

FRAMING THE REAL

Postmodern discourses in recent New Zealand art

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'Framing the real'. The metaphor that sustains this discussion focuses what I believe is fundamental to postmodern discourses in New Zealand: a recognition that representation mediates reality. Postmodern practice, then, is best characterised as a resourceful negotiation of this fact. Over the last decade (at least), a growing body of art and writing has emerged which reflects upon and responds to this condition. Artists and writers now draw attention to the ways in which visual and verbal sign systems condition how we can see and what we can know; and they point to the ways in which ideology operates in this (or any) culture. My purpose here is to identify some of the key moments in the arrival and dispersal of this discourse and to map postmodernism's contemporary terrain.

Dismantling the frame: post-object art's critique of modernism

Post-object' artists in New Zealand, throughout the 1970s, laid the ground for a critique of many of the central tenets of modernism. By undermining a traditional investment in the art object and by shifting attention to the occasions and situations for 'seeing', they opened the way for art to engage with other (non-art) discourses.

This, I believe, was an important precondition for postmodernism in New Zealand. However, in 1982, Wystan Curnow, the principal commentator on and theorist for post-object art here, had located this post-object critique *within* the context of postmodernism² He argued that in minimalist, postminimalist and conceptual art of the late 1960s and 1970s, a breakdown of the opposition between subject and object had occurred. Based, in part, on a new phenomenological awareness, the 'self' was now de-centred and redefined. Curnow claimed that pressure from the 'unredeemed particulars of existence' had precipitated a recognition of modernism's provisional hold on order and meaning. Rather than attempting to discover what lay behind or beneath surface appearance, it was the postmodern artist's function, Curnow believed, to measure that which was 'already itself'.

Post-object artists in the 1970s and early 1980s did indeed seek to engage with lived experience rather than transform, transcend or penetrate it; to highlight an involvement with the processes and contexts for artmaking. Such contiguity between art and life defied modernist notions of art's autonomy and enabled artists to engage, at a non-aesthetic level, with materials and situations, thus denying 'self'-expression in a capitulation to the givens of place and moment. A de-emphasising of the expressive role of the artist was coupled with the use of techniques and materials expressly designed to undermine the unique and precious status of the art object.

It was this art, produced by the likes of Jim Allen, Bruce Barber, Billy Apple, Philip Dadson, Andrew

Drummond, Kim Gray, John Lethbridge, David Mealing, Nick Spill and others, that was best known to Australians at the beginning of the 1980s. This was as a result of participation in the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, the Biennale of Sydney and in contexts such as the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide.

So post-object practice, and Curnow's theoretical account of it, is marked by a ready acceptance that anything could be utilised as the raw material for art. By acknowledging the specificities of context, art *itself* could then function as a framing device to focus attention on the situations within which it was made and experienced. In this way, post-object art optimistically asserted a new role for the viewer as active participant, thereby undermining the authority and status of singular meaning.

With a new emphasis on ephemeral and time-based modes of working, documentation became increasingly important. As such, writing's traditional relation to art was redefined. Produced by both artists and commentators, texts functioned as evidence rather than exegesis; undermining criticism's interpretive role and blurring the distinctions of the traditional, hierarchical relationship of writing to art, text to image. Thus viewers also had to be readers, now actively engaged in the construction of meaning. And so, by positing the notion that meaning could reside 'in' the text, could be shifted 'by' the text, the transparency of visual/verbal structures was called into question.³



David Mealing *Jumble sale*, 1975 at the Auckland City Art Gallery.

Post-object art's relation to current notions of postmodernism resides less in its idealistic hope that art would operate in a non-reified relation to reality, than in its insistence that the viewer may 'construct' meaning and that the (con)textual is the site for this process. Although Curnow's use of the term 'postmodernism', with his reliance on notions of 'presence' and the 'given' may today seem misapplied,⁴ his identification of practices that were critical of modernist assumptions has contributed to a contemporary shift that has redefined the viewer as reader and has located art more critically within its wider social, political and cultural contexts.

