Advances in Lyrical Consumer Research: Collaborative Circles and Paradessential Poetics

Roel Wijland, University of Otago, New Zealand
Jürgen Gnoth, University of Otago, New Zealand

This brand culture research project explores the expressions of rebellion and questing for creativity in small dynamic friendship circles and their relevance for a vibrant urban reputation. The poetic texture and the schismatic core of the city as a brandscape are staged in three embodied acts.

An explorative case study follows a collaborative creative circle of musicians in action. Next, paradessentials of brand performativity are sourced from key interpreters. In ethno-poetics there is no hypothesis up for validation; the project concludes with individual evocations, as a sequential thickening of unresolved paradoxes of the city’s ambiguous reputation, in newly commissioned poetry.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1006762/eacr/vol9/E-09

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
ABSTRACT
This brand culture research project explores the expressions of rebellion and questing for creativity in small dynamic friendship circles and their relevance for a vibrant urban reputation. The poetic texture and the schismatic core of the city as a brandscape are staged in three embodied acts.

An explorative case study follows a collaborative creative circle of musicians in action. Next, paradessentials of brand performativity are sourced from key interpreters. In ethno-poetics there is no hypothesis up for validation; the project concludes with individual evocations, as a sequential thickening of unresolved paradoxes of the city’s ambiguous reputation, in newly commissioned poetry.

INTRODUCTION
God Save The Clean. A block-sprayed patch of faded blue graffiti for local 1980’s band The Clean survives on a white painted corner stone of the First Church in the middle of the city of Dunedin in New Zealand. On the cold bottom edge of the world near Antarctica, where the occasional iceberg floats by, few global fads and fashions seem to take hold and an insular but outspoken version of cultural creativity thrives. As a provincial university town with about 100,000 inhabitants Dunedin has established a tradition of divergent new music at the time of Flying Nun Records. “Dunedin is awash in rock bands, perhaps more good bands per capita than any city in the world...There’s no audience there; it’s just a town full of band members,” the Chicago Tribune stated in a 1992 headline (Eggleton 2003). Perhaps ironically, the rock-solid First Church is also seen as a prime representation of the Presbyterian roots and stout autonomy of the city. The meaning of the cityscape is exposed on a wide canvas somewhere between the conservative materiality of black granite and the metaphorical remnants of creative cultural experiences. The following explores how the possibilities for citizens to be rebelliously creative in small dynamic friendship groups “sits” in this particular city, and how these circles contribute to the paradoxical essence of its urban reputation.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Material and metaphorical experience spaces can be seen as places where the production of meaning and its performance are simultaneously enacted. The engagement with the actions, performances and practices of the citizens “make places” (Baenchenholdt, Haldrup, and Larsen 2008) in the experience economy.

Of what the urban reputation is in brand terms, is encapsulated in meaning arising from the creative engagement with an offering (Sherry 2005). Research into the aspects of a cityscape and its attraction for creative individuals, stress the actual cultural performance as a major component of urban reputation (Evans 2003; Throsby 2001). At the same time, creative talent is an important driver of the image of a networked creative industry (Caves 2000; Landry 2000; Porter 2005). Locality can be both perceived as a brand based on reputation and tradition, and as a community of creative workers (Drake 2003), whereby locality or place is not only spatial or scalar but relational and networked (Appadurai 1996) thus both product and experience of interactivity. Brands are increasingly experienced and valued in horizontal networks (Hippel 2007), communities in general (Luedicke and Giesler 2007; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; Muniz and Schau 2005), and creative communities specifically (Andriopoulos and Gotsi 2000; Drake 2003; Uricchio 2004). This study offers an analysis of how the cultural paradoxes that have grown to be embedded in the performativity of a location may provide inspiration in the creative process (Drake 2003). The research does not extrapolate brand image on the basis of cultural facilities or investments, but analyses the vitality and aesthetics of place as a marketable commodity on the basis of the cultural activity of actual participants in the creative industry. Urban reputation is traced and evoked in terms of the dis-connected networks (Hage and Rogers Hollingsworth 2000).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
This ethno-poetic project seeks new grounds for brand performativity as a combination of the embodied praxis of collaborative circles (Farrell 2003) and a paradoxical brand essence or “paradessence,” defined as: two opposing desires a brand can satisfy simultaneously (Shakar 2002). This integral ambiguity (Brown 2005) keeps a brand suspended in opposites (Sherry 2003). As such, the confrontation with the paradoxical essence of “being” (Heidegger 1962), in the context of creative communities, offers new insights into the socio-cultural, generative force of interaction (Watzlawick 1984). There is no effort to freeze the logic of this suspension in narrative; a post-ironic distance leads to an open-ended individual evocation of paradessences in poetry. The quest is for an evocative approximation of a deeper differential fate of place in collaborative performance (Hamera 2007). This requires finding new ways to resist narrative scripting of meaning in an aesthetic vocabulary that accentuates fragmented expressions of beauty and ugliness.

