some of the dimensions of the community, its interests and priorities, and the nature of its social engagements.

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Fig. 9 John B. Turner, *Tongan Touch Rugby, Jack Pringle Park and Gunner Drive, 28 January 2006*[48]

In the foreground of this scene of a Tongan touch rugby game is a row of trophies associated with the competition, with the game itself being played in the background. The photograph obviously highlights an important ethnic community in the suburb, but lining the horizon is a row of recently-built houses that (based on personal observation) were more likely to be occupied by Pākehā or recent immigrants from Asia. The hint of transition here is subtle. The players on the field represent one of the longer-standing communities in Te Atatū Peninsula, but the (unseen) occupants of the houses lining the rear of the field represent an aspect of the suburb's future. It is left to the viewer to imagine the potential implications of this transition on the character of the suburb. Turner also depicts a tension between the active nature of one group and the static nature of the other, which is implied in this photograph, and which could also be a signal of changes ahead. Again, though, Turner avoids being prescriptive in favour of inviting the viewer simply to explore possibilities that the image suggests.

Fig. 10 John B. Turner, *Chapman Strand, 7 January 2007*[49]

The scene of boats on the shore is hardly the sort of image that is unique to Te Atatū Peninsula. This type of activity is common along many portions of the country's coast. However, Turner includes it as a reminder to viewers that this is very much a maritime suburb (being surrounded on three sides by the sea), where the shallow waters between the shore and the channel are suitable for such small vessels being launched from boat-ramps such as this. It is also a leisure activity that helps distinguish Te Atatū Peninsula from some of the nearby suburbs (such Rānui, Swanson, Taupaki), where there is no such coastal access. There is also a fainter indication that this is not an affluent part of the city. Not only are the boats modest (there are no larger, more expensive vessels shown) but the vehicles to the left of the image are of average value. Collectively, these elements encourage a particular perception about the wealth of the suburb.

f) The Environment

Te Atatū Peninsula is a community, but what binds it, possibly above all else, is the fact that all its constituent members share the same geographical location. The environment is therefore an important aspect of identity for the community. This presented Turner with a range of options for depicting the physical environment in the book, and although selective, the following two examples illustrate how he approached these possibilities, and the themes he imbued in them.

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Fig. 11 John B. Turner, *Taipari Strand, 25 November 2006*[50]

Taipari Strand – looking out to the suburb of Royal Heights – is a carefully-composed image that has at its centre a stand of mangroves, behind which is a stretch of elevated, bush-clad land. It is only the strip of mown grass in the bottom foreground that hints at human agency in this scene.

The mangroves are a reminder to viewers that this is a coastal suburb – but Turner implies a coast in this scene rather than portraying it. For many residents of Te Atatū Peninsula, its relatively flat terrain and the position of its coast means that views of the sea are not available from their houses. This photograph toys with that tension of being at once very close to the sea, but without it being visible – a fact there is a feature of life for residents in the suburb. (Also invisible are traces that Taipari Strand was a rubbish dump before a group of locals turned it into a functional park that now includes a children's playground, canoe club headquarters and much-used boat ramp).

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Fig. 12 John B. Turner, *Earthworks, Te Atatu Road, 29 April 2013*[51]

This is the final photograph in *Te Atatu Me*, and serves as a coda, documenting particular elements that in a vital way articulate the state of the suburb in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Patches of bare land are evident in this scene, which have a historical resonance with the state of the area seven decades earlier, during which time most of Te Atatū Peninsula was agricultural land, including substantial stretches of pasture. But Turner is careful to avoid any hint of nostalgia in this representation. The orange road cones, workers in safety helmets and high visibility vests, along with trucks and diggers excavating the site, depict a location that is undergoing substantial modification. Whether housing, factories, retail space, or something else is being developed in this location is not specified by the image or the text. However, the uncertain new is clearly displacing the certain old. Once again, Turner depicts the suburb on the cusp of transition, and in this final photograph is essentially inviting the viewer to return at some point in the future to see what has come of this change.

Although the photographs in *Te Atatu Me* can be compartmentalised in various ways (as in the preceding categories), they can also be seen as a form of extended visual narrative, with their sequence organised in such a way that the images collectively convey various impressions about the location and its occupants and why is it a greater than the mere sum of the individual images of which this narrative is comprised. This closing photograph completes the narrative of the book, but without challenging the continuity between the present and the future.