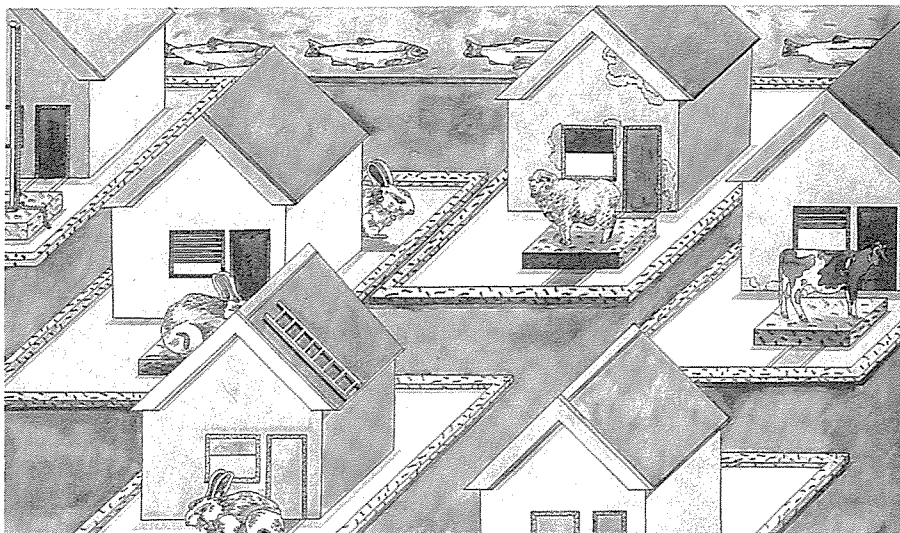
Post-object art should be recognised as a critical challenge to the structures of prevailing cultural ideology. However, in New Zealand, its relation to contemporary postmodern practice has neither been clearly articulated nor fully acknowledged. Perhaps with the departure of so many post-object artists by

1980 (Jim Allen and John Lethbridge to Sydney, Bruce Barber to Halifax and Nick Spill to New York, for example), there was little chance of a development from the 1970s into the 1980s. In addition, although the early 1980s saw some of the best performance work by the likes of Andrew Drummond, Peter Roche and Philip Dadson, that decade was in fact marked by a return to the object and a re-validation of the role of the institution in art's legitimation. Where Australian artists like Imants Tillers, Mike Parr and John Nixon have adapted a re-vitalised, object-based practice to examine how representation operates,⁵ artists of their generation in New Zealand continue to use post-object modes (installation, performance, etc.) to articulate a concern with issues of identity which continue to engage with lived experience. This difference is significant given more recent applications of postmodern theory and practice.

New image and the proliferation of content

If post-object sculptors were exploring a situational aesthetic based on the dematerialisation of the art object; certain painters in the late 1970s and early 1980s were engaged in a practice which embraced the image as the locus of coded meaning. Rather than a direct attack on the authority of modernism and its investments in the object, theirs was an oblique critique of the strictures of Greenbergian formalism and a conscious response to an international return to the figure.

Francis Pound brought together this disparate group of artists for the *New image* exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1983. The selected artists, George Balogh, Gavin Chilcott, Dick Frizzell, Paul Hartigan, Richard Killeen, Wong Sing Tai and Denys Watkins, all displayed a preference for images rooted in the city or suburbia. They avoided any signs of expressionist soul-searching in favour of an ironic detachment which freed them to play with a multifarious collection of images and signs happily plundered from the everyday world.



Denys Watkins *Fringe benefits*, 1978 (ink and watercolour). Auckland City Art Gallery collection, presented by the Friends of the Auckland City Art Gallery.

Pound believed that their detachment was not only a state of mind but that it signalled a new attitude towards art. He claimed that 'Their art [was] an art of images, an art whose images refer as much to images of the world as to the world: an art about *ways of seeing* the world, as much as an art *about* the world'.⁶ Pound was here recognising the coded nature of representation, acknowledging that art inevitably 'frames' reality and therefore renders it inaccessible.⁷

In so doing he was explicitly criticising a prevailing assumption that art could offer privileged access to the 'real' through the conduit of the visionary artist. In New Zealand, this assumption has underpinned a traditional investment in the land as the ground from which our identity springs. These artists' rejection of landscape as their core motif, together with their sceptical disregard of art's expressive potential, signified for Pound a structural shift away from an implicitly ideological investment in landscape and, therefore, an explicit refusal of New Zealand's romantic-expressive tradition.

Pound's belief that vision is conditioned by its mode of presentation, that seeing is a 'language', is central to his interest in the issue of 'picturing'. The effects or imperatives of 'framing' are therefore crucial to his discourse. His subsequent analysis of Richard Killeen's cut-outs, for example, emphasises their refusal to defer to the 'compositional imperatives' of the frame. Their ability to operate 'in' the world, allowing the viewer to physically and conceptually construct or arrange their pieces, he poses as an alternative to the expressive investment in the modernist canvas.⁸

Clearly, then, by the early 1980s, artists and writers had become increasingly critical of certain modernist assumptions. Their interest in framing and reception signals a new scepticism about the myths on which traditional artmaking was founded. Both sculptors and painters had begun to consciously challenge the hierarchies of high and low, seeking non-art sources as material for their work, and emphasising content rather than form as the central concern of their practice.