METHODOLOGY
In this qualitative research, the long trajectory from positivism and the validation of hypotheses, to the meaningful evocation of contradictions is further pursued in the sequential thickening of unresolved paradoxes. Data gathering for an aesthetic inquiry that front stages the potency of contentious views of what is and what could be, requires access to artful informants who are sensitive to form. The negations of contraries are bread and butter for researchers who approximate the essence of culture’s meanings for the benefit of market place reputations in semiotic squares (Greimas 1966;1983). Aware of the resultant stasis of such linearly re-constructed, retrospective brand realities, the present research seeks to penetrate “meaning” in the fullness of its gerundival sense that approximates its “dasein.” The approximation thereby occurs by studying processes rather than just outcomes, interactions rather than just actions. Gaining insights into how talent and reputation resonate requires collaborative catalysis of aesthetic expressions of what is enacted and what could inspire. Resisting the temptation to capriciously concoct a trunk line narrative effectively unscripts a purposive cultural brand prototype. In this instance, the suspended narrativity of the performed creativity that magnetises an urban reputation for the retention and attraction of talent is staged in three acts.

In the first act of the inquiry, a case study of an embodied musical collaboration particularises the process of creative work in a dynamic friendship circle in relation to local reputation. The aesthetics don’t map what reputation is, but how reputation inspires, conspires and performs in instrumental intimacies. In the second prosaic act, a quartet of reputational paradoxes is filtered from conversations with artistic, business and cultural key interpreters (Verganti 2009). This analysis locates paradessential themes in
grounded and multi-vocal praxis. In the third act, each of the four paradoxes is deepened by means of newly written poems. This is not conceived by telling a more intricately closed narrative, but by calling on disjointed lyrical explorations that critically reveal (Wijland and Fell 2009) and heighten evocation (Sherry and Schouten 2002) at a more visceral level.

**ENACTMENT IN SONG: PRAXIS IN A COLLABORATIVE CIRCLE**

Aesthetics offers a vocabulary for exploring social time and social space and “the social works of aesthetics is especially central to performance, where the labours of creation and the dynamics of consumption are explicitly communal and corporeal” (Hamara 2006). Pages from Dunedin (Burns 2009) is a collaborative musical project that originated from a local venue with particularly successful “open mike” nights. A group of songwriters and often acoustic performers met on stage and conceptualised a cooperation that led to a CD, a tour, new songs and fragmented evolving sessions. It enacts the differentiation of the urban space as a multi-vocal expression of “practiced place” (Certeau 1984) and also happens to stage that uniqueness in the thematic cohesion that organically performs reputation. As a collaborative circle (Farrell 2003), it epitomizes the geographic location from where it conspires, criticises and creates. It reflects the six stages of creative circles development: formation, rebellion, quest for a shared vision, creative work, collective action and group disintegration (Farrell 2003). These stages have also been transposed on the creative praxis of marketing academics (Bradshaw and Brown 2008). At the formation, the members may be no more than acquaintances meeting in a “magnet place.” In the case of this circle of musicians, this was the podium of Backstage. A local songwriter recalls: “A band consisted of whatever musicians wanted to be involved and we played songs that were completely made up on the spot that we were never allowed to play the songs again. I guess that’s an example of how these things work here.” (Mark).

Farrell presumes that frequent peer interaction is more important than mentors or role models. This seems to be especially relevant in music (Peterson 1997). The formation of a group requires boundary markers who evaluate the access. In that sense initial group members discuss the quality of songwriters; perhaps typically for a Dunedin circle there is no real philosophy, but members have their own thoughts and argue, on “who’s shit and who is quite good and who’s got something to offer” (David).

