

EDITORIAL

The grindstones that sharpen the senses — conversion, sexual or filial love, extremes of human relations, environment, heredity — are not given to everyone.

Janet Frame, *A State of Siege* (1966)

Appropriately, this special issue on the idea of place in New Zealand culture opens with a densely metaphorical passage, for despite their diverse preoccupations the contributors to the volume agree that place is inherently figurative: place cannot be known in its own terms but only within discursive folds of legend, mythology, desires, claims, alibis, elisions, allusions. Frame's startling sentence defamiliarises the idea of place, presenting "environment" as a question mark, a kind of linguistic and phenomenological puzzle. This catalogue of the "grindstones that sharpen the senses," encourages us, in a phrase Tonya Blowers borrows from Michael Billig, to "actively puzzle" about place.

Studying Frame's quotation, one finds a condensed philosophy of place as both relational and layered in time, always interwoven with the social and the historical — key themes which will be developed in this collection. In Frame's vision the experience of place becomes associated with passion, extremity, spiritual encounter, danger — the latter particularly poignant given that the quotation is borrowed from a novel whose central plot development could be summarised as a slow death by landscape. Of the five terms listed, it is the last two which surprise most: while "conversion," "sexual or filial love", and "extremes of human relations" may not touch everybody, surely each person is, by definition, "surrounded" by environment and "handed" heredity (as opposed to "inheritance"). Yet the parallel placement of items in a list indicates that they have something in common; the

question is, how do the characteristics of the first three items shade into those of the last two?

By suggesting a kinship between “environment” and human relationship Frame seems to be saying that the encounter with place requires co-existence, exchange, and reciprocity in the manner of a social interaction. This belief is already implicit in the fact that the words “environment” and “place” carry both a geographical and a social meaning in English: we speak of “the physical environment” and of the “family environment”, of “a homely place” and of a person’s “place in society.” In Frame’s depiction, the true relation between self and environment is not that of subject and object, but of two interacting subjectivities, “equals, . . . beings with no barriers between them”, as Frame once put it in a letter to William Theophilus Brown. But as essays by Helen Blythe, Denis Walker, John Newton, and John O’Leary show, colonisation is predicated upon shutting off this hospitable dialogue with environment, for place cannot be mastered if it is imagined as a kind of adjacent consciousness. Instead, colonial space must be shaped to the demands of settler ideologies expressed (and masked) in the discourses of Western civilisation, including the literary: the sylvan consolations of the English Romantics for William Colenso, heroic romance for Alfred Domett, sentimental love for George Grey, and the “geographical grimace” (John Newton’s arresting phrase) of the South Island myth promoted in the poetry of Allen Curnow.

As Geoff Park establishes in his genealogy of the concept of “scenery”, the eighteenth-century transformation of Nature into picturesque “territories of taste” functions as another kind of discursive grid placed upon the colonial landscape. The turning away from Nature is literalised in the device of the Claude Glass, used by turning one’s back to a view and contemplating it in a convex pocket mirror which condenses and frames the scene. The upholding of aesthetic satisfaction as an absolute entitlement of the colonial British subject resulted in confiscation of Maori land in the name of Scenery, “cut[ting] Maori out of nature and cast[ing] them as pillagers”, in Park’s words. One is reminded of the irrational rallying of white sensibilities, even today, when indigenous rights groups threaten to reclaim a golf course — that encapsulation of eighteenth-century British values of order and supremacy over nature (Oka, Quebec and Raglan, New Zealand come to mind). The Auckland Regional Council alludes to the tradition of the picturesque in its controversial “natural beauty” publicity campaign, which erects large, carved wooden picture frames in front of views of scenery administered by the council. In postmodern mode, the campaign both mocks and indulges in modernity’s aestheticising perceptual régime.

Frame, of course, is scornful of the way Pakeha New Zealanders celebrate scenery, as if they were somehow responsible for producing it. This proprietary claim over natural beauty, expressed partly through the proud displays of scenery to visitors, may well, psychologically speaking, function as a compensatory gesture for some more fundamental void of communal identity. Frame’s 1969 novel *Yellow Flowers in the Antidopean Room* suggests the New Zealanders’ jingoistic “worshiping”

of scenery far outstrips any British cultural inheritance of the picturesque. “But what,” as English Aunt Lynley dares to suggest as her Kiwi sister-in-law, niece, nephew, neighbours repeatedly impress the view upon her, “if you’re not like that? What if you don’t like scenery?” Returning to *A State of Siege*, we find Frame satirically offering an indigenising motivation for this over-strenuous effort to affiliate with the land, particularly when directed toward specifically Maori symbols and locales:

And Malfred knew or sensed, smiling in sympathy with those who were so desperate to stake a claim in the identity of their country, that so many people were now trying to falsify genealogical tables so that they might be able to trace an obscure relative who was a Maori! They could just as happily have found that their great-great-grandfather was a boiling mud-pool or a piece of glacier or a spray of kowhai or pohutukawa blossom!