Transgressions: feminist strategies at work in the 1980s

Women working in the late 1970s and early 1980s were also concerned with the recuperation of content, but to specific political ends. By focusing on their lives and histories as women, by restoring to their work the humdrum details of domestic life, artists such as Juliet Batten, Allie Eagle, Claudia Pond-Eyley, Jacqueline Fahey, Joanna Paul, Carole Shepherd and Robin White were consciously inscribing their experiences into a context ill-prepared to accept them. Roger Horrocks has acknowledged 'frames' as a keyword for the 1980s. He has drawn attention to the window-frame metaphor that appeared in works by women early that decade as an instance of that shift which had 'made us all more aware of the politics involved in reading and of the way in which a "frame" can shape and exclude'.⁹ Picturing women's lives called on a different experience, a particularity that challenged art's claims to universality. Collective action and the use of art for political ends were further challenges. Speaking as women, exploiting their specificity in social and political terms, they rendered problematic the clichéd image of the artist as alienated hero.

By mid-decade, in response to the newly available writings of French feminists and, in particular, Craig Owens's influential essay 'The discourse of others: feminism and postmodernism' (1983),¹⁰ the critical scope of feminist art and theory in New Zealand had broadened. Women's experience was recognised as a construct of a patriarchal ideology that determined the value of the positions women held, the roles they could play. An unproblematic celebration of women's lives was criticised for its failure to address this and, in its place, an analysis of the construction of gender through representation was begun.

Lita Barrie's critical writing, together with her highly provocative role as a public speaker, are the most visible and programmatic contributions to this analysis.¹¹ Barrie advocated a socially committed feminist practice firmly engaged in a critique of ideology. By drawing attention to women's cultural 'construction', to their oppression within logocentricism and to the ideological bases of representation, Barrie was able to use feminist theory in a critical practice aimed to achieve wider social and political ends. Her matricidal attacks on first-generation feminist artists may have effectively remarginalised them, but, since the mid-1980s, her sophisticated use of theory has assisted a reorientation away from essentialist, gender-based practice to support artists working within the theory-practice nexus.



A renewed interest in content, coupled with the realisation that feminist theory addresses both a politics and a theory of representation, have led some artists to examine how roles are constructed. Photographers such as Margaret Dawson, Megan Jenkinson, Fiona Pardington, Marie Shannon and Christine Webster have manipulated the codes of the self-portrait and explored the mechanisms of the gaze. They have played with the woman-as-object paradigm in order to disperse the self in myriad disguises and, in Pardington's case at least, explored the possibility of representing a feminine desire. Turning language and systems of visual representation on themselves, artists like Julia Morison, Merylyn Tweedie and Ruth Watson have plundered textual and visual sources to examine how stereotypes are constructed, histories written, knowledges enforced. In complex, multilayered works of collaged fragments, they create alternative fictions which both defy unitary vision and defer singular meaning.

Ruth Watson *The book (what you see is what you get)*, 1990 (colour photograph). Courtesy Sue Crockford Gallery.

Feminist theory has also been instrumental in the critique of New Zealand's romantic-expressive tradition. By questioning traditional binary oppositions (male/female, active/passive, mind/body, self/other, culture/nature) artists and writers have begun to dismantle a masculine investment in the land as both silent, feminine 'other' and as material (political, economic, legal) property. Jane Pountney, Judy Darragh and Barbara Strathdee have manipulated the codes of landscape painting to disrupt meaning and to insert an alternative, resistant discourse by sly mimicry, parodic re-presentation and a re-playing of the historical record. Alternatively, Jacqueline Fraser, Christine Hellyar and Pauline Rhodes, working in site-specific installation and with found and reclaimed materials, have developed an anti-monumental sculptural practice which reposit a relationship between the female body and the land which neither objectifies nor fetishises women.

The importance of feminist theory in New Zealand is undeniable. Its implications lie most especially in its recognition of the ideological bases of representation and, simultaneously, its negotiation of a programme to dismantle art's autonomy so as to free it to operate effectively as social and political action. Work by male artists such as Terrence Handscomb, Richard Killeen and Ralph Paine has similarly registered that structural shift away from an easy acceptance of the authority of a unitary masculine vision, highlighting the issue of positionality in the making and reception of art.

Discourse of the 'real': New Zealand and the simulacrum

We should not forget that recent cultural production has occurred within a context increasingly marked by the signs of late capitalist consumerism. In New Zealand we are witnessing the growth of multinationals, the sale of state assets to foreign interests and the dis-establishment of the welfare state. We are subjected to an aggressive marketing of national identity in the spectacle of sport and the commodification of culture. We are served back New Zealand's geography as spectacular backdrop to slick commercials for Japanese cars and served up the happy face of racial tolerance in displays of cultural stereotyping. It is at the very moment when our identities are being dispersed, our assets lost, that 'identity' is marketed back to us and representation now replaces the 'real'.