Creative circles often rebel against authorities in their field and engage in the ritual sharing of anecdotes. What happened after “God Saved the Clean” is a question with regards to both creative positioning and local heritage which any local musician who culturally shapes aesthetic invention will have to answer. Pages from Dunedin fits the peculiar rhythm of musical invention in the city in the sense that it shares the vision and reverses the importance of song writing, but at the same time it defies the archetypical gothic heritage: “It’s like: can we please move on from the fricken 80’s?” (David). The formation of a new creative circle requires the creation of a shared vision as part of its productive quest: “All the old guys in Dunedin were good songwriters and it’s definitely not a move away from that. It’s a songwriter’s album; not mainstream, but often quite edgy and dark. In Dunedin getting your name out there is quite easy; offering support and generally being positive is more difficult.” (David).

It’s part of Dunedin’s unglamorous music tradition that there is a lo-fi approach to music making. Indicative of the tolerant stylistic diversity, the range of individual styles on display even on a single night is stunningly broad to outsiders visiting from other towns: “I’ve been able to do things that stand out, figured it out on my own, whereas I’d like to go to Melbourne and meet some people that are way ahead of me and that I can work for and learn from. In Dunedin it’s almost like through pursuing these things you become one of the main people who are doing stuff.” (David). The success of a recognizable circle is in the collective action effectuating the execution of the art: the tour, the CD and its planning and deadlines. As with any group disintegration and member individuation in the creative circle theory, Pages from Dunedin as a group of musicians has disbanded. Regardless of this, the creative dynamics of the city are not magnetic enough to be a deciding factor in the process: “I’m quite happy in doing things here, and make a difference, but the core who remains here isn’t strong enough to draw me towards staying.” (David). This story of “Pages from Dunedin” shows how the city’s culture is conducive to a unique and distinctive fashion of circle development and fresh vigorous forms of sustaining the performativity of its reputation. The singularity of the place in the context of cultural performance is summed as follows: “I think what we had going, was pretty bloody good. In Dunedin’s just so easy to be in your own space, you can go and live round very few people if you want to.” (David)

**BRAND PERFORMATIVITY IN PARADESSENTIAL POETICS**

Paradoxical essence is suspended and negotiated between varieties of inventive actors who fully stretch what a place comes to mean. The inclination to innovate is unevenly distributed in non-stereotypical spiritual collaborations that co-habit in the city. Key interpreters have privileged access to their creative circles, but also have a heightened awareness of what particularises the cultural environment. Four different themes of the paradoxical essence of the town’s urban reputation emerged from focus groups with a mix of representatives from artistic, business and cultural vocations.

The discourse that differentiates the contested reputational space of a city finds a richer expression in non-linear poetic terms. New poems were written on the basis of the four paradoxes that emanated from the prosaic conversations. Although these have a generic strategic relevance with regards to the city’s distinctive sphere of meaning, each evocation is idiosyncratic. By its very character ethno-poetics can simultaneously move in two directions: the socio-cultural and the aesthetic (Beach 1999). Similar to musical talent in local circles, the poets enact the performativity of the city brand, in a rebellious fashion in content and form, and have recorded their work. The poems show that creative talent thrives in different cultural strata, in different configurations and in disparate stylistic expressions. The following lyrical fireworks each start with a prosaic condensation of paradessentials from the initial key informants.

*The Paradessence of Collaboration: Intimacy and Segregation.* Dunedin is a small town where everybody knows everybody unsurprisingly well. It is nearly impossible to not physically meet. Intimacy makes creative circle development in this particular town different as compared to other locations; the shared expression is that if you want to start a collaboration you’ve pretty much immediately got access to a local elite of the best talents and a cultural or business stage. Different creative streams (expression or voca- tion) don’t seem to mix much. This means that collaborations are predictably and perhaps dangerously intimate and take place in segregated physical spaces with little chance of cross fertilization. Given that the town is too small to support a richly differentiated network of third places (Oldenburg 1999), venues and stages for creative expression are unusually tolerant of different styles. This means intimate collaborations have a history of materializing in the privacy of the city’s notoriously cold wooden villas. Traditionally the town’s geographic isolation seems to have allowed it to
develop cultural idiosyncrasies that are comparatively undiluted by the gravity of global trends. Local poet Peter Olds has been writing about the individual act of creating and the lures of social experiences ever since the iconic petrol head poems of nearly 40 years ago (Olds 1972) to recent new work (Olds 2004) that regularly explores the city; a theme that features again in his singular version of underbelly creativity amidst mentally partitioned urban circles (see Appendix 1).