In the bathetic descent from Maori genealogy to boiling mud pool, Frame derides the facile reduction of Maori culture to biscuit-tin scenery. As John Newton and Helen Blythe make clear, the indigenising urge mocked by Frame often took a more sinister, more complete form in colonial and settler mythologies, with obliteration of the Maori presence in New Zealand and the Pakeha claim to primogeniture often performed in the same discursive moment. The “Holocaust” of Maori civilisation recently and controversially proposed by Labour MP Tariana Turia was one of the historical consequences.

Returning to our epigraph, Frame’s implied analogy between environment and heredity tells us that place and generation are inextricable: despite erasure of prior Polynesian settlement in colonising discourses, New Zealand is not, and never has been, a country without a past. But we also learn from Frame’s statement that heredity is not a “given”: one might say that openness to heritage — societal “heredity” from one generation to the next — has to be worked on and worked through, stripping away the “protective layers” provided by “land or hemisphere”, to use phrases from a further Frame novel, *The Adaptable Man*. The alienation from heritage is, like the failure of relationship with the land, a kind of truncation of experience, a self-imposed exile. One might conclude that people are least responsive to place, least able to “give” themselves to environment, where they most take it for granted, as a “given”.

This may seem an abstract opening, but the material effects of colonisers’ and settlers’ ideas of place are everywhere visible and in force. As Blowers establishes, Frame had to re-imagine place in order to create her own fictional state of belonging, having been literally shut away from society during periods of (sometimes voluntary) psychiatric confinement between 1945 and 1955. Blowers presents Frame’s placelessness as an expression of a larger cultural discourse of unsettlement, with New Zealand always conscious of itself as a relative entity overshadowed first by Europe, and now by the United States and Australia. Recent political and economic

events have shown that the anxieties of place have, if anything, become even sharper with the impact of globalisation.

New Zealand tentatively began the process of formulating itself as a nation in the period between 1890 and 1920. It did so in a haze of empire loyalty and sentimentality about the "passing" of the forests and the native race. A century later, nation states, small and large find their carefully cultivated identities, being overtaken by global forces indifferent to the romantic tropes that figured the nation in its birth and the modernist ones that sustained its growth. For a country as economically and psychically fragile as New Zealand, in which the markers of national identity, borrowed or appropriated, have never quite produced the easy confidence of Australian nationalism, the process has been profoundly disorienting. Not surprisingly, the country elected to move into the future with its eyes firmly fixed on the past. Just as New Zealand's spectacular overproduction of picturesque scenery advanced the purposes of nation-making in late-colonial New Zealand, so in the postcolonial, bicultural New Zealand of the 1980s and 90s a cultivated sense of place — pristine, wild, safe, adventurous, nostalgic — is once again enlisted to refashion traditional imagery, both for home consumption and for export.

Repetitions that do not know themselves risk farce. In 1999 the New Zealand Tourism Board hired M. & C. Saatchi to devise a strategy to market New Zealand internationally. The result was a campaign under the caption "100% Pure", with a tiny image of New Zealand substituted for the oblique bar of the percentage sign. The highly successful campaign was modern in that it employed new technologies and addressed a global market with a single consistent message. Yet the content and the shaping ideology of the campaign return unerringly to themes established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nowhere is the campaign more redolent of late colonial themes than in the image on the cover of the promotion booklet (entitled "Pure"), in which an old man with full facial tattoos bestows a hongi on a young girl. The meaning of "hongis" is even explained on the inside page, just as such exotic cultural terms and practices were in Maoriland brochures. Images of the hongi and moko were the stock in trade of Maoriland postcards from the first decade of this century. In fact, the moko on the cover of the Tourism Board's magazine is more spurious than the selfconsciously staged images of Maori women in traditional costume or cloaked and weapon-bearing warriors beloved of the Maoriland period.: the Tourism Board's moko was applied, seemingly with a felt-tip pen, to a model located in South Auckland.