As Baudrillard claims, it is exactly when the real is no longer what it used to be that there is a 'panicstricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production'.¹² Here, perhaps this panic has a double edge. It is a particular Pakeha anxiety, aggravated by more confident Maori claims to the land. It is this Maori assertion of a more authentic and legitimate connection to place that has effected a Pakeha dispossession. The Maori have now metaphorically taken back that which the ideologues of nationalism in earlier times were determined to acquire and invest with meaning.¹³

It is within this compromised space that postcolonialism operates. Simon During has identified the postcolonial as that drive in ex-colonies to recognise themselves as centred, to find an identity independent from colonial power which, in New Zealand as elsewhere, finds both colonisers (Pakeha) and colonised (Maori) in crisis, the former unsure how to construct identity anew, the latter cut adrift from what they once had.¹⁴ During believes that postcolonialism is in conflict with the postmodern, precisely because it seeks to construct a unique identity independent of that imposed on it as a colony. In this, he claims, the postcolonial may well already be a simulacrum within the postmodern.¹⁵

It is significant, perhaps, that those who are resistant to postmodernism criticise it as an alien and imported rhetoric, with no relevance to local conditions.¹⁶ Such a stance is indicative of that desire to exist independent from those forces that shaped us; trusting, thereby, in the possibility of constructing a unitary identity and finding authentic means to express it. If anything, postmodernist discourses complicate such a view.

Marking the border

This, surely, is the true locus of 'high culture' in late monopoly capitalism: neither decorative irrelevance nor indispensable ideology, neither structural nor superfluous, but a properly marginal presence, marking the border where that society both encounters and exiles its own disabling absences.

Terry Eagleton, *The function of criticism*

Postmodern practice in New Zealand self-consciously negotiates that border territory between representation and reality. Here an authentic identity is neither sought nor contested. Instead 'identities' are examined and disrupted, unsettling any easy reading of culture, foregrounding the ways in which visual and written representations have contributed to a construction of identity. Rather than 'inventing' New Zealand (as Francis Pound claims nationalist discourse from the 1930s to the 1960s intended, and as Simon During claims postcolonial discourses still intend), artists today are more concerned to engage with New Zealand, not as an empty landscape waiting to be filled, but rather as a terrain already inscribed.¹⁷ Pound's and During's acknowledgement of the textual as the final site of meaning, together with Wystan Curnow's recognition of the loaded contents of the given and Lita Barrie's identification of the cultural as a battleground for a clash of contested ideologies; have all contributed to an understanding of the contemporary climate.

By recognising representation as the act of framing, the viewer as reader has emerged. Similarly, new sources and subjects outside the traditional arenas of art have been authorised and essentialist categories broken down. Today, then, conceptual strategies in installation feature prominently, as does an interest in the inter-relation between image and text. Found materials and images are frequently re-issued, both in their original condition and modified, most notably mediated by the photographic process. There is, as well, a new consciousness of and sensitivity to the image. It is recognised and appropriated both as a loaded 'given' and for the meanings it releases through association and juxtaposition. Most especially, the image is now recognised as a surrogate, a stand-in for an inevitably absent reality. What follows is a brief introduction to some of the ways in which these practices have been brought into play.

The frame

The frame and issues of framing have become new loci of concern. In some instances the physical frame has been removed. By so doing, artists both deny the compositional imperative of the frame's shape and dimensions and, more importantly, shift and unsettle meaning by undermining the picture as unitary, bounded object. Richard Killeen's cut-outs are exemplary in this respect. Their non-discursive, fragmentary contents, together with the amorphous, provisional shape of their outlines have set important precedents for a host of artists. Chris Cane, Patrick Pound, John Reynolds, Merylyn Tweedie and others have exploited the freedom offered by the removal of the frame.

Contradictory or supplementary meanings have also been released by artists who are interested in the frame's relation to its contents. Thus Fiona Pardington's photographs are contextualised and complicated by the addition of collaged and overpainted mounts and ornate frames; while Julian Dashper's paintings often sport found frames that deflect ironically away from the contents of his canvases.

In addition, the frame has been re-defined and conceptually extended in a recognition of the importance of context and occasion in the determinations of meaning. While there are important precedents for this in post-object art of the 1970s, motivations for current practice are somewhat different. Rather than an attempt to break down the boundaries between 'art' and 'life', interest in the 'contents' of context derive

more critically from a recognition that the spaces in which art may be seen provide the very conditions wherein, as Mary Kelly puts it, the 'work of art is produced as text'.¹⁸

Billy Apple's installations, alterations and interventions, provide a vital link between practices of the 1970s and those of the 1980s. His protracted engagement with the 'business' of art and the frameworks for its negotiation and reception, impinge critically on younger artists like Julian Dashper, Philip Kelly, Lucy MacDonald and Peter Gibson-Smith.

