

Fara Manuel

**Sikad Sensing** is a practice-led doctoral project that investigates Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington through the vibrational entanglement of human and non-human agents in motion: the bicycle, the sensing instruments, the environment, and the rider. This triadic ensemble enacts a politics of pace, foregrounding how power is unevenly distributed on the road and how the improvisational rhythms of cycling can tactically claim, negotiate, or resist spatial hierarchies. Each ride becomes a spatial performance in which bodies and infrastructures choreograph one another in real time.

A central concern of this iteration is automated photography—how sensor-triggered, algorithmically assisted capture systems generate images that are not simply documents but placeholders, stand-ins for moments, sensations, and spatial configurations that cannot be fully apprehended by the human eye. Mounted cameras, vibration-triggered shutters, light-sensitive auto-adjustments, and GPS-linked capture intervals produce visual outputs that act as proxies for the embodied encounter. They offer a way of “holding place” when the body cannot attend, when motion overwhelms perception, or when the speed of events exceeds the temporal capacity of human seeing. The photograph becomes a placeholder not for lost vision but for distributed vision—a mark made by the hybrid body of rider–bike–sensor–environment.

Within Latent Geographies, these automated images become nodes in the city’s emergent shape. Latent geographies describe how places become thinkable through the operations of capture, modelling, and search. Cycling with cameras turns each ride into a real-time modelling process: the bike’s vibrations determine what is recorded; the sensor’s logic determines what is adjusted; the environment’s contingencies determine what eludes capture. A blurred frame, a skewed horizon, a sudden auto-exposure bloom—each functions as a spatial stand-in, revealing the city not as a stable visual field but as an unfolding set of conditions that modulate what can be known.

Thus, placeholders operate as conceptual and material intermediaries. Conceptually, they unsettle the assumption that representation must be accurate or total. They acknowledge incompleteness as an inherent condition of sensing the city. Materially, placeholders act as fragments—automated captures that mark the moment of a jolt, a swerve, a gust, a shift in traffic density. They index the

micro-geographies that slip past conscious awareness but still structure the rider's negotiation of space. Automated photography fills in perceptual gaps while simultaneously revealing the very discontinuities that make cycling a rhythmic, improvisational practice.

Sikad Sensing extends Urry's hybrid geographies by positing that the bicycle and the environment are not merely accessories to the rider's agency but co-authors of these placeholders. The bicycle's point of view—a low, vibrating, forward-tilted perspective—fundamentally shapes what becomes photographable. The camera inherits this unstable perspective, producing images marked by shake, skew, and blur. The environment intervenes constantly: wind redirects the lens; sudden glare forces automatic compensation; the road surface imprints its texture through vibration. What emerges is a mode of seeing that is always distributed, always partial—where the automated photograph stands in for moments of bodily excess, friction, or attunement.

Taken together, this practice generates a rhythmic archive of movement. Following Lefebvre, the project understands Wellington's Round the Bays corridor and off-road trails as generative fields where diurnal, social, infrastructural, and mechanical rhythms intersect. But the automated camera introduces another stratum: computational rhythms. Exposure algorithms, GPS intervals, stabilization processes, and machine-learning filters each introduce their own periodicities. The resulting images become placeholders for these overlapping rhythms—scores of co-embodied motion where human, machine, and terrain oscillate between dominance and responsiveness.

The bicycle, as both method and metaphor, further complicates the role of placeholders. As method, it facilitates the production of automated stand-ins by placing the camera in a dynamic relation to uneven surfaces, unpredictable traffic flows, and shifting horizons. As metaphor, it suggests a mode of mobile dwelling where affect, habit, and improvisation are continuously inscribed into paths. The bicycle moves through what I call "slow space," a counter-tempo to the acceleration of automotive traffic. But this slowness is not the absence of speed; it is a tactical orientation that creates room for sensing otherwise. Automated photography captures this otherwise—moments of hesitation, compression, or micro-adjustment that are felt but not seen. These become placeholders for the embodied labor of navigating power geometries on the road.

In the broader context of latent geographies, placeholders reveal how places become computationally thinkable. When a sensor triggered by vibration records a patch of rough asphalt, that image becomes part of a latent model of the city's surface conditions. The camera's attempts to compensate for motion blur become indicators of kinetic intensity. Even the misfires—frames obscured by glare, tilted by a sudden swerve, or washed out by over-adjustment—act as spatial stand-ins for events that exceed stability. The placeholder, therefore, is not a substitute for missing information but an active participant in modelling the city's form.

As an intermedia artist, I treat these automated images not as final representations but as generative fragments. They are raw materials for layering with sound, GPS traces, and vibration recordings to produce works that foreground fluidity and emergence. Under an auto-theoretical framework, I embrace the unpredictability of each ride—the breakdowns, malfunctions, weather shifts, and infrastructural conflicts that alter the power balance among bike, body, sensor, and terrain. Each placeholder—each automated stand-in—marks a site where agency redistributed itself.

Ultimately, Sikad Sensing proposes that cycling with automated photography generates a field of placeholders that together form latent geographies: emerging shapes of place co-created through movement, capture, modelling, and search. These placeholders do not fill in what is missing; they articulate the ongoing incompleteness of sensing the world in motion.

**Keywords:** Automated photography, Mobile dwelling, Politics of pace, Hybrid embodiment, Latent geography