Issues of ideology, identity and representation have become central to much analysis of the packaging of landscape and place as a product to be sold. Contemporary place-imaging strategies, such as the branding of New Zealand as "100 per cent pure and natural" or the "Absolutely, Positively Wellington" campaign, are policy responses to the social and economic problems associated with deindustrialisation and globalisation which have beset much of the Western World. One of the purposes of the present collection of papers is to provide a platform for

comparison of the changing interpretation and use of place in New Zealand with that of Australia and Canada.

Imaging and place marketing began to be recognised as a significant phenomenon from the early 1980s, at a time when the impacts of globalisation came to be recognised and when substantial changes in the nature of consumption and production were occurring. The 1980s were characterised as the decade in which consumers were taught "how to desire", as Eric Pawson phrases it in a 1997 article in *New Zealand Geographer*. For producers, an essential means of achieving this has been by way of what Pawson calls "romancing the product" through the use of brands. A successful brand creates distinctiveness in the marketplace — and included here is the highly competitive marketplace for "place".

In the cause of "reimaging" place, marketing practices such as branding exploit, reinvent or create images in order to sell place as a destination for tourists or investment. Ways of living peculiar to a locality are commodified. As several of the articles in this collection note, commodification of the New Zealand landscape is not a recent occurrence. What is new is the scope and size of the commodification of place and the profound cultural and intellectual uncertainty which this promotes. The problem in a global economy as a small country seeks economic advantage from tourism will be to negotiate at least three conflicting understandings of value: the adding of capital value to a commodified nature, the longstanding valuing of the outdoors, adventure, sport and landscape by Pakeha, and the value attached to whenua by Maori.

Much of the discussion and analysis in this collection turns on what we call "landscape" — a term which includes the built environment and its material and social practices, as well as their symbolic representation. Landscapes, as James Duncan observes in *The City as Text*, are "communicative devices that encode and transmit information". Current research examines the tropes which communicate this information, and how they are read by those who come into contact with them. In Duncan's terms tropes are signs and symbols into which various meanings are condensed. They include items in and of the built and physical environment — such as buildings, monuments, public spaces, trees and parks — and also signs, slogans, relationships, brands and even language(s) associated with the landscape under study. The latter include the languages of consumption associated with specific places and spaces. As a "text", therefore, landscape is multidimensional, lending itself to many interpretations.

The fracturing of New Zealand's identity and competing conceptions of place also reveal the personal nature of relationship to place. Yet, despite the absence of a commonly-agreed sense of place in New Zealand, place has become more important than ever before. In a series of interrelated writings to which "Theatre Country" contributes, Geoff Park reflects on the ways colonialism advances both by appropriating and by conserving land. As Park puts it:

Maori ruins could be as picturesque as any Roman forum, but Maori themselves, obtrusive and in your face, were not so easily part of a scenery package as Wordsworth's sentimentalised rustics.... In order to provide not only the dramatic or romantic contexts for tourists (to imagine themselves explorers) but also a sense of security, New Zealand's beautiful scenes were emptied of rival human presences and "returned", as the government men who oversaw the task put it, "to their old primæval grandeur".

Colonialism exerts an indelible imprint on New Zealand's busy constructions of an imagery of place. This issue of *ACS* signals both the work that has been done already and that which needs to be done in scrutinising imageries and assumptions formed within a long neglected colonial literature, usually regarded with embarrassment. In doing so, it touches on the most contentious point of intersection in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as each struggles to redefine itself, overtaken by a global economy in which the old assurances of easy prosperity for efficient commodity producers are rapidly dissipating. We hope this volume aids understanding of the discursive and ideological processes by which that redefinition is pursued.

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Michael Hall, Jenny Lawn, Mark Williams

GEOFF PARK

THEATRE COUNTRY

To persons of refined taste and retentive memory, few enjoyments are greater or more permanent than the sight of grand and beautiful scenery. While present, it creates a feeling of rapturous delight, almost of inspiration. The hills seem to heave with a deeply murmured eloquence, and we understand their tales of times gone by; the rivers roll along their volumed and rapid waters, and we hear in the mighty music, the voices of 'men of olden days', who dwelt, fought or died within its sound. We gaze on the summer heaven, and the eyes of the young and beautiful, whom poets sung, and Princes loved, seem to look upon us, and we live in a Fairyland of thought and fancy.¹

I squint. Not against the light, for White Moss Common has precious little of that kind, but rather with the difficulty of seeing in the dark circle of reflecting glass snug in its wooden case in Turi's hand, anything other than my face distorted, peering back at me.

No less a difficulty though, than accepting that whatever the mirror might reveal is more worthy of my attention, no matter how curious or correct the image, than what the evolved apparatus of my own eyes had already focused on: a quiet