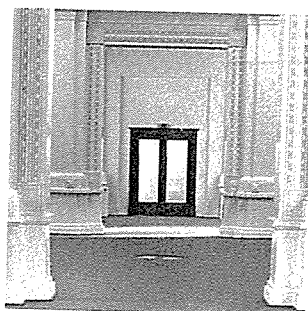
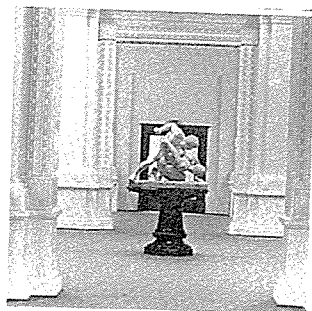
Simultaneously, curators have become more aware of the ways in which their projects can structure and determine meaning. On occasion, boundaries between the curatorial event and installation have become blurred. Robert Leonard's *Pakeha mythologies* (1986) or Jane Pountney's installation for *Outcrop* (1990), the former an exhibition by a curator, the latter an installation by an artist are examples. Both selected and arranged art and non-art images to foreground how an exhibition can provide the narrative frame within which ideological constructions can be identified. Curators of shows like *Exhibits* (1988) and *Putting the land on the map* (1989) are more self-conscious about their roles as active participants. In each case the mode of presentation and the catalogue texts are meant to mirror the contents of each show, alerting viewers/readers to the metadiscursive frame within which each exhibition operates.

The reader and language

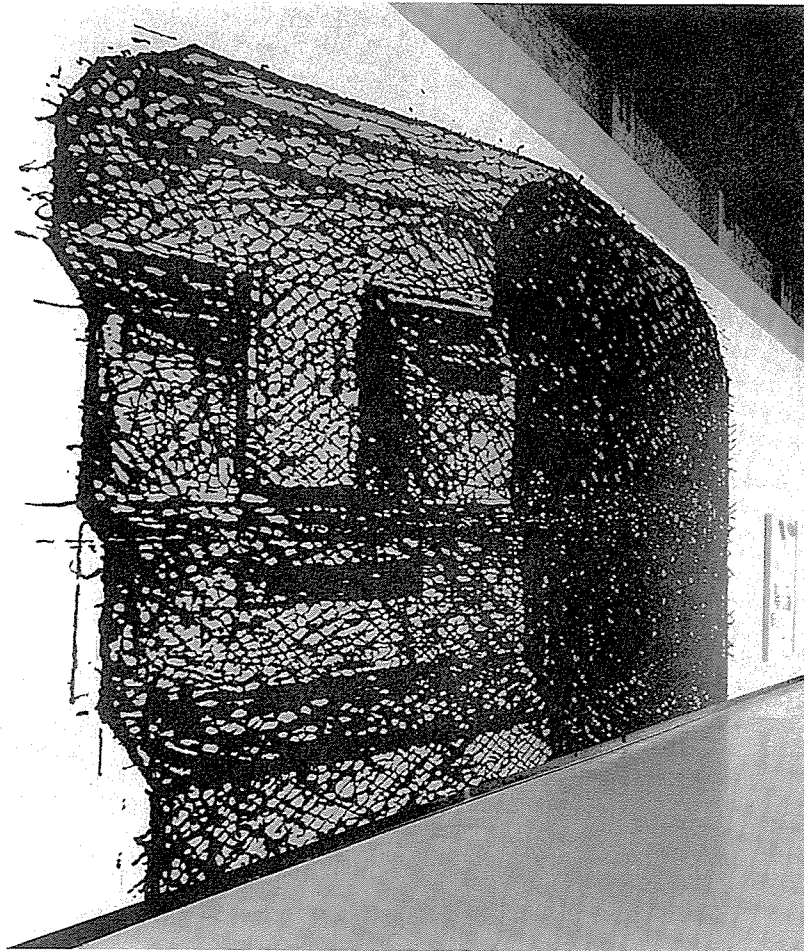
Removing or re-locating the frame are strategies designed to deny the art object as a discrete entity, as the intimate and transparent evidence of the author/subject. This process of de-centering has shifted attention from author to reader, from image to text and thus, to the politics involved in reading. By emphasising the coded nature of the visual, the modernist notion that art is somehow outside language has been challenged. As a result, analysis is now focused on art as a language, on the ways in which art is turned *into* language and on the distance or proximity *between* the visual and the verbal.