The Paradessence of Flow: Terminus and Transience. In the conversations there were often references to the major dividing line between “town and gown,” the traditional Presbyterian city with an older demographic and the equally heritage-imbedded Oxfordian university populated with academics and a much younger community. The frequencies of what creativity, community and place have come to mean for these cultural strata are increasingly disparate. The imagina
tive and self-proclaimed conservative population who has decided to settle in Dunedin has a paradoxical rebellious streak in its own right. There is pride in being successful in making a living on the edge of the world and serving the town in a manner that is idiosyncratic and different from the rest of the country in a Southern, rural way. The infusion of new ideas from a structurally transient population is a part of the cosmic make-up and the seasonal rhythm of the place. Movement is a constant and as such, beneficial. The fact that the city’s constitution comprises cultural streams of variable temperament and rhythm and of distinctive objectives and incentives, means that intimate collaborations have to position themselves in the context of these two discordant streams. This could materialize in finding ways to funnel inspirational energy from the inherent discontinuities or build on the anxieties of influence. The 2009 Burns Fellow for literature at the University of Otago was Michael Harlow. He is a long-time (Harlow 1980, 2009) lyrical poet, who lives in Alexandra and who is an excellent example of a transient creative in Dunedin. This is his version of coming, staying and departing (see Appendix 2).

The Paradessence of Quality: Excellence and Mediocrity. Dunedin is a town that is small and geographically and culturally isolated. This means that it is comparatively easy to be deemed excellent and find exposure and stages. At the same time there is risk that perceived local excellence in a less saturated talent environment is unchallenged and not competitive on a wider scale. There is enough critical mass to create a couple of firms who specialise in a particular niche and are better than anybody else in the whole world. There is a sense that you can do anything here and a feeling of close knit camaraderie that makes ideas happen. At the same time there is a risk of a big fish / small pond mentality. “I’ve seen a lot of people get drunk on that whole thing; people who have stayed in Dunedin because even though their work is mediocre they still get recognised - and that has to go.” In a regional city it is difficult to surround yourself with people who are better than you and that’s considered to be a hard sell for Dunedin specifically, and even for New Zealand in general. There are few mentors or examples from whom you can learn. They might be there, but they’re hidden in the woodwork. Dunedin is also a place that has an explorative, liberalist nature; where few things are instantly measured and graded in over-mediated exposure and a lot of vulnerable work is possible. Musicians don’t compete to be the tightest band or the most impressive live band or the best singers, or the fastest guitar players. They compete to have something different; they inherently seem to think about differentiation. In the following short evocation, the researcher and the poet subjectively merge in introspection (Wijland 2009). The groundedness of rural Central Otago is compared with the high culture of the academic city and in both sites evidence of the particularities of local excellence and mediocrity are explored (see Appendix 3).

The Paradessence of Reputation: Pride and Embarrassment. Dunedin is a town that instills southern pride, if you can make a creative living here that adds to your vocational stature. At the same time the perception is that you have to make it elsewhere first and the Dunedin pedigree of a creative collaboration is seen as parochial. Creative people at times seem to be embarrassed by Dunedin’s city brand and provincial reputation. There’s pride in the fact that its formative conditions are not for everybody, but for the designated few. In a city that offers little imaginary substance (even if pressed hard, key informants have trouble coming up with iconic visual anchors for the place), nature as an atmospheric or surrounding physical presence is a core constituent of what attracts and keeps talents in the city. The city thrives on the bizarre and the oddball as embodied in graffiti, from the weird giraffes that are everywhere, to the returning spray-painted statement: “we are all dead souls.” Key interpreters show exasperated embarrassment, not with the way the city walks, but the way it institutionally talks. In part this seems typical of the mistrust of grand schemes by both conservative independents and entrepreneurial and artistic inventors. Performance poet David Eggleton has an acute sensuality for the language of marketing—a quality that reverberates in many of his poems (Eggleton 1983; 2006) (See Appendix 4).