Documenting and Anticipating Change in *Te Atatu Me*

As has been mentioned, one of the opportunities documentary photography offers is a means of measuring developments over time. With its emphasis on preserving aspects of the present, changes can be reappraised after only a relatively brief period of time (in this case roughly a decade). Some categories of change are more obvious and objective (such as new buildings),

while others are much more intuitive and subjective (such as the 'sense of place'). There are various angles from which these assessments can be made, and in the case of Te Atatū Peninsula since the publication of *Te Atatu Me*, Turner's documentary work often anticipated change as well as reflecting it.

The most noticeable physical change to the suburb since the publication of the book has been the intensification and modernisation of its housing stock. In particular, many of the 'traditional' single-level, 1950s and 1960s bungalows are being replaced by higher-density terrace housing. *Te Atatu Me* emphasised the early stages of this transition, with photographs showing older houses being removed, spare spaces on sections being built on, and samples of modern, more expensive housing being constructed in what was formerly a poorer part of the city, and to this extent the book both documented and anticipated changes in the suburb.

In keeping with this transition, the community of Te Atatū Peninsula has evolved since the publication of *Te Atatu Me*. The percentage of the population who identify as Pākehā or Asian has increased, while the proportion of Māori or Pasifika people has declined over the period[52] – a trend that was subtly foreshadowed by Turner over a decade earlier in *Te Atatu Me*. There has been a corresponding increase in the area's average income over this time, strengthening its shift from being a working-class to a middle-class suburb – a fact supported by the higher percentage of managerial, professional, and technical workers than the average for the city. Turner's detailed photographs of small-scale businesses, such as takeaways and auto mechanics, documented a class of occupation, and of worker, that was about to diminish in the suburb. Indeed, partly as a corollary to these changes, many of the retail businesses featured in *Te Atatu Me* have since closed down. Urban transformation does not come without some costs, both economic and social.

Conclusion

When considered individually, the majority of Turner's photographs included in *Te Atatu Me* could have been taken just about anywhere in the country in that period. They succeed in capturing the ordinariness of a 'typical' working-class suburb, and distil a sense of 'New Zealandness' which makes the impression that the images create identifiable to people who may never have been to Te Atatū Peninsula. To this extent, the book could almost be a representation of just about any other working-class suburb in the country. However, Turner's careful selection of the photographs that comprise this work ensures that cumulatively, they offer a rendition of Te Atatū Peninsula which would be readily identifiable to all those who resided in the suburb at the time as being uniquely of that era. Turner's intention was therefore to serve different audiences simultaneously (those familiar with the specific suburb, and those familiar with the archetypal working-class new Zealand suburb). This meta-impression has no pretension to being definitive, but it does provide an evocative depiction of the suburb. Through the selection of various categories of subject matter, accompanied with careful composition, Turner has documented the perception of place as well as its literal features. His work serves not only as an important visual history, but also a milestone from which subsequent developments can be measured. Considered in its entirety, *Te Atatu Me* encompasses those essential elements that go into making an effective documentary photographic record of a place in a particular period, while also enabling viewers to discern some changes that may not have been discerned at the time these images were taken. This too is an indication of the value of documentary photography in creating a record of place that is detailed without being overly prescriptive, and that serves as a form of historical record in a way that no other medium can match.

As for the photographic collection from which the selection in the book was drawn, a small selection of exhibition prints from Turner's Te Atatu Peninsula documentary is held at the Henderson branch of Auckland Libraries, along with a digital set of photographs made at the beginning of the project. But Turner's move to China in 2012 to research and promote the unique 1956 essay on China by his friend and mentor, Robert (Tom) Hutchins (1921-2007) got in the way of his intention to follow up and provide a selection from all 20,000 images made over seven years for the Library's archive of historical images. Turner's aim was to collaborate with the library on identifying the people and situations in the photographs, and making the images available to the community digitally for personal use as a historical record. That intention has not been fulfilled to date. Turner is now 80 years old, and following a stroke, which partially impaired his eyesight, hopes to live long enough to fulfil his 'Te Atatu Me dream' as he referred to it.[53]

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