There is a new critical interest in painting's traditional relation to text: in the title, the signature, even the date; and more generally in the inter-textual workings of the visual, rather than in any exegetic revelation of hidden meaning. A poststructuralist writer like Laurence Simmons, for example, has begun to uncover the *name* of the artist as it is implicitly inscribed within the painting-text.¹⁹ Where Richard Killeen, Gordon Walters and others have always paid scrupulous attention to the specifics of dating; other artists like Dick Frizzell, Michael Stevenson and Julian Dashper seem to play ironically with this convention, toying with that exact moment when a work enters circulation. Similarly, titles have been used by Lucy MacDonald, Judy Millar and Merylyn Tweedie to unsettle meaning, to besiege the work with supplementary or irrelevant readings.

A counter-trend today, then, is the desire to reside *in* language, to dislocate it from its traditional relation to meaning. By emphasising its code-ness, meaning can be deferred. Thus Merylyn Tweedie uses texts in an arbitrary and fragmented fashion, consciously confusing theoretical discourses with snatches of writing from non-art sources. While John Reynolds or Julian Dashper have used gesture as a kind of pseudo-language, women artists like Jane Pountney, Barbara Tuck and Maria Olsen have manipulated paint as a means to 'speak' the body, by-passing the textual altogether. These artists have provided a resistant, troublesome strand *within* a postmodern fascination *for* language.



Billy Apple *Towards the centre (The given as an art-political statement)*, 1979 at the Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui.



Derrick Cherrie *Untitled*,
1989 in the exhibition
Nobodies, Shed 11.

Allegory/quotation

Allegory is a mode of reading the already-written.

Michael Newman, *Postmodernism: ICA documents*

Writing about *Drawing analogies* in 1988,²⁰ I was intrigued that artists seemed to be denying the originary, choosing instead to utilise a range of strategies that signalled the dispersal of self in a variety of non-hierarchical, fragmentary takes on the world. One recurring strategy was the use of found imagery and materials and their re-manipulation in a different context. By this means John Hurrell, Derrick Cherrie, John Reynolds, Victoria Sheppard, Merylyn Tweedie and Ruth Watson were exploiting the surplus of meaning released when images are combined or overlaid (as in the palimpsest). Their preference for found images, for a deferral to the given, marked them in their new roles as readers/bricoleurs. This is now an accepted focus of postmodern practice. Patrick Pound ironically calls this new generation of 'image scavengers' the 'xerox club',²¹ which says much about the peculiarities of such practice here. For there is a strong tendency in New Zealand to shy away from the impeccable surface of the glossy media image, to turn instead to the grainy tactility of the photocopy, to see the image as it is enlarged, gradually decompose.

Supplementary meanings are also released by cutting across media categories. Artists now work in fertile territories between painting and sculpture combining, for example, photography with drawing and collage. This breakdown of the discrete boundaries of each medium, together with a tendency to disperse or scatter objects in space, has been authorised by post-object art's critique of modernism. By supplanting an aesthetics of form with the epistemologies of content, the physical nature of contemporary practice has itself been rendered allegorical.²²

Expression

I'm suspicious of expressionism's crocodile tears.

Patrick Pound, *Fragments and fakes*

A sceptical postmodern practice has invalidated gesture as a sign for 'self'. Quotation is one ploy to undermine the ordinary mark as locus of meaning. Other distancing devices – a deferral to system or chance, a utilisation of mapping techniques, a preference for reproductive media, for the typographic rather than the autographic – alert us to the codified nature of mark-making. Derrick Cherrie, for example, has enlarged small sketches to gigantic proportions, highlighting the way in which an intimate gesture loses its authorial meaning in its transposition into the public domain. Similarly, John Hurrell maps images appropriated from art magazines or comics onto local street maps by a system which obliterates all but the streets conforming to the outlines of the images he has chosen. Even abstract painters, John Reynolds, Judy Millar or Michael Hight, for example, exploit gesture not for its expressive potential, but for its signifying possibilities, as another writing of sorts.

It is as much a loss of faith in the claims of expressionism as it is a widening and a re-defining of the persona of the artist. Certainly artists like Philip Clairmont, Allen Maddox and Colin McCahon have been criticised for the high costs of their emotional and physical investments in their art. Feminist and post-object critiques, together with the cool irony of 'new image' are precedents for artists which now allow them social or political reintegration or which authorise the adoption of new guises and roles: the artist as businessman (Billy Apple); the 'product' maker or designer (Merylyn Tweedie as *Popular Productions* or Philip Kelly's *Artverts*); the artist-director (Margaret Dawson) or the anonymous, de-personalised collective (City Group); and the professional now critically involved with all the processes of art's conception, presentation and reception (Julian Dashper).