CONCLUSION

This research assesses how a city makes “an exhibition of itself” in relation to its captivating lures for creative talent. Exploring the existentialist notions of Heideggerian concept of “dasein” as manifested in interactive, meaning-creating processes, it theoreti
cally interlaces the two concepts of Farrell’s collaborative circles and Shakar’s paradessence, in order to provide an embodied basis for the deconstruction of cultural scripts. It investigates the brand consequences of the reality that both original inventions and expressions are literally “invested” in people. From a contextual perspective the research finds that the praxis of aesthetic expression in small collaborative circles is a prime amplifier of a credible brand performativity. Strategically, paradessences designate the long term characteristics of a place; they are the cultural fate under which any urban reputation senses and produces aesthetic activations. For the short term dynamic collaborative enactments animate the fragmented “home-truths” of the place. From a methodological point of view, this research contributes to currently limited applications of non-narrative discourses in consumer culture. It stages expressions by key informants in three distinctive presentational research modes: embodied-enacted, prosaic-explorative and evocative-poetic, that is effectuated by privileged access to various layers of creative culture. As such it beneficially embeds a poetic logic in a cohesive research sequence, whereas in previous poetic exploits, artistic and scientific components are rarely integrated. What makes the city vibrant is the cultural suspension of beauty and ugliness across a range of quiet and anarchic animations that give rise to particular evocations and inventions. Advances in lyrical consumer research irreverently contribute to the deconstruction of prototypical brand concepts.

REFERENCES


Beach, Christopher (1999), Poetic Culture, Evanston, Illinois Northwestern University Press.


Drake, Graham (2003), “‘This Place Gives Me Space’: Place and Creativity in the Creative Industries,” Geoform, 34, 511-24.


Harlow, Michael (1980), Nothing but Switzerland and Lemonade, Auckland Hawk Press.

______ (2009), The Tram Conductor’s Blue Cap, Auckland: Auckland University Press.

Heidegger, Martin (1962), Being and Time, Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing.


APPENDIX 1

Ballad of the Last Cold Pie

A man is writing in a large notebook with colouring pencils at a table near the door in the Methodist Mission coffee lounge. A life story? A theory of life?...

An intense concentration of tea things and a banana skin.

A regular customer rolls in, steaming a little, and loudly requests four slices of buttered toast, and though it’s a bit on the hot side for soup he’ll have it just the same, with the usual pot of tea.

Well-groomed office workers on a coffee-break from the upstairs law firm pop in for the convenience of the home baking and the friendly reception.

Dressed in standard black evening-wear: high heels and flat weekday hairdos, they greedily swipe the last of the sweet cakes from the servery, then outside to stand for a minute in the gritty wind for a quick smoke.

All are welcome who are thirsty and able. Everybody brings his own trouble and meat to the table:

Corporate T-shirts from some abandoned cause; pinstriped suits from the Salvation Army;

gym-shoes from the Red Cross — some with shaved heads like the outer skins of onions;
others with wheezing lungs like the inner linings of cabbages.

A woman, mumbling quietly to herself, red-kneed, bows respectfully (Chinese style) before a plate of buttered scones...

The man with colouring pencils has developed a bleeding nose — complains of ringing in the ears and lack of privacy; gathers up his notebook, pencils and life story. Scoots out the door.

The lady behind the counter takes the last cold pie from the servery and offers it unheated to a latecomer (who likes his pies like that); who nibbles it greedily like a rat —

(continued)
FIgURE 1 (CONTINUED)

shakes crumbs off his newspaper; 
reads aloud, sips his tea noisily, 
coughs his guts up — buys two jars 
of pickle on his way out to the 
granite lipped street; his eyes 
rolling like two minced rissoles.

FIgURE 2
Somewhere East of Elsewhere

To save some part of the story gone missing, dreaming of one 
place you arrive at another; somewhere east of somewhere else 
where forgetting is always about remembering, isn’t it?...

As if everyone is hurrying to board the train at the same time

Turning the page, we see: all that deep down whiteness: the snow 
falling on all the stranded houses; ear to hand, you can hear as if from 
afar one dark window then another calling out for a touch of light, if you 
please, a touch to make us shine; there’s more to this than meets 
the eye the ear is listening to, don’t you see?...

And here, all the emptied rooms the good Lord never entered; these 
orphaned words, motherless and fatherless, swarming to re-assemble 
inside the family Bible no one has read for years…

Ah, yes—the dear years, the “dear departed”; it may be they’ve gone 
missing, too: like a film put in backwards, “with calm firm steps, back-
wards.” And look—turning the page:

Fluttering on their hooks, such a family of clothes you might expect 
something in return—a hat doffed, a sleeve or two shaking hands, 
a bodice full of slightly steamy expectations… But, no—they are merely 
happy to be eating air, leaning into each other, a little caress here, another 
there in a “very existential place”; and not even a wasp of a word between 
them. Oh—happy somebodys at last…

And for a fine finale, sometimes we have to go back to the beginning to end 
up east of anywhere else, don’t we? You know, to make the “far more near”; 
to make the place safe. To end up where you hear for the first time: look—I saw the 
star I fell from, and just now. And I do like the way your face is living, today 
and tomorrow, too—don’t you?

And you do wonder, I do: what is the name of this place—what songs 
do they sing here to wake up to?
My inland gully is hidden
from reception.
In the absence of a wider world
a broad band of wetland grass
leads the way to the Upper Pond.

On the downside of nearly everything
anywhere I plant hopeful
chestnuts in an abiotic patch
I reckon will suit them just fine.

If you follow the Downs Road
beyond where index contours
bite calves
you're stereographically balanced
between a cartography of arteries;
Dunstan Creek and Manuherikia River
baptized in the folds of a map.
So much more is sky than land.
One tree is not enough substance
to name the flat ridge
but its road.

In the village pub wisdom is granted
for ancient repetition of seasonal arguments
on clouds and pests and poison and the price
of what is sold, shorn, slaughtered or lost.

Rivers end near the flatland campus
where uncrowded isolation revels
in mindful extremes
in the quiet weathered few
in the naïve talent that wants
in the human colluvium banding together
in the unchecked passion and difficult words
that educe sustainable singularity
and imagine stuff like nowhere.

Fluorescent builders commit
an act of grey
and scramble to finish
the new psych building
in time.
For I will consider Dunedin, for you are a brackish backwater inhabited by south sea gods.

For tipped out of a colonial toy-box, your stone buildings mingle with the bones of the land.

For oystercatchers by night, above Knox Church, cluck and chuckle, flying seawards.

For you have villas, with diamonded mullions blazing, and glossy cast-iron lace-work whose doily fringes hang above verandas.

For you have villas decaying and tomb-like, mantelpieces crammed with empty bottles and medication.

For Robbie Burns in bronze plucks a quill from a passing gull, and writes on air words in praise of Octagon hip-hop.

For at your centre you have a shiny Gaggia espresso machine.

For within your castle keep are the witch hats and wizard cones of pinnacles and turrets, cloak draperies, and a vault possessing the Harry Potteresque desk of the Ettrick Shepherd James Hogg.

For your bees nuzzle summer's clouds, and your skateboarders scrape out pavement's song, and shadows drawn from trees run across your parks in the late afternoon.

For Jetty Street on Sunday is loud with the eerily magnified musical whispers of industrial rust, and guitar fuzz buzzing like sourly ground-up sawdust.

For Anzac poppies bloom in Picardy Street, and orange cordials are poured on Alhambra's sports fields.

For every other corner on Princes Street echoes to bagpipe skirls, horse hooves clatter, and phantom flow of golden syrup ragtime piano solos.

For Rattray Street remembers the boogie-woogie, the elective jazz mutes, the wah-wah pedallers and the doesy-does beneath zigzag steps.

For King Edward Street is greasy with the taste of Southern Fried Gothic, and loud with rugby choruses from beer-babblers at the Brook.

For your seagulls glide up and down George Street looking to greet all they happen to meet.

For your mollusc-like dwellings are concealed by tough thorny hedges.

For you have your pipe-dreams of a harbour bridge and railway tracks elevated above a statue of Queen Victoria surfing.

For you still possess the ruined grandeur of some cavernous Edwardian gin palace populated by elderly alcoholics.

For you are a synonym for depopulation, petrified as limestone, with your buried tunnels leading to bricked-up bomb shelters and closed gold smelters.

For you are a clue to all of New Zealand, a primal bog of settlement which has evolved to spawn many of the nation's symbols of self-identification.

For who knew what could grow inside your cocoon of will and idea.

For there are rumours of beetles munching their way through your museum, over the notched spears and sandstone sinkers, the basalt adzes and bones of birds.

For you are a jester in cap and bells holding up an inflated gallbladder on a stick, which vibrates in the wind like an aerial tuned to otherworldly hymns.

For in the New Year you are a ghost ship of a town maintained by a tatterdemalion skeleton crew in op-shop regalia.

For the sight of you spread out in the skylarking sun reveals postal districts packed with concealed email users.

For you stretch up, Dunedin, take a breath, and sunk in dreamtime vacancy seek to break the trance of a hundred years, aware in your cobwebbed obstinacy that you're making an exhibition of yourself again.