

# Bravo! Monster Island is a Peninsula

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*Bravo! Monster Island is a Peninsula* addresses the fragmented cultural presence of nuclear power. The video, drawings, statue, and model, form a network of media objects, through which I aim to deconstruct the phrase “nuclear-free zone.”

What is the nuclear free-zone? Anti-nuclear scientist Robert E. White writes “[The June 1987 New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act] expresses New Zealand’s complete rejection of nuclear weapons [...] and of related manifestations of nuclear strategies”.<sup>1</sup> The key imperatives of this act became the prohibition of nuclear armed and/or powered vessels in local waters, and the active pursuit of bans preventing nuclear testing and waste dumping in the Pacific.<sup>2</sup> The paradox, phrased by National MP Simon Upton in 1987, is that “for an anti-nuclear government to be in alliance with a country that possesses nuclear weapons taints the alliance, and if government members are sincere in their anti-nuclear stance they should be considering withdrawal from that alliance”.<sup>3</sup> Even inactively, as was largely true post-1985, the membership of Aotearoa in the ANZUS security treaty tacitly endorsed US Nuclear policy. As such, any formal anti-nuclear sentiment carries the whiff of NIMBY-ism.

Burrell, Henry. “What’s Elon Musk’s Starlink Doing in New Zealand?” Business Desk, Oct. 2020.

Deese, Kaelan. “Russian Space Chief: Elon Musk’s Plan to Bomb Mars Is a Cover to Put Nuclear Weapons in Space.” The Hill, 28 May 2020.

Duffy, Kate. “The US Military and Elon Musk Are Planning a 7,500-Mph Rocket That Can Deliver Weapons Anywhere in the World in an Hour.” Business Insider Australia, 9 Oct. 2020.

Hilgartner, Stephen, et al. *Nukespeak*. Sierra Club Books, 1982.

Nelson, Joyce. *The Perfect Machine: TV in the Nuclear Age*. Between the Lines, 1991.

White, Robert E. *Nuclear Free New Zealand: 1984 - New Zealand Becomes Nuclear Free*. Centre for Peace Studies, University of Auckland, 1997.

White, Robert E. *Nuclear Free New Zealand: Twenty Years On*. Centre for Peace Studies, University of Auckland, 2007.

<sup>1</sup> *New Zealand Becomes Nuclear Free*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Nuclear Free New Zealand: Twenty Years On*, 21.

<sup>3</sup> *New Zealand becomes Nuclear Free*, 12.

The impetus for this exhibition came with learning that a subsidiary of Elon Musk's SpaceX gained approval to lease satellites near Waihōpai Invercargill.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Musk has signed contracts to provide rockets to the US military.<sup>5</sup> Are we a nuclear-free zone when we enable nuclear actors? Dmitry Rogozin, head of Russia's space agency, suggests Musk's Mars project is a cover to extend America's nuclear stronghold into space.<sup>6</sup> This is standard practice within the military-tech relationship, a brand of Futurism underwritten by demands for arms superiority.<sup>7</sup>

Nuclear is a technology, a history incorporating Curie, Rutherford, Oppenheimer, and Szilard, but it is more than weapons and power plants. Passive nuclear influences are embedded in Aotearoa, in the hardware we use (television, microwaves), and the operating values of our government. Nuclear is a culture, and a language.<sup>8</sup> Following an expensive gestation, and horrific birth, nuclear culture defined post-WWII America. Considering America's substantial intervention in the Pacific throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nuclear is key to understanding our position. The globalised society in which we live is embattled by the initiatives of the nuclear industry: incessant surveillance,<sup>9</sup> the erosion of government accountability,<sup>10</sup> corporations pretending towards benevolent Utopianism,<sup>11</sup> and an unrelenting need for growth under the auspices of "quality of life".<sup>12</sup>

The beauty of Godzilla rests in the failure of successive generations to fix her meaning. She is lumpy, molten, a radioactive victim, like Philip Guston's smoking insomniacs, or Willem de Kooning's *Clamdigger*. She debuted, in 1954, as an analogy to the nuclear warheads ("Fat Man" and "Little Boy") dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki nine years earlier. Six decades on, her meanings encompass Mother Nature, Japan, nuclear power in many iterations, earthquakes, and domestic terrorism. Godzilla teeters between terror and magnanimity. She was also born of the Pacific Ocean. The first Godzilla movie harnessed the memory of the Lucky Dragon incident, from that same year, in which fallout from a US hydrogen bomb contaminated twenty-three Japanese fisherman, 457 tons of tuna, and significant portions of the Marshall Islands. More recently, the American film *Godzilla* (1998) involved the French government attempting to obscure the link between their Pacific nuclear tests and the birth of this monster.

The ring of fire produced by a nuclear warhead has an inverse: the unrelenting quiet of nuclear industry propaganda. The video *Sierra Club Legal Department / Suds on Bleeker* excavates a vein of intrigue from the movie *Big Daddy* (1998). Adam Sandler plays a law-school dropout who fosters a young boy. Sandler's love interest (Joey Lauren Adams) is an environmental lawyer who repeatedly emphasises the importance of an upcoming trial, before skipping it to be with Sandler. Briefly alluded to is her employer being The Sierra Club, a major US environmental advocacy group. A large part of this group's work is their long standing opposition to nuclear energy. This is not covered in *Big Daddy's* banal evocation of environmentalism. Adams' employer exists to signal that she is a "good lawyer," and nothing more, however the inclusion of this real organisation demonstrates the nuclear presence within the most placid of texts. Much like the linguistic relationship between "Fat Man," "Little Boy," and "Big Daddy," it is farcical, but I can't help thinking Adams should've gone to that trial.

Nuclear power is an unwieldy subject, with a massive and complicated history. This industry defines the unhampered pursuit of technological progress that continues to harm the environment and the public. It is not sufficient to be nuclear-free, we must actively oppose the nuclear mindset, as it coolly manifests within Aotearoa.

<sup>4</sup> Burrell.

<sup>5</sup> Duffy.

<sup>6</sup> Deese.

<sup>7</sup> Hilgartner, 53.

<sup>8</sup> Hilgartner, 41.

<sup>9</sup> Hilgartner, 30.

<sup>10</sup> Nelson, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Hilgartner, 77.

<sup>12</sup> Hilgartner, 181.