History

There is a new self-consciousness about representations and their histories. This has led artists back to art history, to the popular and official records of the past, as sources to be examined, borrowed from, even pillaged. This return to history is marked by an unconscious recognition of, or deferral to the *loss* of history – faith in progress, belief in historical determinism – which has rendered previous art a series of styles and subjects to be used, discarded or nostalgically re-issued. Dick Frizzell's resuscitation of a deadpan style of landscape painting which knowingly falls somewhere between New Zealand's regionalism of the 1940s and the tradition of the Sunday painter is one example. Other more critical examples are Judy Millar's *P-op* (1990) or Julian Dashper's *Murals for a contemporary house* (1988) which, by deliberately downplaying finish and timelessness, re-examine New Zealand's modernist 'masters'.

History has been revisited by both artists and writers as part of a deconstructive project to dismantle the myths on which New Zealand culture is founded. It is here that the landscape tradition itself has been most strenuously challenged. Francis Pound's critique of nationalist discourse, Wystan Curnow's



Margaret Dawson *Marching girl*, 1984 (colour photograph). Collection of the artist.

identification of a now defunct expressive-realist investment in the land, and contemporary recognitions of the textual, for example in new writing on Colin McCahon;²³ are all symptomatic of, and instrumental in the debunking of this tradition.

In practice, Gavin Chilcott's 'stumpmen' are exemplary.²⁴ They represent a contemporary demystification of land and origins which, as Lita Barrie suggests, refer to the 'stunted development of colonials' growing as they have, from a 'deforested landscape, which brought with it a male ethos based around a chainsaw'.²⁵ More obviously, Ian Scott has recently exhibited paintings which play with and expose the clichés and constructions of a national mythos, juxtaposing copies of iconic images from New Zealand's (authorised and unauthorised) art history with screenprinted photographs of sporting greats (the All Blacks) and cultural heroes (Colin McCahon), rendering explicit a critical discourse which has gathered momentum over the last decade.

Conversely, alternative histories have now been brought to the fore by artists concerned to expose the ideological bases on which official versions of history are founded. This is part of a larger cultural project to re-examine New Zealand's past. Exhibitions such as *Art and organised labour* and *Mana Tiriti* (both organised by the Wellington City Art Gallery in 1990) have contributed to this process by examining under-valued aspects of culture and by engaging with discourses normally considered outside the domain of art.

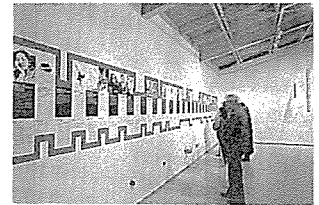
This positive revision which foregrounds alternative history is complemented by a growing recognition of another attitude to history: a Maori relation to time. The Maori belief that the past is living in the present is a profound rebuff to a western conception of linear history and its ideological adjunct: a belief in progress. It is an attitude that, while disrupting western historical discourses, simultaneously works against a postmodern dislocation from the past. In this, its relation to postmodernism has yet to be fully analysed.

Clearly then, the discourses and practices that have emerged are questioning, circumspect and critically self-conscious. As a result, new theorisations of and identifications with place and location are evolving, more complex histories (or is it fictions?) of this culture are being written.

The category of the 'postmodern' is our first glimpse of the historical emergence of a field of post-Romantic aesthetics.

Victor Burgin, *The end of art theory*

Postmodernism in New Zealand, with its roots in post-object and new image practices of the late 1970s and the early 1980s, its theoretical bases in phenomenology, feminist theory and, more recently, deconstructive, post-structuralist theory, is a response to that profound shift marked by the demise of the ideologies of Romanticism, as they have impinged on our social, economic and cultural history. For, more than anything, postmodernism questions those sustaining romantic myths of individual expression, originality and an identificatory investment in the land. It is within this overarching framework that our contemporary critique of modernist discourse should be construed, that 'other' voices should be heard. By conceiving postmodernism thus, problems of relation, definition and degree retreat and, in their place, programmes for an effective, critically mediated practice emerge. There is much to look forward to in the 1990s.



Philip Kelly *Treaty time-line*, 1990 (mixed media) installation in the exhibition *Mana tiriti*, Wellington City Art Gallery.

NOTES:

1. My use of 'post-object', here, is based on my analysis of the use of this term in New Zealand and Australia in the 1970s. Its use differs from an American or European preference for other designations – 'conceptual', 'arte povera', for example. See Christina Barton, 'Post-object art in New Zealand 1969-1979: experiments in art and life', 2 vols, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1989.
2. Wystan Curnow, 'Post-modernism in poetry and the visual arts', *Parallax*, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 1982, pp. 7-28.
3. Tony Green makes this point in 'Review: I will need words', *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, vol. 9, 1985, p. 60.
4. Curnow has been criticised in particular by Simon During in 'Towards a revision of local critical habits', *And*, no. 1, August 1983.
5. Australian critics have paid considerable attention to the connections between these artists' conceptualist roots and their current postmodern practice. Their prominent role in Australia has therefore helped to foreground continuities within recent conceptualisms.
6. Francis Pound, 'New image', in *New image: aspects of recent New Zealand art*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983, p. 8.
7. Pound developed this argument further in his important book: *Frames on the land: early landscape painting in New Zealand*, Collins, Auckland, 1983.
8. See, for example, Francis Pound, 'The escape from the frame: Richard Killeen's cutouts', *Art New Zealand*, no. 20, Winter 1981, pp. 34-9.
9. Roger Horrocks, 'The invention of New Zealand', *And*, no. 1, August 1983, p. 20.
10. In *The anti-aesthetic: essays on postmodern culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Bay Press, Port Townsend, 1983, pp. 57-82.
11. In particular, see: Lita Barrie, 'Remissions: toward a deconstruction of phallic univocality', *Antic*, no. 1, June 1986, pp. 87-103; and 'Further toward a deconstruction of phallic univocality: deferrals', *Antic*, no. 2, March 1987, pp. 19-47.
12. From Baudrillard's 'The precession of simulacra', quoted in Michael Newman, 'Revising modernism, representing postmodernism: critical discourses of the visual arts', in *Post-modernism: ICA documents*, ed. Lisa Appignanesi, Free Association Books, London, 1989, p. 137.
13. More recently, a Maori relation to the land has been questioned for its own implied essentialism. See, for example, George Hubbard and Robin Craw, 'Beyond kia ora: the paraesthetics of *Choice!*', a short essay written to accompany the exhibition, *Choice!* Artspace, Auckland, 1990.
14. Simon During, 'Post-modernism or postcolonialism?', *Landfall*, 155, vol. 39, no. 3, September 1985, pp. 366-80.
15. See also: Simon During, 'What was the west? Some relations between modernity, colonisation and writing', *Sport*, no. 4, Autumn 1990, pp. 63-89.
16. Resistance to postmodernism of this kind has come from many quarters including reviewers like Garth Cartwright and cultural figures such as Hamish Keith.
17. McCahon's oft-quoted statement: 'I saw something logical, orderly and beautiful belonging to the land but not yet to its people. Not yet understood or communicated, not even really yet invented. My work has largely been to communicate this vision, and to invent the way to see it', has recently been deconstructed. See, for example, Robert Leonard and Stuart McKenzie, 'Pathetic projections: wilfulness in the wilderness', *Antic*, no. 5, June 1989, pp. 36-48; after McCahon: *some configurations in recent art*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1989.
18. Mary Kelly, 'Re-viewing modernist criticism', in *Art after modernism: rethinking representation*, ed. Brian Wallis, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984, p. 100.
19. Laurence Simmons, 'After Titian: intertextuality and deconstruction in an early painting by Colin McCahon', *Interstices*, no. 1, December 1990, pp. 100-15.
20. See my essay, 'Drawing analogies', in *Drawing analogies: recent dimensions in New Zealand drawing*, Wellington City Art Gallery, 1988. This exhibition was the first to shift from the media-based curatorial project to the textual orientation of more recent practices.
21. Patrick Pound, *Fragments and fakes*, artist's book produced to accompany his exhibition at Southern Cross Gallery, Wellington, 1989, unpaginated.
22. See Craig Owens's influential essay 'The allegorical impulse: towards a definition of post-modernism', *October*, no. 12, Spring 1980, pp. 67-86; for a fuller explanation of this process.
23. See, for example, Francis Pound, 'Nationalist antipathies: a compendium', *Antic*, no. 1, June 1986, pp. 73-84; Wystan Curnow, 'Landscape and the body', *Antic*, no. 3, November 1987, pp. 143-63; Leonard and McKenzie, 'Pathetic projections'; Laurence Simmons, 'The enunciation of the Annunciation', in *Now see hear! Art, language and translation*, eds Ian Wedde and Gregory Burke, Victoria University Press for the Wellington City Art Gallery, Wellington, 1990.
24. Chilcott anthropomorphises by combining the cliché of the tree-stump with a generic 'stick' figure to depict a human form that is of particular relevance to New Zealand culture. See Robert Leonard, *Nobodies*, National Art Gallery, Wellington, 1989.
25. Lita Barrie, 'Curators on stage', *National Business Review*, 6 October 1989, p. 10.

HEADLANDS

THINKING THROUGH NEW ZEALAND ART

EXHIBITION CURATED BY ROBERT LEONARD AND BERNICE MURPHY
WITH JOHN MCCORMACK, CHERYLL SOTHERAN AND CLIFF WHITING

PUBLICATION EDITED BY MARY BARR

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AND THE VISUAL ARTS/CRAFT BOARD OF THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL