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Something
in
Place**

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Everything's Something in Place

John Geraets

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Pokeno 2473

New Zealand

www.titus.co.nz

editor@titus.co.nz

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Startup

Among proliferating pronouns, what is there to be understood about this 'me' by that 'you'? Nothing stops anywhere.

Life, like writing, *ad libitum*.

All statements come from letters. And while language does enable a meaningful enough account of what goes on in our lives, it as readily serves as wooer to all sorts of fuss, obfuscation—not the least in poetry. Hard to keep direction through such thickets.

Words don't carry content, they ricochet.

The five books of poems represented span some thirty years and reveal obvious shifts in style and focus. The first and second were written from the outlook of a lapsing Catholic and father of six, the last out of a direct engagement in Vipassana and Buddhist life principles. *Go figure!* Likewise, the earlier of the included essays were composed under the influence of continental philosophers Foucault and Derrida, more recent ones in the context of the above-mentioned meditation practice. Neither needs be taken as an adequate explanation of the unlikely peregrinations of this writing individual.

The presentation is broadly chronological with selections of critical prose interspersing poems; a brief closing selection is taken from *Quite little ones*, a sequence of paragraph verses that's unlikely to quickly find an end. I follow in the *poème critique* footsteps of Mallarmé.

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*what more
pleasure can I give
her*

*than to bring
her
on waking*

*an orange—
peeled and quartered.
How*

*she delights
in the eating—*

*the juice that
stings the corners of
her mouth. I*

*have made
this morning one
to rise to¹*

¹ *Tango, 'a literary rage'*, ed. David Eggleton (Auckland: Auckland University literary handbook, 1982), p. 15.

Post-war temper

This opening piece announces a step-change and appeared in the NZ Listener in mid-1983, a few months before the launch of the oppositional literary magazine And. I had recently submitted a PhD thesis 'Landfall under Brasch: the Humanizing Journey' and the idealising humanist mode that the journal promoted looked suddenly old hat, hegemonic. Editors of And, Leigh Davis and Alex Calder, had been classmates and were among the first enthusiasts of the new ways of thought imbibed from contemporary Continental philosophers. Hence this upstart, somewhat amplified, assault on the creditable editorial efforts of Vincent O'Sullivan and Mac Jackson (my MA dissertation supervisor) in putting together The Oxford Book of New Zealand Writing Since 1945.¹

+

Of the good intentions behind *The Oxford Book of New Zealand Writing Since 1945* there can be no doubt. It takes its place among a steady stream of anthologies (especially of poetry) that have recently appeared or are due soon to appear. Evidently there is a strong feeling about as to just what we should make of the literature of recent times.

This collection of poems and stories since the war is offered as a sort of literary stocktaking, a 'national dress', and as such it will inspire a sense of reassurance. The 300-plus poems have been chosen and are introduced by MacDonald Jackson, and Vincent O'Sullivan has done the same for the 60-odd stories, though much of the selection was apparently done jointly. Altogether 43 poets and 34 short story writers are represented. Yet, despite the fact that several of the pieces are already familiar to us, this anthology lets us down because it simply takes too much for granted.

To begin with the title is misleading. Whatever we may be inclined to think, stories and poems alone do not provide anything like a full picture of 'New Zealand Writing' since the war. The misconception springs from the way in which we have been inclined to think that it is literature's job to 'define ourselves', our 'social pattern' (Chapman's 1953 phrase). Certainly in the 1930s, in the 40s, perhaps in the 50s, it was

1 Review of *The Oxford Book of New Zealand Writing Since 1945* (NZ: OUP, 1983), eds Vincent O'Sullivan and McDonald Jackson, in *NZ Listener* (30 July 1983), pp. 98-99. The title modifies the one supplied by the *Listener*: 'The (early) post-war temper'. Another essay I wrote during this time, 'An interior landscape: Charles Brasch's *Indirections & The Universal Dance*', in *Islands* 33, New Series: vol 1 No 1 (July 1984), pp. 71-84, while expressing some of my intellectual reservations, is essentially an appreciative piece composed from within the *Landfall* paradigm (in Foucault's terms, our very own antipodean *episteme*).

I should add that there has been some minor excerpting and revision in style (decreasingly in essays that follow) where things seem to have faltered the first time round: the content can be taken to be essentially intact.

appropriate to speak of our literature in terms of 'reality', as an imaginative ordering of our lives. On this basis it would seem only fitting to present stories and poems together as somehow 'depicting New Zealand life more accurately'. This is exactly what Charles Brasch, editor of *Landfall*, believed when in *Landfall Country* (1962) he combined an even wider range of literary materials that he considered offered a first full imaginative self-identity for the country and for New Zealanders. Allen Curnow had offered much the same in the substantial Introductions to his 1945 and 1960 anthologies of New Zealand verse. The role of the anthologist in the 1980s, however, requires a different paradigm.

This book has the distinctive characteristics we associate with *Landfall* and the immediate post-war years. Big, balanced, panoramic, it makes use of literature in an endeavour to define much that lies beyond its jurisdiction. For example, O'Sullivan in his introduction is prepared to tolerate Janet Frame's fascination with words because this 'does not prevent her setting out very clearly what is true of a number of New Zealand writers'. The 'set of values' we are constantly referred to is societal, a well-tried humanism.

Revealingly, prose writers like Frame, the later Sargeson, M. K. Joseph, Maurice Duggan, and the Gee of *Plumb* are placed on the outside of O'Sullivan's sense of the social pattern, when he says that their writing springs from 'complex individual minds' more than it does from 'what New Zealand writing had to hand'. His talk continues to be of 'dominant tradition', 'what society offers', 'the pathos of ordinary lives', 'society in its broader workings'. The misrepresentation is in supposing these to have been the foremost things in our writers' minds from 1945 through to the present.

The way in which the poetry is presented is similarly disappointing. In addressing historical circumstances without a proper sensitivity to change and difference, Jackson has not done his job with justice. The compiler may well have tried to be scrupulously fair, yet he still reveals a distinct partiality in his selection of poems. The editorial task is presented as if it should fall naturally to hand, as if somehow the poems select themselves. Conferring inclusion are: 'range of experience', 'poetry... of vision', 'enduring worth', 'language doing itself right'. But there are no universal litmus tests of this kind for poetry and the touchstones are as vague as they are nostalgic.

Almost two-thirds of the poets in the anthology are represented by at least one poem that first appeared in Brasch's *Landfall*. Yet Brasch retired as editor in 1966. Similarly, almost one-third of the prose writers are represented by at least one story that originally appeared in that journal. However, what was achieved during Brasch's years with *Landfall* is by now well enough assimilated into this country's cultural mind. There is little point in reconstructing, as if it were brand new, something that

for quite a while already has been commonly accepted. What has happened since is of immense interest. Jackson speaks rather offhandedly, one feels, of 'that fashionable expansive mode in which everything within a wide-ranging field of awareness is hustled onto the page'. Someone who occupies the modernist position that, say, C. K. Stead does is not going to appear in a particularly favourable light.

When he does mention the modernism with which he associates Stead, Jackson is either rather oblique or else he doesn't pay careful enough attention to the complexity of issues he is raising. Modernism and postmodernism are treated summarily: 'This is a poetry of "open form", "projective techniques", "composition by field", "the variable foot", and the "breath group". Its spoor is the uppercase ampersand'. That second sentence is simply not a sufficient explanation of the forms of poetry referred to. And to be reminded that 'the underlying issue is still poetry's relationship with phenomena' leaves one feeling rather let down by the ineffectuality of the criteria applied.

For it is here – from the mid-1960s through to the early 80s – that 'directions' in New Zealand writing have been most resolutely disputed, and here too that the editors maintain a virtual silence. Ian Wedde displays 'an insistent modernity', David Mitchell 'a distinctive music', Murray Edmond we come upon as a sort of endpiece; Alistair Paterson is under-represented. Alan Loney and Michael Harlow (among others) are not included; Stead is oddly represented. Significantly, the selection is both more coherent and more considerate when dealing with those poets whose development appears to have been either more obviously consistent over the years – Kevin Ireland, O'Sullivan himself, Peter Bland, Fleur Adcock, Michael Jackson – or where the output has been either quite limited or else has apparently ceased – Gordon Challis, K.O. Arvidson, Owen Leeming, Raymond Ward.

Where developments are more recent, and more compelling, the selection depends on the credibility of what has gone before. While Curnow and Baxter can be taken



as our literary ridgelines all seems OK, but when they are no longer there to hold everything up, the structure becomes less secure. It is surprising, to say the least, to find Brian Turner given such a prominent standing in the poetry of recent years.

Of the importance of recent critical writings by Curnow, Stead, Paterson and Loney there is scarcely a word. Each of these has, in his own way, contributed significantly to the continuing debate about modernism and postmodernism in New Zealand poetry. Paterson's *15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets* (1980) is an attempt to record the impact of modernist influence on local poetry. A more recent contribution is Loney's *Parallax*, a self-proclaimed 'journal of postmodern literature and art'. Late in his introduction Jackson briefly mentions Curnow in this context, albeit only to implicitly agree with the negative position that Curnow has adopted towards postmodernism. Beyond this, the importance of current critical debate and its influence on the poetry being produced goes unacknowledged.

A similar approach can be discerned in regard to the short stories. They are presented as having a broad social centre. Writers not immediately associated with this centre, we are told, have been 'forced into a kind of existential stance' (my emphasis). Closer to the centre are the stories of direct human and communal affirmation: those by Finlayson (2), Hilliard (3), and by the three writers of Māori descent included, Witi Ihimaera (3), Patricia Grace (3) and Keri Hulme (1). Nothing is included that is likely to upset the social framework that O'Sullivan delineates.

While there are obvious similarities between stories like Gee's 'The Losers', Wedde's 'The Gringos', and Michael Gifkin's 'Head over Heels', what is also of immediate interest is their fundamental difference in the valuing of language, of action. Wedde's drummer Nigel and Gifkin's randy grandfather are not like the characters in Gee's 'The Losers'. In Gee's story one feels that the language is made possible by and in imitation of the reality presented, a reality that language defers to. In the former two, reality is seen to be simultaneously produced by the language that reshapes it: situation requires exploration rather than assumption. There is an extra excitement in their language, as if it were freed from the burden of having to re-present a prior reality with accuracy and penetrating insight.

There is, of course, rewarding and pleasurable reading in the anthology. Pieces like Wedde's long poem 'Pathways to the Sea' are a delight to come across and show that the editors have not been afraid to step beyond some of the reserve they display in other respects.

And yet, notwithstanding the intrinsic pleasure of the contents, there are other unfortunate aspects. Were we to place it alongside O'Sullivan's earlier *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry* (1976 edition) and *New Zealand Short Stories III* (covering 1965-74)

we would see that the usefulness of the present combination anthology is at risk. That one editor should be involved in all three of these Oxford University Press anthologies is plainly questionable.

In wanting to define the 'post-war temper', the present editors have restricted their terms of reference to those current in only the early post-war years. Its lack of a sense of the historical processes involved, its absence of really relevant purpose, its very copiousness, raise difficulties in the anthology's conception which suggest a missed opportunity.

Foundation & a supplement

This essay appeared in And/3. It takes my work done on Landfall and sets it spinning: the realisation at back is that literary history is not self-explanatory, but rather the pursuit of modes of thought and claims to attention. Here (again cheekily) I explore an unwitting trope of sexual yearning to be found in the journal: what I was coming to see in literary practice was the incipient forms and values that lodge in the shadows of things proclaimed, things taken-for-granted: thus behind a commitment to serve the society that provides for it I detect in Landfall a wanting also to determine the nature of that society. Behind the openness one senses a covetousness; behind the selfless modesty resides a lingering conceit; behind the inclusiveness nestles an unremitting Eurocentric masculine terms of encounter. Needless to say, the case is overstated.¹

+

For instance, line 10 ('whilst I bearing reality to him') sounds rather old-fashioned. Then, the inversions: 'Of all things manly did he partake' might read, perhaps, simply, 'he partook'; 'I nothing am to you it seems' (line 30) needs turning round somehow; 'Bear I none nor malice stain my obsequies' is rather awkward – could this read something like 'I bear no malice, let none stain my obsequies' (line 45). In line 13 I think you need to repeat 'death' to make the meaning quite clear – perhaps 'Yet death plummeted down like a bird'. In line 20 'to him' isn't clear, but the line would be clear if you dropped it. Can you avoid 'thee'? This has an uncomfortably 'poetical' sound, strained and unreal; you use it only twice, and so far as the English goes it could well be replaced by 'you' (lines 22, 41). In line 27 'trees' should probably read 'trees''; line 47, I think this should read 'the clouds' heave', or if that's not the sense, then you want a capital letter at the beginning of the line. I may not have read the poem quite as you intend in every case, but I hope this will give you something to go on. (Brasch to Tuwhare, 29 October 1957)

Charles Brasch, editor of *Landfall* from 1947 to 1966 (80 issues), its classic period, defines the terms:

Landfall is a 'New Zealand quarterly' in that all its contributors are New Zealanders or are living in New Zealand. As a matter of policy it has not accepted work from overseas writers. Its principal aim is to give New Zealand writers a place to write in and find them a public to write for in their own country, which, unlike overseas writers, they have not had. (Lf17)

1 'Landfall 1947-66: Foundation & a Supplement', *And/3* (Auckland, October 1984), pp. 98-110.

It is well accepted that *Landfall* provides a very real beginning, a foundation upon which our literature, our culture, rests. In retrospect, we may also detect an element of ambivalence in the journal's singular drive toward a centre, towards imaginative truth, towards assumed societal values, standards and judgements, in short 'a single scale of values'. We are aware that in *Landfall* exchange systems are at play whereby art and society are mysteriously interpolated, whereby something is sometimes itself and sometimes something else. Indeed, we have seen this as a perhaps necessary or at least a negotiable (non-surreptitious) strategy: *Landfall*, embarked on a course for which it did not have the necessary charts to follow or a clear sense of its own relationship to those things surrounding it (everywhere seascape!), had in a sense to plot its own course. On such a voyage self-interrogation quickly amounts to mutiny, and above all the cry of 'land' wants to be heard: the gaze is always outward, scanning the horizon for landmarks for which names are already being conjured up. In *Landfall* there is not much heard the sound of other voices, of dissension, nor are there inflections, everything emphasises a unifying conviction of discovered identity. And this, we take it, displaces that very anxiety that remained prevalent in New Zealand's Centennial year:

What has been the fate of this old civilization in its new setting? Have we, as some would maintain, remained in a Victorian backwater or have we, as others assure us, moved out of it too far and too fast? To what extent has the new life been an escape from the old, to what extent a fulfilment of it? Has a new nation arisen, with a soul and a destiny, or have we remained mere imitators of the old? (W.H. Cocker, *1840 and After*)

The kind of history *Landfall* presents is one in which literary bodies are given social shape and social bodies are inhabited by the literary imagination. We hear in *Lf2* that 'for the sake of [securing] an ordered society... We can only do so by determining to live from the centre of our lives and not to be distracted from the group and personal interests and aims on which every stable society must rest'. This means nurturing the imaginative possibility that certain social institutions are assumed to (want to) represent, and so expropriating them: 'In one field which should be of particular interest to readers of this journal, there is already in being the great enterprise of the National Library Service. And the establishment of the National Orchestra comes as a fresh sign of courage and faith at a moment when these are much needed'. Here is the history that the journal is writing. In the Foreword to the collection of writing in *Landfall Country* (1962), things are expressed thus: 'The country had become a centre, self-generating: it was no longer a mere dependency'. And finally, in Brasch's penultimate

issue, there is the avowal of culmination – *Lf*79: ‘The arts concern the life of society: the real world (so-called) and the world of imagination are not distinct but the same’. And while it is acknowledged that ‘our own arts form a very young and weak body’ and that ‘Culture as such in New Zealand does not yet wear a recognizably New Zealand face’ – nonetheless – ‘the first steps have been taken: they were taken when Peter Fraser’s government founded the National Orchestra and set up the New Zealand Literary Fund, in 1947 (the year also in which this journal began): they were confirmed when the Arts Advisory Council was established in 1960 and later when it became the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council: publicly, the arts have been made part of the established order’. In all of this, the assumed task of steerage:

No editor in his senses will accept a contribution he is not satisfied with whatever the reason may be, and whoever the author may be – poet, painter, novelist, critic. Of course the editor may be wrong in any individual case.... But he can’t abandon the principal: in each instance he has to use his judgement, not abnegate it: no one else can judge for him. He can ask other opinions, and they may help to form his own; but it is his own that must decide in the end. (to Theo Shoon, 20 May 1949)

These, then, are the true beginnings: and it is not simply a ploy on Brasch’s part to have the arts play the part of dispossessing possessor. Where: ‘The New Zealand education system does not merely fail in its primary task of teaching children the use of their own language, it is actually helping to undermine the language and so betraying the foundation and the means of all teaching. This is a threat to every form of communication, and finally to personal relationships and to social and political order’ (*Lf*23). Such is the form of the *Landfall* injunction (‘a threat to every form’), where substantial distances (‘and finally to... and... and’) are compressed before our very eyes. *Landfall* is our only literary magazine that has been so many things, outspoken on so many issues – television, the 1951 Waterfront Strike, architecture, education, race relations, women, the environment, armaments. Its existence is wrapped in and wraps about these forms, everything. And in the adopting of forms and the merging of forms that occurs, distance is something that becomes increasingly translucent – null. *Lf*67 will argue the need to preserve the ecological balance of Lake Manapouri (threatened by damming for electricity generation) and rebuke the government of the day over its inaction in allowing the water level of the lake to be raised for purely commercial reasons. ‘What’, Brasch asks, ‘has all this to do with literature and the arts?’ And answers himself,

Simply that if men are to respect themselves, they must respect the earth they live on, which is an extension of their own bodies, which supplies their needs, which offers them rest and recreation and delight. To prey upon the land, to treat it as a mere commodity to be exploited at will, ravaged, sold, is a kind of self-violation. To despoil great works of natural beauty is close to murder, as great a crime as to destroy great works of art and historical monuments. If we care for one, we must care for all. To betray either is to betray our own essential humanity.

But with this subsiding of form into meaning, of distance into proximity, our own present-day awareness responds with a degree of incredulity, a wanting to enquire further. *Landfall's* perspective seems almost to negate perspective ('a light of its own', 'the excellence of truth'), for it is a way of seeing that recognises only the bringing from out-of-nowhere into stark view – where the vessel on the vast expanse represents the isolate eye, whose true capacity is to take everything in and to keep naming.

distance

Arriving at the very entrance to *Landfall's* receptiveness – a state of prolonged suspension in which things as they appear are neither simply themselves nor otherwise. Hunger here is the hunger for perfection, everyday imperfection's enticement:

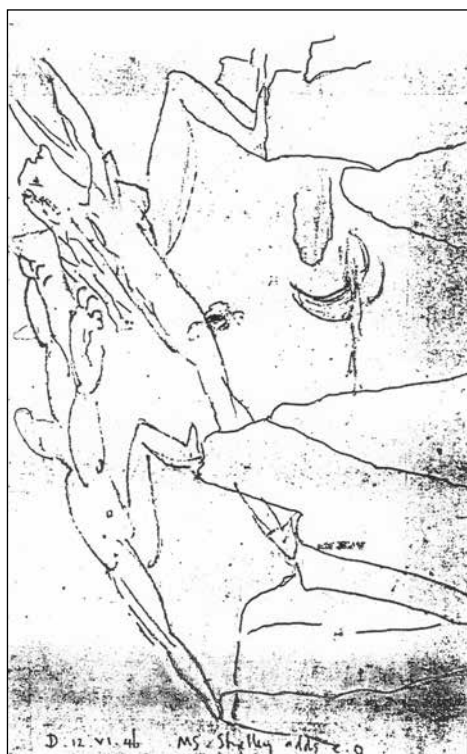
We hunger and thirst after the comforts of mediocrity as our refuge from doubt, thought, and danger; but underneath, an insistent doubt besets us, a doubt, finally, of the reality of our way of life.... [The artist's] creation of order amid the shapelessness of our life, his hunger for perfection, his vision of a cosmos resolving our chaos, may then be haunting and contagious and of good omen for the future. (*Lf*20)

With *Landfall* (it is as if) we are caught at the entranceway; where beckoning doubles as yearning – where the eye straining toward the horizon is prone (so disposed) to flood with seeing! Nature here obliterates difference. Measurement is removed from distance so that what's far away looms into view and hovers terribly near as something intimate – a reification – where retracing the origin, as in a vessel's wake, brings us only back to the point of dispersing. A figuration of non-figuration, a simulacrum, heralding the discovery that serves as creation. Says Brasch, 'The artist is in the true sense a discoverer and a creator' (*Lf*39). And if, for a moment, we step back from the lure of this, the very thing that allows it to take – to give – a shape fixes us at the

accessway to the journal's own attitude of disinterestedness, its unshakeable emphasis on (adherence to) judgement and truth and standards: in short, the misleading embrace of the imperative. 'It disappoints', writes Brasch in 1948 of the English journal *Horizon*,

because it has no standards except literary ones, and these are not enough. They enable one to judge if a work is good, but not, as between two or more works equally good from a literary point of view, which of them is more important. The notion of importance is not a literary one, but it is essential to the judgement of literature, which is not to be judged, finally, on purely literary grounds. For literature is concerned not only with the aesthetic, with beauty, but also with truth. (L β 8)

From this position one looks everywhere – to sea!: an indeterminant movement in which perspective turns simultaneously inward and outward – assuming the guise of truth, a single all-ways embrace.



guise

When Phoebe Meikle in 1958 contributed an article entitled 'Men and Women in New Zealand', calling for an end to the 'predominance' of material masculine values in society, she did so not under her own name but under the assumed non-gendered name Leslie M. Hall ('those destructive masculine attitudes which are essentially a product of contempt for women should grow weaker and masculine interests and sympathies should widen correspondingly', Lf45). Prior political and social Commentaries had been almost entirely the preserve of male contributors; at times the female artist appears as the differently-named. Janet Frame's first story is signed Jan Godfrey; Ruth France's poems appear under the

name Paul Henderson; and Ruth Dallas (relatively the journal's most represented poet) is a pseudonym for Ruth Mumford. Here, one might reflect, the line of development is one in which the disguised female implicitly recognises a sexual secondariness by which a disinclination to accommodate sexual otherness occurs as a kind of androgyny (of not noticing the difference). Might Mary Stanley (wife of the well-represented Kendrick Smithyman)'s non-appearance in the journal be related to the fact that the woman, poet or otherwise, appears often enough in guise? Does this require explanation? Perhaps part of the explanation is that the nature of the journal is in some respects antithetical: where art 'cannot be forced into a single narrow mould' (of socialist realism) yet slips comfortably into 'the mould prepared for it in nature'. Where: 'Every society *wants* to see itself in the light of the imaginative truth which works of art inexplicably capture and embody' and where finally art is made 'part of the established order', while conversely the artist is not to be viewed as merely an 'apologist for any established order'. In the journal's double-play (seriousness allows it little play) art and nature switch masks, where either can suddenly displace the other: 'a work of art which is also a work of nature'; 'a joint creation'; 'Nature here is still untouched or at least unaffected by man... instead of being violent and malevolent, it appears to us remote, impersonal, indifferent'. We remain strangers in the land. There is a parallel in the paradox of 'hubris' – the injunction to be less injunctive:

In a new country, the necessary first stage is that nature should be recognised, not as an obstacle, not as so much indifferent dead matter, but as living and a power. Every civilization is in one aspect the expression of an accommodation between man and natural forces; a relationship, that is, neither of blind hostility nor of passiveness nor of pretended peace, but of rhythmical tension issuing in some form of harmony. In the past, such accommodation was sheer necessity; and for all the independence that applied science seemed to have given us, we are finding that it is still necessary today. To New Zealanders, however, nature remains above all the enemy to be subjected by force, or the slave to be used without scruple as greed or convenience or policy may at any moment dictate. That is the measure of our status as a civilised community: it is less nature than we ourselves, suffering from a form of *hubris* almost world-wide today, who have to be subdued and given a proper sense of our place in the scheme of things. (*Lf15*)

Are we, then, to be subjected to nature as she-he-itself is subjected to and subdued by us? The movement is through abnegation, renunciation – *hubris* themselves!

proper

The individual who conforms wholly to society is thus betraying his nature, because he is surrendering, and to a body which by definition incorporates injustice and evil in its order, that part of himself which, if he is an integrated being, will not be satisfied with less than perfection in one form or another. Further, to conform wholly to society is to betray society itself, for if it can find no place for non-conformity and cannot always admit new energies into its order, it must necessarily harden and decline. (Lf20)

This is the appeal of the sexually affronted (read: captivated, enraptured)! Being so, it surely is in the nature of a display, a dissembling? For what is it that affronts *Landfall* but its own nemesis: the artist who is in 'entire possession by his subject, by poetry', the 'loss or sublimation of self, a virtual transubstantiation'... 'continually in for and filling some other body' (Lf69)? For the artist, 'a thing of nothing', yielding and gaining are indistinguishable ('a power more subtle and pervasive than that of physical force, and self-renewing'). Against the 'collective mediocrity' of the this or the that that *Landfall* abhors ('submerged in the mass'), there is the contrary movement toward the self – a body prised open, discarding the differences that exist within and between bodies: byways Hermaphroditus.

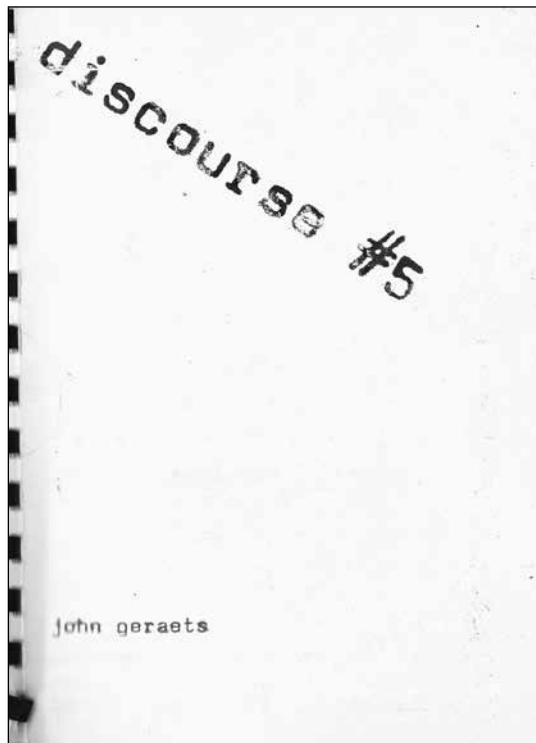
The attack on and disdain for societal norms is a means *Landfall* deploys in its own defence (in advance). Perhaps the connection to be made is between apparent dichotomies, between foundation and supplement, creation and embryonic order, perfection and chaos, a womanly form and its confinement? Where style becomes what it means and where her secret hope is caught between the sensation of uncertainty and distress at her confinement and unfamiliarity with her surroundings. In this moment, style and form and content share one end and purpose. Whether it be a vessel as supplement or a work of art or a child, there is effulgence, the sense of empowerment and terror, as another body is expelled in order simply to make or leave the body *whole* again! A moment of *jouissance* – thrust, yield, replenish.²

2 Books deployed: especially Derrida, Nietzsche, and of course *Landfall* and several related products. The early quotation from W.H.C. Cocker is taken from *1840 and After: Essays Written on the Occasion of the New Zealand Centenary*, ed. Arthur Sewell. The documentary material is taken from my PhD thesis '*Landfall* under Brasch: the Humanizing Journey' (1982). Thanks to Alan Roddick for permission to quote from the correspondence.

Exchanges (1966)

<p>England</p> <p>U.S.A.</p>	<p><i>The Times Literary Supplement</i> (review)</p> <p><i>Outposts</i> (London)</p> <p><i>Composer</i> (London)</p> <p><i>Abstracts of English Studies</i> (Ohio)</p> <p><i>Approach</i> (Pennsylvania)</p> <p><i>Books Abroad</i> (Oklahoma)</p> <p><i>Descant</i> (Texas)</p> <p><i>Forum</i> (Indiana)</p> <p><i>Historical Abstracts</i> (California)</p> <p><i>The Kenyon Review</i> (Ohio)</p> <p><i>Modern Fiction Studies</i> (Indiana)</p> <p><i>Southern Review</i> (Louisiana)</p> <p><i>The Sixties</i> (Minnesota)</p> <p><i>Tri -Quarterly</i> (Illinois)</p>	<p>India</p> <p>New Zealand</p> <p>Australia</p> <p>South Africa</p> <p>Europe</p>	<p><i>The Indo-Asian Culture</i> (New Delhi)</p> <p><i>Foreign Affairs Reports, The Librarian</i> (Bengalore)</p> <p>(New Delhi) (gift)</p> <p><i>Mate</i> (Auckland)</p> <p><i>Te Ao Hou</i> (Wellington)</p> <p><i>Meanjin Quarterly</i> (Victoria)</p> <p><i>Overland</i> (Melbourne)</p> <p><i>The Critic</i> (Western Australia)</p> <p><i>Twentieth century</i> (Victoria)</p> <p><i>English Studies in Africa</i> (Johannesburg)</p> <p><i>Rumanian Review</i> (Bucharest)</p>
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from *discourse#5*, Hard Copy, Auckland, 1985



Woodcuts Béla Trussell-Cullen

I Antonin Artaud, I am my son, my father, my mother.

I should not employ such language. For the princess all sounds are the ministration of scoundrels. You cannot let Uncle Leopold get away with such things, King Gerard—she pleaded. Then there was a splash in the water. We've made it.

'Thank you, your majesty.' Hands on swords. All princesses are borne away. All's amiss. Your majesty.

'Thanks to you my friends I am back on my rightful throne. And nobody, not one, appreciates fine music. 'Everyone shall be made to laugh; all must sing! All we need do is wait.

'All shall love presently. *Or forthwith.*

plight of her black (noir) hair: each tiny ruse
there is, there, her Grammar blue skirt & emblemed blazer,
in fact a noir wry hair & polynesian hair & glasses—fairer,
you'd say, her blond crinkled hair, unruly, ruled (fed) from a centre over her
black jersey, not flying (fallen)

heavy—heavenly coachwind—Brueghel(the Elder)'s boat shifts
gracelessly the heedless sea—& all the while
the milk pulsator's tha-tha-tha-tha—and this was to have been a kind
of tournament—a wedding festival—a cow's wide rotating eye—

Signature

A long absence. Absinthe (the slur). Passes
in the first person plural—WE, i.e.
you & I (he), having twisted sidewise come
now to the far & wide.

The heart of the question. Knows itself
accessible—a sweet discourse:

To gain access is to lose; to show, to conceal; to acknowledge, to lie.

The poet—or the man Jew—protects the desert which protects his speech
(in the desert) of his writing.

The text's usual peregrinations. Its
under-stood (*sous entendu*) spaces.

She takes a few steps forward, stoops, folds her body at
the hips & looks back up thru her (spread) legs. Oh I (he) has
forgotten what it is to carry this neat fluency

back to the book, a plate. Or let's leave that to fellows, to Roger, to Wylan, to
Will-Leigh. We (the third)

have come now to the bridge (crossing) being
purposive for us—a practice to dislodge. & I—
make something, particular, of it.

'A white sheet is full of ways...'

Nothing is our principal concern, said Reb Idar.

cf. Pernod

everyday further inklings, & when the railway crossing bell
clangs with lights lit red blinking on/off—horses, canopy,
a smoothing carriage 4483, one muses: the afternoon's a thick
unruly black, against the provenance of
thought, redoubled: of the Norfolk pines (in tresses)—grown
here in Yvonne's small tubs. Or the prospect of Nika's fingers
bent back, wrists at rt. angles
in a gesture, & each day with the news what you are
changes, reconstitutes, emerges afresh with the sky & the selfsame
means of transit (on the white Commercial buses)

black swan black shirt black sox striped tie the (karma) the
calm why! I must describe it to you: black tack
her daughter she call the nerveless tooth in his jaw black
& passing the Grey Lynn P.O. dull with
newly repainted logo—alongside the road this morning
the white picket fences wood or iron, among resplendent
billboards—the property of carsalesfolk or of the thickthighed
Polynesian inhabitants—



he sits Mallarméan stalks about peers thru the
apertures of the white fanheater repainted or small
flutes out the heated air—*a couch!*—trailed
Artaud out along the morh() trail &
thru LA with others of their party—what gives, glances off
stone cover—a knee fitted tightly over
a knee—Robespierre! (*Danton*)—avant!

+

we shd only be used to smile at one another, Max J (*see discourse#5*)

+

Heliogabalus—sexual access (*excess*)

+

we travel distances in our minds to reach places
denied—perhaps—to—others

+

Vaudeville—(the man said it couldn't be done) a dying art (art dying)
pantomime

+

the more certain (the more certain I am) in my movements—

...

whether it's giant (excellent) 12' ants as in Gordon Douglas's
film *Them!* or champagne glasses poised atop a round silver tray—
whether it's—cold—or a blue backdrop (*acdc*) puts
a fly in the soup—
whether it's discrete—language patterns driven off a thing or
a person's affections: her thick brows, winsome lips,
narrow shoes, calotte or cavalry went by and there was a flash, a
prickle—every revolving asp—silvery caltrops—that curt-
ains hanging there should of themselves present no awkwardness, unless
pressed back by the breeze, or to the side by some
unsuspecting hand (to a view!)—
I must have at some point two things in the mind... a
naval uniform—a car, a badge—a newborn
So it is: 'stay loose' (a bar of heat)
suppleness of breath, something I haven't tasted, or I should regard
you as a favoured presence—reaching thru the
gaps—a beautiful female is everything! That I be—to love!
M... —should that be the name but not the one—a young
girl, glassy eyed—loss of voice (a name for that)
formic acid—to lift the senses (alert) sand lifted &
tossed *en masse*—a sand storm, a car, a trailer—
Get the antennae! I said, get the antennae!—for SURE—(Wilbur)
mandibles—
a scientist's dream come really true! Anything anything for science!
(*tsk*)
arm over arm up the language !

nikka scroll

There is something that comes and takes
out of this second, from this
second—that which I (he) is locked: blockage.
On the cambered surface, sealed, fixed—divided by a
broken white line, a gathering of cicadas.
A loud beginning green autumn!
The light that's eased off things, takes leave, travel by bus
over the black dustjacket; white
Of Grammatology, of red, a scene of green or cream.
Inside, the running gate, the burst page—writing
(again) pressed forward.
All are stopped in their colours, white, yellow,
red, green: the cars themselves are stationary. In rows, TQs
at the entrance-way. Trailers.
And out again. Past the lake.

decline

(Walter, 1924-2006)

But that way lies a decline, he would say. Speaking as he did at that time of—a former continuity?

For continuity had stretched out and had not, not at least until that occasion, ceased, and the entire arrangement lay fixed in place. There was still some leeway, he supposed. And he had come to the older man with this proposition and the older man had admonished him: it came to him to determine a future course, the telling of which remained for him—them then—present. At the older man's insistence, he considered, there was still a curious comeback, towards life, where all things (characteristically) are held necessary and fair.

God, he murmured. The word that the older man had articulated and keeps placing before them as they sit together in the darkening lounge with its dull dusty curtains and speak of that rare incontestability. **THAT ONE GOD.**

Miranda, who was present, was asked to bring in the tea at around four-thirty, and she did so. They sipped, they talked. At one particular moment, when the older man saw it—a grid, a light!—he pulled himself together scowling as if somehow to indicate an unseen something that was right there before them. Leaving nowhere, it seems, to settle. The gesture becomes part of the younger man's construing or want of constancy.

From this point, from that one Sunday afternoon, a gap opens between them that holds no clear boundary or entrance or exit. He seizes upon what he knows to be his own recalcitrance, for there remains a sense of bewilderment as to precisely where these defining lines might lie or what had helped hold him in place.

Meantime, he remains intent on his dear companion: and when he is with

her, would enjoy sex with her, or just lay with her, touching, or just talking, he would experience that alluring fact, that female somethingness. As an affectionate release he recognised it was altogether of a different order of latitude and longitude and moreover, that sense of touch, he was inclined to allow, was a form of easing that was not to be enjoyed elsewhere. Leaving nothing, nothing that is outside of what he desires and is not easily attainable—to suffice.

Sometimes he would watch her take a sewing pin, inserting it in a dexterous manner deep into the canal of the ear, right into the lining. With her head tilted to one side, she sweeps the pin about pivotally, intermittently drawing it out and incidentally examining it with her eyes. It relieves an interminable itching, she would explain, when he questions her. And pins like this, with light dust or small waxflecks from within her ears attached, are found dotted around the house, on ledges, sometimes on the floor, on the sink bench, in the laundry.

And once she had employed a pin topped with a small plastic green head. Light green, which had got lodged and snapped free—within the ear! Half a day she continues her normal household duties with this small plastic globe locked inside the ear canal. Involuntarily, she leans her head sideways, as if in an instinctive balancing measure. And had finally to go to the doctor to have the thing flushed out by douching—warm water from a syringe flooding into the ear, dislodging the little orb, making it fall with the water into the kidney-shaped stainless steel bowl, fitted snugly about her neck. The nurse at that time had spoken to her of another woman, one who had, in a hurried moment when leaving to go out one night, mistaken a small tube of *Superfix* for the herpes ointment that her doctor had prescribed the week before. And had gotten herself well and truly stuck!

Do you realise, the older man continues, that those I've met who are most at ease and truly at one with themselves and their universe are those who

have this quality of resolute belief of which I speak, things as wholes? Do you realise that those such as Mother Teresa in Calcutta and Albert Schweitzer in Africa are paradigms in this respect? There is an order spread about of things as they indisputably are, entire and exact. Hearing these words, their accents ringing in his ears, he glances abstractly out of the window which silhouettes the older man sitting facing him—looked up at the unfilled portions of the sky and then at the occasional heaps of darkened cumulous traversing it. It was as if the clouds had taken on that implied aspect of the words spoken, clouded thoughts—part of a vast compass and the breaking clouds heaving in an ongoing shaping and reshaping. The room, as he brought his attention back within its confines, was a place in which they were given occupancy, their wording their way, forming clouds, words outside the room hardly existing. It was a silly reflection he knew, and it hardly brought with it an appreciation and purpose in the other's presence.

End thus: he wished for them to remain close, beneath that anfractuons exterior. As for others—well, they would needs sit about and themselves learn to listen, so.



mellifluous—comes surprising into the room—her
pink pajamas—to pass myself fit, says—
and pulls the cloth together at the neck where applewhite
skin works down to a simple v—glazed in the eye & dumblooking in
this hour's light—her legs lead one way then the other, soft legs

everything names, as named, another
passes it, the little
flowers marked close & white to the tilted halfflight
the sound which follows on the path of her footsteps to
redlights under white fumes—
two cars towing, cries of a cat like
a baby doll its string pulled out—
— I say—*I am she!*—

...

sunlight edges about the side of the house and enters the room and Michael notices that the way that things appear changes—now there were four of them pictured in front of the garden in front of the red & yellow dahlias & the black dog standing facing them its tail lifted horizontally in the air—their arms linked about one another's shoulders & they were each of them gazing back towards the lens of the camera (Olympus)—that is, not Linda, who, a smile on her lips, holds herself askance, looking away. This photograph occurred in early autumn with the flowers bright & the shadows particularly distinct—

...

Ibsen's *Solness*, & the better unknown or a sense of disproportion that harries us (Binswanger's summary)—how does the achiever achieve—commence—perverse help or beyond help or an attained sublimity—constitutes everything.

I tell you, I looked out thru
the plateglass window up into a night sky agape with stars, subtle tracery. de Man terms it 'falling upward' but what am I to make of him so's he'll fit into the new section format of the *Auckland Star* or the bulk of the *Saturday Morning Herald* when the jobs are advertised.

The light falls out of the Higher Salaries Commission & H.S.C. let them have it—both ways!

Now you see the weather map painted, by Willis, by Veronica, by Romaine as a class project, paint's put on & there the substance of all our todays: the yellow pac-man, Air NZ logo in crimson on the solid white cup from which I sip my Earl Grey tea with the new 767 and the risk that with the engine fault detected this morning at Christchurch—the ego is not the enemy of art, but rather art's sad brother—



things end easily—a door is closed—*woosh!*
you are no more—bitter sleep (better)
the smear—brilliant rapture (success)
Piet Botha, take that South Africa! Your
death breathes (begets) a certain energy—*Jaap*

a rueful time of evening!—the NL logo placed red
against a skyline that's partly
itself, partly the transport of hieroglyphs or clouds, or
a single sheet of newspaper—long running stripes
(water) diagonally down the bus window—the blue conveyance
pulling out alongside the low red brick building &
onto the roadway ashen with wet (at an
angle) resolute the sun's gloved hand (coppertoneblush)

brilliant or not!—Anaxagoras's 'things that do or
do not exist'—the girls pretty in their white communion frocks
& veils (some with little white crosses embroidered
on them) and the boys manly with their washed hair and dark shorts (white
shirts)—now Lara shows those about her a medal that has impressed
on it the figure of the virgin Mary—another woman (older) wears
matching eye-blue (Marian) medallions in her earlobes & has
(as she tells it) a devotional altar set up by her bedside where
—when one of her children is ill—she burns a candle
while the others sleep—

(Anaxagoras)

he was himself situated at the rock—o why does it fl-o-o-w
so fast, he enquires—had flicked his nylon line out onto
the water—the surface slips & clicks into place at his feet—
saw her, saw Jan—
in her nearpurple swimsuit, fair legs set, & alight &
strictly quotable—eyes glanced (geared) forever out & beyond the
Manukau Heads no object! all thought afoot, original

glistening necks of water—fierce quashed light!—together
with the rattle of machinery & cranes at their waterfront
construction site (the new Harbour Board building)—rippled &
work performed by hand, diesel—wingslap right & I
another pigeon off the pier!—today squeezed tight by
causation & space—skipping

—it is not or hardly that the quarter-hollow is
unwashed or spoiled—
her virginity!... or is it that cars taken off
the regular track follow the median strip on other surfaces—this flat!

Her appurtenances!
She anchors herself at the margin...)
She is deadly at the edge)

Tokyo Story (Yasujirō Ozu)

before the seawall, the sea: where only the night before the
newlyweds had dallied—*exaltus!* & on the promenade's approach
the sound of low voices rising as if off the water's surface
as it silts & plaps against the seawall—*chiaroscuro!*
Presently the ageing Japanese couple steps off on
enormous platform jandals, scraping their footsteps along the concrete
walkway & now the picture
swaps for another location in the same(?) city, of undistinguished
grey factories with smoke rising over them the colour of lank (noir)
Japanese hair—

suicide, a note

has been able to finish: a
loose night, quite simply: the dog snatches itself, nipping around
its penis: Christine said: 'no constant rays; / The worlds
whole sap is sunke'—you lick the foreleg—I
she lies awake on the bed unmasked—unasked for, she
lies—awake!
blue tailcoat & yellow waistcoat—
suicide: an extrusion

Shelley's 'white radiance of eternity'
my hand is around this, there is a feeling behind her eye
the dog stretches, yawns *le lecteur peut s'en donner,*
avec un petit frisson, l'emotion delicieuse
in this, you might hope to add, a certain dispassion then
a letting go—depart—ive THere
Is Something THere tensive; quick!
a gun to his (right!) eye!—
call this one languorous—

RIMBAUD: *littératuricide*

BAUDELAIRE: *les bas fonds*

+

on their temple doors in delphi: know
thyself & nothing too much

+

OR old Socca: I know (this) I know nothing

+

—the children adrift on the black polythene strip
ski wet ironsand—the man pulling them
gathers his strength, fills his lungs (me)

+

I tell you this whole park could... godammit!
IS ENGLISH!

+

for the fearful of homosexual impulse (?), fears—and of
bisexuality—words...

of this chopped sea, this neat rectangle,
that's heavy, or naught—of women's
perplexity—I sing—tell a
lie—the doll's orange hands twitch on the
linoleum floor where it lies—the child across the
room on the couch—
this is *madness!*—this is—war—



absences répétées

... but out of whose insistence or gest (guessed)
(which) never ceases to mark an actor's
gestures—fists clamped
tight, hands on tools, EISENSTEIN'S heavyset peasant women sporting
thick leather belts (what shiny buckles!), a baby wrapped in the
perambulator (like a sailboat!).
The subject itself is the hollow pit; without the
social nick, drugs are insignificant, or rather, their significance
is only that of eSSential
natURE—vague, tremulous: 'dRugs lead
to iMPotence,' or, as precisely,
drugs lead to suicide (*absences répétées*)

trimmed to this piece—your hair!—look't that
one, sister! the skin! the piece!—and blond! blond!
& thick & screened thru the
enormity of RUSSIA! But you have not seen the
tsar; you have not been to St Petersburg?—you
have not seen the Tsarina...

DASEIN – WILLY'S LEAP

Word and thing or thought never in fact become one. We are reminded that, referred to, what the convention of words sets up as thing or thought, by a particular arrangement of words. The structure of reference works and can go on working not because of the identity between these so-called component parts of the sign, but because of their relationship to difference (différance).

adapted Intro. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*

+

For Willy, what questions? With what are we to probe him, this straddler on the tower, this jetman, hawk, Willis Totem, Willy Robusta 'figuring a tabloid'? This Willy is not to be interrogated. To press him means to put your hand clean thru the paper ('pink, grey, thin, dreamt, paperman'). No; casual Willy stands aloft in his 'to wer rr'; he leans, muses, is roused, exuberant, sees himself swollen and erect.

This ineluctable tracer of himself, this instigator of his own pageant, his edges indeterminate yet sharp, his mind heightened and keen, penetrant. The imagery of the early pages of WILLY'S GAZETTE is of 'snappage', the crisp planal imagery of whites, blues, sea, chrome, sky and wind, sun, the net, the whale (and of the interjection of planes: 'he projects').

From the opening line of the first piece 'You blow there Willy', to its closing whump 'Willis looks up and his rose shirt balloons', Willis extends - sights forward. Planes intersect, track back, are chromatic, 'shiny', the world is snatched over by Willy, enacts his inquiry.

This magic grid of positionings is Willy. The quick moves and points of entry: diachronic, *loci*.

'a huge pole' – the figure itself, the flick of electricity as opposite charged points approach, a movement of contacts nowhere stopped, always the shirt-tail out (' '), 'covered with information'.

For Willy, too, is purposed for reading, whose real language 'is English / invaded – and invaded with bits of Auckland, Wellington, passing Spanish phrases, Parisiana, snippets from the latest foreign mags!, and the rags of the likes of Christian Dior ('christian door') and Pierre Cardin: sly wily Willy, 'beret (noir) mimes Guevara and radical chic – plimsoles (claret blazer...)'.

Nowhere constrained, cosmopolitan Willy bursts into presence in things he eyes (I's) ('anything takes Willy's eye'), as we track him across his twenties:

DISCUSSED DECISION
WITH WILLIS, TWENTY-FIVE

will seek 'wholes'
in future, he says

Willis codes his society. Despite the slight shuffling that may have occurred in the poem's ordering, these hundred-odd wind-biffed sonnets that comprise the GAZETTE provide a movement forward thru the four parts. *What writing?* (What is the *naming* of that one: Willy?)

From the pure gaps, this movement across the four parts of the poem, Willy's filling, filing them, there arises the sophisticate Willy, the nifty dolphin Willy as opposed to the whale one (priapism). Still termed Willy, Willy is

elastic and feminine (incorp
-oreal -orating) & linguistic
sight like a dolphin turning

no longer Willy – or at least not one
with such simple active curvature.
Becomes Willy *lapsus calami*, offers
himself (gets offered) as a term of

upon the brown reef he drives
out blind whose flank catches
aqua beyond the beach a stream
of blips erratic and frequent

displacement; gets into the very
chinks of the language, into the
communications system – into that
terrible impressive economy of the
language which affords all that

possibility (of what is known) at the expense of a mere 26 letters ('the seam's
worth following' – no wonder)! Willis as script, in and out of costume, under
Leigh's nib, 'printmakers surround

the body'. Willy the speech mark
within the shirt, his presenc(ing).

Willis deconstructing his (our) –
literal – possibilities. Dolphin. The
purity and pure necessity of Willy.
Lives on the skin of history ('borders
stay where history last placed them').
Himself slipping thru the net he de-
ploys: his radar disk ('bright mesh').

the ships planes autos and trains
pace by Willy slow in the evening
shallows near sleep and the
margins ceci n'est pas un homme
then, what there at first shapeless
looms upon the field what has
he captured ravelling, an opening?

He anticipates readers, plays up to them. Makes and leaves tracks ('Willis
coyote'). And as he goes he himself gets edited, becomes less our immediate
focus, more an emanation. Deftly leaps a gazelle over what we know.

All for the space of one generation,
fourteen contingent lines, a bloc
or site any rhythm, word, or posse
of words releases *sustaining* like an
athlete's kick from the back foot
Willy the outlaw's long ride, his long
unreeling line. There comes Willy
the old Lord Mayor of London

Dick into the sunlight any ordinary
man bland & squinting and common
who gives evidence, I am two people
I have been upon the range, the stick
with the red spotted bandanna is couched
upon my shoulder.

Willy gets more occidental, less spectacular, kind of a spectator – meets Leigh, gets aligned with the golfball (type-writer/xerox – giving the book its physical black and white appearance). In the later pieces the last line comes with less of a whump, more a subtlety, things happen in shades ('blue bleached cambric', 'raw cotton') and in these there is a frequent sprinkling back – of attention, of lines or parts of words – over earlier stuff. The way that sometimes one poem is the adjunct or perhaps the root or even the repetition or reappraisal of an earlier or later piece is quite startling.

Willy has it to re-dress himself – as in the lovely piece which includes these lines:

The Birds

The Patois de l'oiseaux their toss off
flies light
running English all seems free
all seems free in Willy's MSS

turning in the ~~draft~~
make ~~sketch~~ lines
bunch

whose lines (much the same thing) appear reformed overleaf:

The patois de birds in the tree's
getting free and loose with their English
off any way, broadcast from green
wattle station

Willy quizzes L –

and you, L, with your curious
objectives, and trove,
S standing in the light of the room
dressing, and the thought fall,
its incidence, ravelling, the two
of you smiling..

Until 'I' moves to a position where Willy is purely notional:

if I could draw a date with this
pencil full shirt long amours
in the bowers bicycle at 45
degrees it'd cross an edge Willy
chose on Victoria Avenue salute
a tossed floral dress there, a citrus tree..

Everywhere in this book is the making and unmaking of forms where all
things are a form, never *only* form. Take it from me, this is a fine, a marvel-
lous book. Buy it, you win!

Something There is of One

Yes, yes, the buildings. The sun comes off the copper-coloured windows onto the Public Library building across Wellesley up against the hospital board building. & coming up gasping at the surface for delicate air, out of Nature's: 'She whom I suppose to know, I surely love.'

Not to suppose. Not so simple as that. Swimming at Mill Bay late summer with gulls, oystercatchers, a tern or setneck duck in flight. & the 3-spot ('cloverleaf' to the kids) jellyfish milling about—to their anguish & delight! Lift it gently out of the water and see parts tear away, rueful at that. Or the steady propulsive motion, ballooning, undulatory, myriad—which manner of saying, every embellishment! Should we ignore what's read or spoken of as a weave of gradations. Call them steady (*Call me Ishmael...*). The journey (journal) is to sea—with eyes! The fact, as one has it, adapted to intimacy. Tidal. Whether one's excluded or censured. Just so... distinctly the place where speech or its composite arises



Jays Rd in May

immediately this disposition—of WINGS!—solitary plumleaf eased from the plumbtree this May—wanting only to be swept up &—ablaze!—each morning, the moon still sharp, something rouses him... he is subject to something (which stirs him)—turns to the bedside console to compass words freely into the covers of the redbacked journal (May)—watched a longtime into her sleepfilled eyes only to see one of them obtain to him—or... managing to SEE CLEAN THRU HIM

a blackbird traverses my lawn this morning—
(maestro a tree with red or yellow flowers (compressed!))
my dear friend, Nijinsky, the introvert, danced out
his last days in the streets of S. Moritz, exhorting
passers-by: Have you been to the church today?—Kyra's gold
cross swinging outside his shirt to his own unevenness—
thus they found Nietzsche in his own final
clearthinking days—. Decisive. Maudlin & alone.

”

BEEN or dream—*Oneiric!* Bachelard or Bachelard’s spirit
out walking or strutting out at *l’amphi Gaston Bachelard*.
Dujac (Uncle Jack)
or Travolta ‘Staying Alive.’ Strut is as
must. In the sandpit a black hen scratches loose sand into a
masterwork, against which she pricks her beak—staying alive!
Hence my episteme:
.....
.....

[quick decolorations
[hang loose
[smoke the devil : declare nothing
[PASS YOURSELF FIT
[dɛ.pɛ] 'mɔʊd

Smithyman's Selected Poems

This review followed (and is included in place of) a case study published in Landfall which tracks the contributor-editor exchanges between Smithyman and Brasch and to which it makes passing reference.¹ Smithyman is an outstanding adventurous (idiosyncratic) poet – features that caused some consternation in the traditionally-minded editor – and the Selected Poems, edited by Peter Simpson, represents the poet's achievement most capably. The review focuses on Smithyman's proclivity to keep extending the borders of his work, both in terms of where his attention gets placed and the knack he has of managing somehow to pull each new catch back into the boat of his craft.

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Seduction is elsewhere – Baudrillard

Every so often in our critical practice things get slowed right down, and there is an opportunity to reassess work that we may wish to hold on to and reconsider options for the future. Allen Curnow's recent honouring by The Queen's Medal for Poetry suggests a broader social recognition of what has been accepted over the years by many as of right. Judging from recent issues of *Landfall*, a similar reevaluation is taking place in regard to Kendrick Smithyman's achievement. My 'Kendrick Smithyman and Brasch's *Landfall*' appeared in *Landfall* 160 (1986). It was followed by substantial articles by Murray Edmond and Reginald Berry, as well as MacDonald Jackson's interview with Smithyman in *Landfall* 168. In this context the appearance of *Selected Poems* is most timely.

Peter Simpson has selected 100 poems from a considerably larger number which Smithyman himself selected. This collaborative method has proved useful. Doubtless there are grounds for contesting particular inclusions and exclusions, yet the book does display the range of Smithyman's practice and includes all the really important poems while leaving scope for discussion about less significant ones. The book is especially valuable because it provides a reasonable representation of the poems to date and because it prompts us to scrutinise the preconceptions with which we approach this poet's work.

As much as they provide satisfaction to our usual ways of reading and enjoying

¹ The present review appeared as 'Kendrick Smithyman: *Selected Poems*', chosen and introduced by Peter Simpson (Auckland: AUP, 1989), *Landfall* 177 (March 1991), pp. 111-15. The earlier case study 'Kendrick Smithyman and Brasch's *Landfall*' appeared in *Landfall* 160 (December 1986), pp. 443-57.

poems, Smithyman's poems do so often in a tricky, even mischievous manner. Whatever is expected of them they are not attempts, successful or otherwise, at succinct human statement. Indeed, direct show of emotion or analysis of common human experience is shunned, in that in the texts the human element is rendered something of a curiosity (see 'Climbing in the Himalaya'). This in turn is interesting in terms of when the poems were written. Smithyman does not merely question the overriding preoccupation of the time for lucidity and truthfulness, he manages a fairly thorough overturning of many of the key values and expectations associated with his fellow writers from the mid-1940s onward, including Glover, Curnow, Brasch, Baxter, Dallas, Stead and others.

In mentioning their mischievousness, I am conscious of the knack the poems have of seeming to carry a narrative thread or the way the language clusters about a central interest, when these are key organising elements only in a dubious, haphazard sense. At the same time these 'semblances' are the only concession made to the reader seeking the familiar terrain of subjectivity conveyed fluently in language. The poems' reflexiveness (their playful self-reference) encourages us to take our directions from within the poems themselves – as if it is best to take our eyes and mind off the compass needle for a moment and become directly aware of the brief magnetic storm that each text represents before reestablishing our whereabouts and direction. In the work of his contemporaries, the speaking subject (even where implicit) is the indispensable and binding centre round which meaning is organised. For Smithyman, the subject loses such singularity. Merely one element in its own language activity, de-privileged and predominantly featureless, the subjective appears strangely lacking in underlying purpose. Reality is not so much a given – a place awaiting only discovery or expression – as it is a place of contention and the crisscross of possibility:

As though it were all designed.
Which, I suppose, is what Hardy meant
when he wrote about a Chance
that cannot seem wholly random.
Unconscious mindless nature
culminates in design.

'A Showing Forth by Day of the Nankeen Kestrel'

Moreover, there is no guarantee that the places these brief language incursions take us to will provide any special hypostasis or further insight into nature or human life. The means for conveying such insight is itself language and as such it presents us with two difficulties: the medium is at least as interesting as any ulterior purpose to which it is

put to work; and further, there is a persistent difficulty in dealing with any resolution or end purpose when meaning in the poems is informed largely as a play of opposites, without ultimate resolution. Eventually each word takes up not truth but its opposite ('Man and a Brute lie proper in one pit').

Design is the after-effect, inadvertent. As nowhere else, these poems are prodigiously wordy, profuse, eclectic: the only thing avoided is the final word, for that would start things off again:

If we live, we stand in language.
You must change your words.
'An Ordinary Day Beyond Kaitaia'

Having said this, it is worth noting by way of balance that there is much in the language craft on display that is urbane and dexterous – anything ranging from the off-hand severity of 'Somewhere, away inland, that we decay is / Less pleasantly recalled to us', to savoured mannerism as in 'the Beast... However he bled, / Stank or staggered, a corrupt patch-pelt / Scurfy verminous draggletail, caricature / Of piety's detestably impure / Other', to plain statement as in 'Jed, when I was your age / my parents kept me from / children who were too rough'. Such a propensity to yield to language outside the given strictures of meaning has left Smithyman's readers sometimes feeling bemused as it runs a constant risk of – for want of a better word – demeaning the language of poetry. Anyone looking for poetic mastery will not find it here. Smithyman habitually reneges on the drive to mastery over meaning.

The one thing Brasch and other commentators of the 1950s and 60s had to hang their hats on, the reprieve for Smithyman so to speak, was their discerning in his work patterns of meaning or pertinence that were in keeping with their own views of proper poetic practice. Essentially, the concern was for compression, logical and emotional continuity of statement, local reference, unambiguous syntax, and general deference to the reader's requirement of graspable meaningfulness. Whether phrased as Brasch's 'order of the imagination', Curnow's 'local and special', or Stead's more recent advocating of the middle way's 'sense of an achieved reality', the expectation of clarity brought its own unremitting demands. Writing, in this view, is required to be immediately recognisable in terms of something other than and external to itself, something demonstrably real and self-empowering because it appropriates that outer sense of reality and draws its privileged status into the writing. It is as if writing, in its endeavour to overcome its own sense of secondariness (as a social practice), and with its distinctive capacity to simulate an external reality, should produce a special kind of conforming, a practising in the likeness of, and in so doing achieve an indisputable

Another striking thing about the poems is their constant understated sense of rupture, of dislodgement ('I look towards you, madam, with a view to death'). Even the quite lovely and relatively straightforward title poem in *Inheritance* makes of the sense of security and continuity that inheritance might ordinarily seem to guarantee a disconcerting affair. The alluring prospect of

Tree, paddock, river: plan
landscape for a child
who will inherit all

is immediately and inexplicably undercut by a sense of foreboding and fretfulness on the prospective inheritor's part:

but when does manhood's wild
ordinance of downfall
first rack him?

Many of the *Selected Poems* are similar, starting from a seemingly fixed point only to head off with a mind and language of their own.

The more Smithyman defers to any requirement for readerly coherence, as, strangely, in 'Elders' and 'Deconstructing' – the more he interjects a comprehensible 'I' into the poem – the more diffuse and merely whimsical the result. Of such poems, one wishes only that they may be more themselves, free of such need for concession. Quite traditional thematic elements – such as the interdependence of death and desire, denial and achievement, death's proximity in living, satisfaction in loss, the necessity of compromise, the tension between instinctive and civilised values ('Parable of Two Talents', 'The Seal in the Dolphin Pool') – while indeed present in the poems in a conventional sense, are so by the nature of the language that portrays them, perversely, almost capriciously. As Smithyman has put it: 'I tried to be concerned with the poems rather than with me'.

It seems a nice point at which to end. Readers will find more information on the poetry and its development over four decades in Simpson's sensible and engaging introduction. The book is a good, manageable size and its straightforward set-up and presentation give it a tidy, compact feel. Despite a characteristic modesty, here is a very impressive poet. Even the cover photo showing a wily looking Smithyman suggests nothing of aggrandisement: as I see it, very much more the maker than the receiver of poems, he keeps the language mobile.

Literary Biography¹

Professor Lawrence Jones (co-assessor with Mac Jackson of my (so-so) MA dissertation 'James K. Baxter: A Theology of Communitality' (1978)) invited this piece that touches on interests that have always been there for me: a fascination with the fact that language can enthrall and delight in unexpected ways, along with a recognition that it is the capacity of human minds that makes such enthrallment possible. Biography (you will see in 'Startup' that I no longer have such a positive conviction regarding the integrated unitary self) places emphasis on the second aspect, perhaps ultimately the more beguiling of the two. Fairburn and Ashton-Warner are the less compelling figures in both respects. Baxter's a different matter, precociously gifted and humanly alert, yet also disreputable and often enough a pain in the butt, his own as well as that of others. I cannot help but acknowledge the skills, yet I am inclined to give him a hard time in terms of his tendency to be constantly hamming it up, life-as-pastiche, as I refer to it late in the essay. For all this, it is as likely Baxter, not me, who will enjoy a last chuckle.

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I do not have a biography. Or, more precisely, from the first line I ever wrote, I no longer see myself, I'm no longer an image for myself: I can't imagine myself, can't crystallize myself in images anymore.² (Roland Barthes)

Freed from many of the conventions associated with other literary forms, biography seemingly provides a safe place where life and its literary representation meet. Yet the biographical enterprise is tricky. More than other forms, it finds itself speaking from within the materials and conventions with which it deals, while assigning to these a status beyond literary practice.

In today's literary community, an understanding of biography as a straightforward representation is increasingly under scrutiny as an over-simplified response to what are the complex practices and structures involved in all literary texts. Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief' cannot be deferred to as part of the reader's equipment because it effectively amounts to a playing into the biographer's hands. Susan Ash, in her review of Lynley Hood's *Sylvia! The Biography of Sylvia Ashton-Warner*,³ illustrates the dilemma when she contrasts Hood's claim to an absolute veracity through

1 'Literary Biography in New Zealand', *JNZL* 7 (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1989), pp. 87-105.

2 Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice, Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), p. 259.

3 Lynley Hood, *Sylvia! The Biography of Sylvia Ashton-Warner* (Auckland: Viking, 1988). Details taken from the Author's Note.

'painstaking research' to her readily deploying a range of fictional techniques. Her 'I have made up nothing' sits awkwardly alongside a proclivity to extemporise undocumented aspects of the subject's life: 'The book may be read like a novel...'.⁴

New Zealand literary biography has little history to call on. Dennis McEldowney's 'Recent Literary Biography' acknowledges that as at January 1984 'no full-length serious biography of a writer who spent most of a lifetime in New Zealand has been published, although several are being written and at least one will appear this year'.⁵ Denys Trussell's *Fairburn* is the full-length study referred to.⁶ Given the lack, McEldowney instead reviews autobiographical writings by Sargeson, Frame and Brasch. And if we exclude three photo-essay texts (McEldowney on Sargeson, McNeish on Fairburn, Oliver on Baxter),⁷ following *Fairburn* only two full length literary biographies have appeared: the above-mentioned *Sylvia!* (1988) and Frank McKay's *The Life of James K. Baxter* (1990).⁸ These three are the subject of this essay.

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An obvious reason for the paucity of literary biography is the relative newness of our literary industry. Much biographical material to date appears only in the form of general introductions to critical studies of individual writers.⁹ Full biographies require extensive research: McKay's *Baxter* was two decades in preparation; *Fairburn* has its origins in a PhD thesis and was a decade in the making; likewise *Sylvia!*, which has enjoyed the widest audience (Ashton-Warner had a substantial reputation as a writer of fiction and educationalist, locally and overseas), perhaps aided by the populist style the biographer adopts: 'I wanted the reader to be emotionally involved'.¹⁰ In contrast, *Fairburn* and *Baxter* make firmer distinctions between author and poet-subject,

4 See *Landfall* 173 (March 1989), pp. 114-16.

5 *JNZL* 2 (1984), p. 47. Peter Gibbons, in 'Non-Fiction', ed. Terry Sturm, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* (Auckland: OUP, 1991), comments similarly, pp. 99-102.

6 Denys Trussell, *Fairburn* (Auckland: AUP/OUP, 1984).

7 Dennis McEldowney, *Frank Sargeson in His Time* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1976); James and Helen McNeish, *Walking on my Feet: A. R. D. Fairburn 1904-1957* (Auckland: Collins, 1983); W. H. Oliver, *James K Baxter: A Portrait* (Wellington: Port Nicholson Press, 1983).

8 Frank McKay, *The Life of James K Baxter* (Auckland: OUP, 1990). (Antony Alpers' two biographies, *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography* (1953) and *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (1980) are not considered: while receiving funding from the NZ Literary Fund in the late 1940s, much of the research and writing was done in Canada and Europe and the audiences are implicitly European.)

9 Examples include the Twayne's World Authors series and the Oxford series *New Zealand Writers and their Work*.

10 Foreword. Hood traces the gestation of her work in *Who is Sylvia: The Diary of a Biography* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1990).

while addressing more specialized audiences. Current sales statistics:

Subject	Date	Publisher	Print Run	No. Sales
Fairburn	1983	A.U.P.	1000 <i>h/b</i>	850
Ashton-Warner	1988	Penguin	4000 <i>h/b</i>	4000
	1990	Penguin	4000 <i>p/b</i>	
Baxter	1990	O.U.P.	2500 <i>h/b</i>	1200 ¹¹

In a small marketplace production and distribution expenses must be carefully managed. Because the writing of biography requires substantial labour for modest financial return, incentives will include pleasure in the enterprise itself and/or the opportunity to advance in professional and/or intellectual-culture standing.¹²

Actual events provide the verisimilitudinal boundaries:

The author wishes to thank many people and organizations for co-operation and assistance in providing insights into, and information about, A. R. D. Fairburn. (*Fairburn*, Acknowledgements)

But every detail in this biography was established by painstaking research. The conversations used were reported to me in direct speech. Sylvia Aston-Warner's [sic] thoughts, feelings and fantasies were either written down by her or told to friends, who in turn told me. (*Sylvia!*, Author's Note)

Baxter's life must be placed in a historical context... The aim was always to present the life as lived despite all the shifting lights that play over such an undertaking. (*Baxter*, Preface)

The narrative is linear. It proceeds in roughly equivalent time-chunks, combining into chapters which claim an ordered unity. Yet against this continuity, there are indications

11 Information provided by the publishers. **Fairburn**: an additional 750 copies of the AUP edition remain unbound, due to lack of sales. Meanwhile: political biographies from AUP on Vogel (Dalziel, 1986) have 500 of 1400 sold; and on Nash (Sinclair, 1976), of 5000 paperback and 7000 hardback (1978), few remain unsold. **Ashton-Warner**: success with the hardback Penguin edition saw a similar sized reprint in paperback, with sales over the initial four months said to be 'encouraging' (additional copies to these print runs were sold to Penguin USA, Australia and the UK). **Baxter**: figures reflect an initial 5-6 months of sales from March 1990; more recently sales have slowed. From the initial print run, 100 copies were sent to the UK, 150 to USA, 50 to Australia. With the success of the hardback, a paperback edition appears likely.

12 Alpers in 'Literary Biography (in New Zealand)', included in ed. Jock Phillips, *Biography in New Zealand* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson, 1985), speaks of the sustained 'effort that is involved in literary biography', p. 20, adding, 'Biography offers no career, in any country. Its use and its value have not been acknowledged in that way', p. 23.

that the literary artist continues to be considered a force of personal disorder and contradiction, counterbalanced with an ameliorative capacity to ultimately reconcile the disruptive flow of life events. Hood's use of place- or role-names as headings gets interrupted at chapter 12, headed simply 'Escape'. Trussell's headings are deliberately evocative: 'An infinity within', 'An age that unfastens us'. Even McKay acquiesces to Baxter's self-stylization as Romantic hero: chapter headings blend factual description ('IV. King's High School 1940-1943') with a mild lyricism ('V. First Book, First Love'). The table of contents indicates the patterned structure:

ch.	pp.	Content summary	Age	Year
1	19	Family background	-	1860-1920
2	28	Birth, early childhood and schooling	-13	-1939
3	18	Secondary schooling, King's High	-17	-1943
4	13	University, first jobs, early writing	-18	-1944
5	11	Jacque, first book, drinking	-21	-1947
6	10	Christchurch, Anglicanism, marriage	-22	-1948
7	31	Wellington, A. A., Training College	-29	-1955
8	15	Catholicism, Plays, teacher, Education Dept	-32	-1958
9	15	India	-33	-1959
10	27	<i>Pig Island Letters</i> , Wellington, postman	-42	-1968
11	31	Dunedin, Burns Fellow, Drama	-42	-1968
12	16	Auckland, Boyle Crescent, Jerusalem	-43	-1969
13	22	Jerusalem	-45	-1972
14	14	Dunedin, Auckland, death	-46	-1972

The greatest time spans occur in the opening chapters covering the family background and childhood years. The greatest compression occurs in chapters dealing with the final three years, from the decision to go to Jerusalem through to the poet's death (52 pages of a total 290). On average each chapter covers just over three years of the life, or a ratio of about six pages per year.

Understandably, in preparing authorised accounts of those recently deceased (one need only look at the expansive Acknowledgements sections), the privacy of

immediate family, friends and various informants must be respected. While the element of controversy is tantalising, unavoidably there is sensitive material available that the biographer will be either unable or reluctant to include ('There is a time for a moratorium on biographies of Baxter and there will be a time for a new biography', Preface). Much is left to the reader to infer.¹³ In *Baxter*, John Weir provides an instance of a minor presence in the narrative who is nevertheless significant in the gestation of the biography. During the 'Pig Island Letters' chapter, he is introduced as a young poet seminarian and a later friend to Baxter who edited the *Collected Poems*. Fleeting, he reappears on the final page as the priest who, distraught, is unable to deliver the funeral panegyric. However, in the footnotes he plays a larger role, with citations spanning eight different chapters.¹⁴

There are other ways in which biography transforms the 'life as lived'. The narrative includes a valuative process that in effect looks 'both ways'. This is apparent in *Sylvia!*, where infancy is examined for signs of an incipient creativity:

The mirror is Sylvia's looking-glass view of her world; a world where fantasy and reality overlap and merge, a world cursed, blessed and dominated by imagination, creativity, pride and guilt. Sylvia inherited this mirror from her parents. (14)

Birth is prosaic:

Sylvia Constance Ashton Warner was born in Stratford at seven o'clock in the morning on 17 December 1908, at the beginning of the summer school vacation. (17)

Beyond all, the ordinary serves as an imaginative springboard:

¹³ Kendrick Smithyman has drawn attention to an evasiveness in Fairburn biographers when dealing with a crucial phase of personal crisis for the poet, beginning in 1937 and lingering through subsequent relationships and writing: 'If the twenty years of Fairburn's maturity were lived with "a grim underlying tragedy" then this is surely of considerable importance and demands an attention which it does not get. At the centre of the McNeish and Trussell accounts is a roar of silence which, it would seem, must preclude either book being regarded as a definitive life', *Islands* 36, New Series: Vol 2 No 2 (November 1985), p. 149. And again: 'Trussell's difficulty is obvious: how to report extensively a life which was not eventful... a poet whose poems... were produced in a period of ten years or so, of which years a singularly important factor, the "crisis", is scarcely uncovered' (p. 151).

¹⁴ Weir is referred to in person at p. 187 and p. 290. Tellingly, he is noted as a source at: II, 5; V, 21; VII, 48, 57; VIII, 21, 30, 35, 36; X, 10, 29, 33, 50, 52, 65, 73, 76; XI, 13, 14, 24; XIII, 8, 9; XIV, 9. Noel Ginn and Brasch are two other minor 'characters' in the narrative who prove substantial sources of information.

Sylvia drank in all this music with her mother's milk. Quite possibly, like Germaine in her novel *Incense to Idols*, she spent some of those early weeks in a basket on top of the piano – that would be the only place in that sparsely furnished home where a baby would be safely out of the reach of the toddler Daphne. And like Germaine, Sylvia grew up with a love of music and a violent aversion to loud discordant noise. (18)

Physical birth occurs in *Fairburn* and *Baxter* about one tenth of the way through, a page or two after opening chapters respectively entitled 'Ancestral' and 'The Ancestral Face'. For Fairburn's parents, 'It remained for one of their children to find words for much that was unuttered in their lives' (p. 22). The opening page presents a future artist who occupies central time, despite an environmentalist aegis which threatens to overwhelm the sense of the awaited one:

Rex Fairburn was heir to three European generations in New Zealand. Memory of the country's transfiguration by the white man was dissolved in the bloodstream of his family. His society arose by the fusion of primeval and modern elements in the crucible of human development. Stark and dramatic landforms, the eloquent beliefs of a native people, contrasted with the bare purpose and industrialism of the invading civilization. But the earth presence persisted, imparting its singular quality to the work of the poet; a living force that gave scale to his vision, enabling him to reach, in epochs before human habitation, the titanic world of geological impulse. . . (1)

Baxter similarly opens with a foreshadowing of destiny:

The forebears who most stirred his imagination came from the Scottish Highlands, which became for him a place of disinheritance and a spiritual home. His lifelong preoccupation with origins is largely explained by the influence of a family for whom Scottish history was part of themselves, and the ancestors living presences. Since the ancestors came from a far country, outside Baxter's own historical time, they readily assumed for this most mythopoeic of our poets the dimensions of myth. And he had the strength of imagination to acclimatize the myth in his own region of Otago. (1)

Admiration for what will occur is established at the outset. The trajectory is essentially fixed, self-referencing – quite a departure from the 'willing suspension of hindsight' that has been given as the biographer's necessary goal.¹⁵ After all, the actual condi-

15 Paul Murray Kendell, 'Walking the Boundaries', included in *Biography as High Adventure*, ed. Stephen B.

tions of ancestry apply as readily to Baxter's four-years-older brother Terence; yet Terence opts for a non-literary life. The following is conjecture:

Since the person who affected him most was his revered father, it was to be expected that he would be a romantic poet. (47)

In this sense the Vietnam war becomes Baxter's passing relationship with it; the Education Department becomes a projection of Ashton-Warner's felt vexations; and the New Zealand Humic Compost Club becomes little more than Fairburn's polemical engagements with it and organizations like it.¹⁶ Further, and revealingly, the subjects' spouses are presented as longsuffering supportive figures (even though those of Fairburn and Baxter were themselves creative artists), despite the strain that they must inevitably have felt in their relationships.

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Let me turn to *Baxter* to explore these stratagems in more detail. Excerpts from the subject's own writing are sprinkled across the narrative with scant regard to the specific circumstances of their composition. For example, on page 1 Baxter's own reflections are used to corroborate statements concerning the value and importance of his ancestry. The 'King's High School 1940-43' chapter commences with Baxter's poem 'A Family Photograph 1939', composed in the 1960s. Childhood time spent at Sibford School, a co-educational Quaker Boarding School near Banbury in England, is characterised using Baxter's reminiscences taken from his autobiographical 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet', published in *The Man on the Horse* (1967). The same Sibford experience is illustrated with an extract from a poem he wrote at the time plus another called 'School Days', written in 1958. The difficulty with this is that very different sources and viewpoints are included as compatible illustrations of his school-life. The difference that the passing of time makes is not factored into the process. On p. 63, Baxter, a secondary school youth and avid reader, is said to particularly admire Blake's 'Tiger' and Auden's 'Lay your sleeping head, my love'. McKay lets slip that Baxter 'was well aware that the theme of Auden's poem was homosexual love'. The hint is picked up again at pp. 94-95 where we learn that

Oates (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), p. 48. Biography he terms 'art within boundaries', p. 40.

16 'The broad aspect of soil politics engaged Rex's imagination: the consciousness that the fate of a civilization and the shape of its culture depended ultimately on its style of farming' (p. 198).

Baxter had a homosexual involvement while a student at Otago University, as if the two events are somehow correlated. But the link is textual rather than behavioural (the earlier comment depends on the later one for its bearing). And, as if to allay any misapprehension on the reader's part, a further qualification is offered: 'From his own account there were other homosexual episodes in his life, and though he couldn't be called a homosexual, he had some difficulty in coming to terms with his sexuality throughout his life' (p. 95). What the exact difference is between being 'called a homosexual' and engagement in 'homosexual episodes' McKay leaves unexplained.¹⁷

There is a proleptic element in the text's eagerness to be understood in a certain way. 'But already he had met the young woman who was to become the most significant person in his life' (p. 97) is how Jacquie Sturm, soon to become his wife and later Baxter's literary executor, is introduced. Yet the start of this relationship immediately follows the termination of another. In the preceding paragraph we learn of the break-up of Baxter's only previous serious love-relationship, with Jane Aylmer, another Otago University student. Did he turn to Jacquie on the rebound? In having her importance in Baxter's life attested before her name is mentioned, Jacquie is accorded a privileged status. McKay, usually circumspect, becomes openly approving: in competition against 'exceptionally gifted' students, Jacquie is one of 'very few Maori' then studying for a degree who, without the benefit of some of the preferential considerations accorded to others, nonetheless passes her medical Intermediate exams against 'fierce' opposition. More is revealed about the evaluative textual process than the actual nature of Jacquie's early relationship with Baxter. Perhaps Jacquie, at the time a young Māori student alone in Dunedin, was pleased to meet him, perhaps not? While we are told in the following chapter that the 'ghost of Jane Aylmer' still haunts him, it is also announced that 'Baxter had grown very fond of Jacquie Sturm, and late in 1948 he asked her to marry him' (p. 118). Despite the insistence on Jacquie's centrality to Baxter's adult life, it is quite reasonable for us to form a quite different impression of the conjunction of the Aylmer/Sturm relationships and the strong emotional ties that Baxter evidently formed with both women. An additional discovery, which may have been a further complication, and which we are left to infer, is that Jacquie was almost three months pregnant with Hilary when she and James married on 9 December of the same year.

17 Speaking of Baxter's difficulties in his sexual relationships with women, McKay similarly seeks to mollify negative reaction: 'But it would be extreme to call Baxter a misogynist' (p. 199).

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In his Preface, McKay remarks that Millicent Baxter's *Memoirs* and Archibald's *We Will Not Cease* are important formative influences on the 'famous son' but cautions that the mother's view (Archibald's book deals essentially with his First World War experience) 'is in danger of becoming the official version' and 'needs considerable modification'. 'Objectively, James's childhood was happy. In a closely united family he was loved and well looked after' (p. 44), is how McKay characterises things, yet this is verbatim Baxter (quoted on the page following). Interspersed among assertions of domestic harmony reside more disturbing indications. 'Much of James's life was lived in reaction to the strict regime of his childhood and the strong personality of his mother', we are told. Despite assurances that James and his brother Terence enjoyed a secure and contented childhood (pp. 22, 24, 27), there is a rupture which McKay presents as an understandable divergence between the developing poet and the man of practical affairs. And at this point Terence all but disappears from the narrative.

There had also been a displacement in the home. His brother was now older and Terence noticed the amount of time he spent discussing poetry with his father. The subject was clearly of passionate interest to both of them. He felt excluded and later confessed to a certain amount of jealousy. He decided to yield his brother's chosen territory; though it had interested him once. More and more it became alien to him as he was driven to develop his own skills in making and doing. (92)

Differentiation between various accounts and incidents is lacking, and it is difficult to know how to weigh certain aspects of the narrative. James, to all appearances a fairly contented child, exhibits also an 'inability to react to normal social situations in the expected way' (p. 39). Archibald, for the most part an enigmatic, calm background figure, presented in terms of his unshakeable pacifist courage and the love of poetry which transmits to his son, is also 'a chronic worrier and subject to deep bouts of melancholy' (p. 33). He features largely as the internalised poetic figure, one of those few with 'deeper and more delicate insights into what is central in human experience' (p. 7). The sympathetic association with Archibald shared by subject and biographer is offset in large part with an essentially unflattering portrait of Millicent. Along with her father Professor Macmillan Brown, she is characterised as having not 'the least smack of creativity'. If she helped Baxter develop his linguistic skills, such was fortuitous because 'his literary talent did not come from his mother's side'. Poetry is viewed as facilitating insight and reconciliation, and this is associated with

the father's side of the family. Millicent, somewhat antagonistic to the visionary bond shared by husband and son, becomes a negating influence: a supposed lack of passion, vision and curiosity leaves her isolated.

Yet it is she who ultimately preoccupies Baxter. He remains perplexed ('a divided self and a perennial inner conflict' p. 45), on the one hand due to his strong feelings of identification with his father, and on the other because of a sense of severance from his mother. A man of naturally strong attachments and loyalties, a self-styled poet of love who lambasts its failure at all levels of society, there remains an anxiety and confusion that Baxter cannot finally fathom or rectify. Toward the end of his life, aged 46, anxieties resurface. Unwell and depressed, over a period of some weeks he approaches various people, including religious, a retired psychiatrist, and friends, seeking assistance and comfort. He is aggrieved at the sense of abandonment his mother represents: 'He was obsessed with his relationship with his mother, believed he had not received enough love from her' (p. 282). Feelings of blame arise: 'He spoke negatively about his mother and her relationship with his father for a long time' (p. 284). The final chapters are distressing in the sense of helplessness they contain.

That Baxter's restless endeavours must have placed immense strain on his relationships cannot be doubted. Nor should we assume that the cure was at times much better than the illness. Jacquie found Baxter's joining A.A. in 1954 – perhaps his way of joining? – 'very difficult'. His conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1958 took her completely by surprise. Such a tendency on his part to make unpredictable, unsignalled moves may well have contributed to an initial separation of the couple in 1957. As with Fairburn and Ashton-Warner, Baxter is shown struggling with his own inclination to escape. And this, very much the affliction of the romantic artist caught in a web of escape-and-return, where the one is not desired unless the other remains seemingly available, is linked in the relationships with a need for possession and support that is simultaneously clung to and spurned. Irresolution and a constantly deferred sense of conflict accompany the artist's apparent championing of humane values and these are set against a drive towards literary achievement that is as compelling as it is ultimately elusive. Under the circumstances, the final physical separation, difficult enough under any circumstances, especially so for a couple that despite all appear to have remained very close, must have been wrenching. Baxter's decision late in 1968 to leave Dunedin and pursue a spiritual call to establish a community at Jerusalem was one which neither he nor his family could adequately articulate. Not clarity, but confusion and incomprehension ensued:

Twenty years after Baxter left for Jerusalem, Jacquie still did not know

what really went on in his mind. She was not at all sure that he knew himself. (240)

+

Alongside the chronology of real events runs a counter thread that is a search for essence or truth. Biography is constructed as an Everyman's quest, a kind of *Pilgrim's Progress*, whereby out of life's vicissitudes, necessitating compromise and occasional failure, there is a sublimation of these in terms of the quest itself. What happens is a lesson in the heroic, even the tragi-heroic. Even where, as in the case of *Sylvia!*, the biographer may in the end struggle with feelings of antipathy toward their subject, it is the transmutation of the ordinary into the artistic that prevails:

Her central personality was that of an artist – sensitive, imaginative, talented and unique. She expressed her artistic inspiration in ways that were both readable and poetic, and her insights came to the public at a time when the life spirit of the age was saying the same thing in many different ways. For all these reasons she will go down in history as one of the seminal voices of our time. (249)

A half-recognised eschatology is at play. There is a promoting of values that is not immediately reducible to events. Baxter's dour intractability in pursuit of his own interests, his very waywardness, is valorised in a way that empties conflict of any ultimate discord: reality defers to Reality. Rather than the actual life, it is the literary quest by which the life is to be judged. Statements concerning Baxter's inner consistency are sourced from a truth that surpasses the story McKay tells:

Beyond all this, the sense of grief came from *the* mysterious depths of the human person of which we are hardly conscious. (46) An experience is recalled, vividly realised, then pondered until it yields its meaning. In personal terms the method helped Baxter to arrive at a philosophy of life based on his own experiences.... The heart and its mysteries would always preoccupy Baxter... (136-37) In India, as elsewhere, he was preoccupied with the nature of true living... (178) Baxter's growth as a person was toward a full acceptance of his whole self. (200)

It is literature, biography's *real* subject, that helps explicate events in a figured pattern: 'The body of Baxter's poetry illustrates his mythopoeic imagination endeavouring to give shape and meaning to his life' (p. 203). If the subjects of these biographies did

not achieve such wholeness, wholesomeness, if the lingering impression is of a lack of certainty and contentment, as the actual life-material suggests, then what are we to make of the biographers' implicit claims? Is it literature's mythopoeic task to render assimilable the 'chaos of experience'? Does Baxter's life, with its frantic efforts, dead ends and recommencements, not simply *need* poetry in order to make any sense of it at all?

'In his best poems Baxter himself has this fidelity to the truth of his experience' (p. 202). The necessary distinction, as McKay draws it, between what Baxter was to himself as a person and family man, and what was required of him as a writer, is presented as finally beyond dispute, reconcilable. Constantly life slips into the guise of illusion only to be rescued again in the form of poetry. Baxter's awareness that poetry had overwhelmed his living is shown by McKay to initiate not an improved living but an improved relation with the poetry:

Poetry had been the centre of his life, almost the god he worshipped. But it had concealed from him his personal destitution. Like his alcoholism, it had wrapped him in a world of illusion. That kind of poetry with its elaborate art would have to go. Having arrived at so piercing an awareness, Baxter felt obliged to follow the new realism initiated with *Pig Island Letters*, which was to reach its flowering in the late poetry. But the wisdom learnt from his previous experience must not be lost. (196)

At the end of his life Baxter suffered a powerful sense of grief and denied love. During a stay at Puhoi with his close friends the Illingworths, we see him continuing the search in the mangrove swamp for a child's lost gumboot after his companions had given up. Always Baxter was drawn to the hopeless, those lost, those stripped of belongings, those in any way dispossessed. This was his condition and the condition of his poetry. Poetry was the one thing he let himself be possessed by, that possessed his life. It is in this way that his poetry was always personal, confessional as McKay refers to it. Yet poetry was not able to make full sense of Baxter's life, because he could not ultimately direct his poetry as he could not control or direct his living. It happened to him – sometimes things worked, and sometimes, as especially around the middle 1950s, he lost his way. His behaviour was hardly original, just as the formal aspects of his poetry were not. He practised Hardy, Auden, Dylan Thomas, Yeats, Lowell, Durrell; his *Iron Breadboard* poems in imitation of other New Zealand poets demonstrate his considerable skills of inhabitation, parody.

In taking a model of literature that presents poetry as 'revealing what lay behind appearances' (p.113), in suggesting that poetry for Baxter was integrated into this

actual living, 'not a free-floating artifact cut adrift from its human context', McKay has poetry caught suspended between the two. Biography as we have it perpetuates this idea that literature and its practitioners are involved in a pursuit that leads to truth and the betterment of social and personal living. Perhaps the outcomes of the lives studied suggests otherwise. As in Baxter's case, perhaps there are no achieved ends in sight, no final legitimating imaginative mechanism that really holds. Perhaps what the writers' lives most strongly indicate is that the quest does not actually deliver an end but makes available something deeply compelling that has the capacity to both nourish and devour itself.

from *Itsan*, Watermark, Auckland, 1990

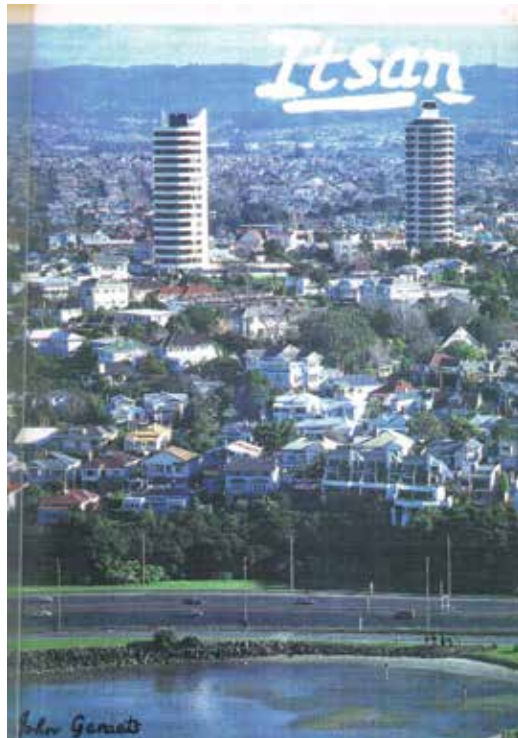


Image Metro Magazine cover (circa 1990)

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Back to language of level sea, the old woman remonstrates
the steps her neighbours, attired—you guess—in
another young peasant girl's return from
the open field in her hands proffered—what?—are
violets, tipping a line of fingers, green
stems beneath. Fields which, week after week after—January
through April—are green, yellow, cropped—
The sky once a pavilion is wound, as
down the hills
march over roofs they come

+

as a remnant of their desert days the sennas carry two
little white pouches on the undersides of their throats—they come
chasing up the field as Gloria claps her hands and in
her pitched voice calls each by name—until the goats, sennas (worth
thousands of dollars depending on their pedigree) & angoras—
for Gloria they are her life, her morning and night, they
come shaping their effulgent udders to be milked—

+

Rimbaud calls to the world beyond the world (fowlie) and
thoughts that no one yet has. Scribble across

and down the windshield and realise it is adhesive plastic over glass that makes blue. She wrote

Werther, all were enchanted with resonance and I thought 'Werther' and the delightfully sounding Charlotte. I tell you, I was splendidly happy, I was, and saluted the intellect.

Notation, or the fabulous coarseness of red bricks, tossed up in lots of three onto the scaffold—that she turns and looks aghast. It's a form of afflatus, we're stuck with it. When it's done I'll advise further, salubrious, maybe candid. You see it's just come short by a bit...

WHITE

to this very white; not as white but
materially so, placeable and so
constrained—in my hands and eyes. My
toes turn its side: jacaranda
purple ruff and shadesprinkle across the grass this morning
tresses at the Kerikeri rock-daubed inlet,
where draughts (craft) in, by the riversedge, near gums
rocks clutter & where Marsden then Kemp arrived, one settled, instructed
what were natives, what Christianity needed or reprised,
a pear tree *par excellence*
remains (to walk beneath), one hundred sixty years
& fruit only slightly marred (tarnished), marked—tallies
black and white sheep bleeding (bleating) & a blacksingleted man bent
shearing them of their wool, perspiring, so it goes into the large brown sack,
supported by the young Māori fellow, also a singlet. Slim,
very white, your block of ice, freezing and brittle in the sunshine. With
serge avocado
& sweet plums that're tiny
& overhang the white gateway and path near the stone steps and store
we bought the delicious ice at (iceat)

+

Not a face orange under orange tree face
of a book, partly partly not,
partly grasped. Partly something else.
A burgundy jersey, mixed with
triangles of green and black, pulled (y-a-n-k-e-d) in by another stitch
or band at the sleeves. Other sleeves
balloon as they flutter, occupied
or chaotic, they plummet. Inhabit a corduroy jacket,
an accordion, people with white sox watch intently the band deliver
other Kelvin Hair tunes, lean concierge. Prince's
drizzling letters with ribbons and 'sassy' in
the hair and grey shorts, skinny legs.
Ribbons (from that line) in the hair, black, silken, frayed at the bottom
edge; he wears or is adorned (ordains)
with a tie, carries a briefcase—tan leather with combinations—and
the hair is parted this way or apart.
She was to say, I think of you.
But who knows what she thought of him, or only of him, he sang
a brilliant tune.
Other names come to or from espresso (or at that rate), so that the person
—no the spoon—seems almost to stand upright
and manly. And all
Italians wear or are endowed with such smooth skin, like George St,
even at Uni in the English tutor's room. The other
on the phone put a boiled
egg or pot before him. The brick buildings were

red and almost for Marist Sisters. Or
another Christian figure on the metal cross at the church, a
wooden kneeler. Louise Henderson at Henderson which was harder
to instil for the young ones not thinking in glass cuts or grey
metal and contorted muscular with strained lines and downcast narrow head
under a spiked crown:
small square mosaic tiles, air-blue,
comprise XIV stations that square attention, one starry Mary.
It has to be a light touch (Mrkusich) for you to respond to, I guess.

SEARS, ROEBUCK (ON A BILLBOARD)

The Pompeii is yours. Mr Howerd, Frankie (get away!):
apricot pip not needing to be eaten clean, pursed and so smooth, a perfect
vowel to spit from the mouth (emulating that shape):
gets ejected—like a video—the little red light on and onto
the carpet alongside the tv set. The colour, drape-brown. A
ginger cat, in parts, lollops and skips and toys at
the drapes: then settles to doze two hours (as if placed there, or discarded
by one of the children) on the indian cotton-covered
couch. Not settee. Nor is it
an apricot pip—for that reason—nor a pipe. Ginger not brown
and an apricot pip. As waves
are, in contrast to sea, serial. Importunate our
goodbyes. We aren't. Are so are all right too!
Apricot this aperitif. Isn't. I say ours. You—my—friend—dad.

+

Is lakes and laking long to speed boats or skiers
or launches but
it was hardly ripples, chill and flat;
lakewater smoothing and very green
that yellowing pears border it—
these things attest the sublime, a confraternity.
Swans which, black or white, foist and ride
the social and it's clangorous, clasping them so that they question mark
and glance quizzical
using this and their bills in a mild deprecatory poise:
the water was sober and a tablecloth.
This is pretty-much summer and a seasonal, yes,
and winter moreso, strewn leaves, stiff-edged, which are sometimes
to bask in and, she imagines, because winter in the tale is spelled
and in need of censure, looking masterly. Water so availing
of gulls or swans mill. Nothing much else. Waters close
together and the earth is spread, back to back, without shimmer.
I remark walls as if substantive.
Without demur, such as this one
(makes distant weathercocks clatter and forget)

PICUL

Loosen up Nerida Nichols on '1.' One.

Skin type marginal and without commotion in three feet or degrees of water, water skiers that strew the surface lack scruple.

Sideward stuff: where the date lines

up, & hooks up chances from the upper ridge of the hill, down the rough chip seal highway—tacky hot tar in summer—

grips and tightens when the weather's down. Down degrees. The centrepiece's

deliberate to observe and avoid things.

Each person is articulate, alert, touch of skin and pants together, slender arms and bones in surprising consort. Morning sun piazza. Dealing with attention and getting it as asked. Take space

eagleair—enunciating—Bill's paddle hips which gyrate

and sparse ginger bristles on the chin. The girl with

crimson, tapering fingernails and a small fleck of tongue

over the lower lip. According to Barthes, branded

as mastery of outline...

+

'Could you please pass the footstool this way?' Thank you. I'm from Canada, too'

'We cannot talk here.' 'Don't stay; no, don't go either.

'Cigarette? No, thank you. A small kitchen table. Decorated with a small black hat—netting to eye level (Anabella), tapered eyebrows, tasteful, pursued—an agent! 'I have no country.' Interesting to tell of eyes: two figures, beneath a street light, naturally smoking (*fume*).

leaving the top section of the little finger adroit. 'Shake down on the couch.' So that the man in Scotland may be called on: a draught from the window, or under the door, she clutches her coat at the vee by the lapels, mutters him, and dies.

A phone rings incessantly and a map of Scotland: marked.

Things evaporate quickly and always not enough is retained. A sudden switch; out of doors and into a door: dogs. Policemen hot in pursuit. Stopping on a bridge, great girders, silence.

A pretty woman who cheated him without rancour. Rolling countryside, upended, between Nelson and Picton and a man on foot. Everything is close or far somehow. Savour him. Everything a questing, ready for sleep, in love, longing for supper. Indeed, heavy with trails,

forked, wayward. In London, where the ladies paint their toenails. 'God made the country.'

An old grouch, awaiting his supper and the couch. 'Poot d sign th paper'—youse miserable sinners!—in his eyes. Searching, stern with suspicion. Tracking back, quick eyed, to catch

them at it!). She lifts herself to accompany him. Pigtails,

tightly bound: strange dalliance. A kiss touches, just touches and presses

her lips. Wanting to respond. Tending, saying things that make his heart swell. And then an old chopper overhead, cumbrous. So the thing is speeded up.

Alt-na-sh—always, there are details in things. ‘I have sent them away—but there are words left within conversations and trust.’ Moors. smaller frames, a key turned at his back. No one is what they seem—yet he survives. A revolver, a man with his own life.

There are hints, everywhere, hints, little signposts Hitchcock and others put in the ground or drop—which are not just posts or leaves and not just dropped. That is what being sent away means. And you know that he will meet her again: in her dark wash of hair and the woolen Sunday-best coat she lent him—

abrupt sneaks across. Steals a kiss! That’s it, that’s it, he stole a kiss from her and she reciprocates—not to taunt him, but to—to share him. It is possible to be carried away: a kind (of) frenzy: but she gets tied in too. There’s no escaping it and he eludes them again. A little stream—they are linked, tied in a way. They flee! Fog, a small stream (as said), an arched stone bridge. Her insouciance and it is more than that links them, chains move them. Even humour. A missing section of a small finger, the pinky: voyeur, because he (or she) takes only misdirection, and it doesn’t excite—or it does—but it shouldn’t—and she is unsurpassed as his companion. And he would kill her though he admires her and urges and savours her. Her hand is against her leg and he’s handcuffed to her and she’s removing her stockings. Madam S.—when the crazy music comes with her, her eyes light up, swell nobly, she pulls the blanket up over them both: she gives what space is hers. And does he reciprocate? Behind the facade of—well, anyway... it’s worth remembering

+

Closer this twin wire
running twice the point, reemerging.
This is the position adopted and proffered (or inverse)
an overhand thing. The finger runs
to the ear, & from
the hand near the tableleg and tablecloth.
One hundred and twenty three
and a different time and a different feeling.
It could have been the wool carpet upon which the body reposed—
it could even have been the other
characteristic: the entire groundwork wants checking out, Gracey Jones
on stilts, stars
& a man in a black suit & tie with trim moustache &
heavily lidded spectacles, a debonair man, painstakingly tracking them (the
stars)
with an arrow of light

ALAND

both excess and pause,
domiciled in a room (4 edges) and look
at an eye looking for you. I know it
a woman's eye, her compact, the pink cover.
Powder puff, like a sewing finger cap but soft, distended.
Delicate repose of the fingers and
in the mirror's hole a lash, a seawave.
What then? Trinkets?
Or is it holding a kind of spell, ends—
a clicking or clipping you open or close? and further, a
a firm resolve?
Always rebuttal, always acceptance.
Among things they're perfect or not (the tenses)

+

nothing to distinguish it at all—a
string tied to a tree, at the Myer Bowl go
yourself filled with fruit and on Lygon everything
but everything—everything is bobbed
hair and shrouded eyes the lids of which settle halfway
down the brown iris and black of the pupil, white soiled
tights, an old fawn pullover and skin fit to sleeve a continent.
Well... we have stopped off where others before us
where they drink the cappuccino or espresso and where the orangegreen
Shrine of Remembrance fluttering shifts
an obverse tide to those remembered and you can wander round the
elevated portico and view mementoes of the wardead
and others honoured the same. In a blue corduroy, I
scan you—a water frame, your green swimsuit, each centimetre
wavering. Tonight fireworks shield
the sky for Moomba
viz waterfront '84 & the red and white thud of light as it showers over
the barge idling [towed?] upharbour—young watchers' mouths and eyes
tilted upward—immediately you
have it and then bang! how easily satisfied for Australian sun
and the northerly enough for hot water and Albert Park built to scale
to dawdle or jog round with the large and mostly
recognisable trees and platforms for lakes—and rowers!—not a patch on
what we can offer? so I surprise you, where she goes...

+

a certain ambivalence for which
mostly youngsters get arrested
for drunkenness (under the bridge!) two kinds
necking in the shrubs so a friend leaps down on them (from the
bridge) and the guy loading the searchlight with what appear welder's
rods keeps separating the sky with pencil beams (yesterday
the sky exploded). Today's grass dries yellow,
divots; sky smokes up
like grey over Sydney, drizzled somewhat, at the terminus,
and this chap managed to procure a midi of New Tooheys from a Sports
Bar just up from the Travelodge (now it's Sunday evening).
Tonight he got a Carlton the blackhaired Greek girl served him

24-2

a merest trifle—green clanking tram
for rail movement & faint telephone bzz across
from the War Memorial—all round are cars! stream red on
white as he presses the plate
resistance of glass which is (a take on things) at the Travelodge St Kilda.
Learning *Status* & p'haps the blue lights flash
of a white police car in the distance the very
tallest Rialto in the Sth Pacific (45 storeys, Stuart's reckoning) on
a skyline that's supernal & large—
an upright tower the moon an orange like the one the maid
leaves on the table but larger, larger,
& oranger—it rises as if lifted on a curved string and all
strangely ascribed, tilted. The top portion of the moon is missing, the rest
like a conquistador vessel & we're looking up at the sea
bottom (it flows). Bodies are vague,
white shirts only (or companions) and this one's locked
against glass like the water running down the entrancebacking
of the Victorian National Gallery (Ron's *Antigone*
playing, he notes). Things get lit up, strangers, diadems.
A pathway gets cleared before your trammeling (in motion)
(She has to think now someone's coming...)

+

kimono does (not Junko). Sequester red stilettos, not a jersey,
not trousers! We acknowledge her upward—
nylons. Brush teeth with salt water and a tablespoon of propolis
at breakfast. Feathered by rules, chamomile with a squeeze of lemon
and honey when cooled; spoken of as a mild carminative

+

pasture. He sees. Or—shade
under trees: red jersey
four spindly legs and
a grounding jaw: forelegs askew

+

like the first map of summer or white gloves these are
neither magpies nor
crag—these papery squadrons appear in
the upright—
by threes, & endlocate the pines serial notches: can snip
its black triangular. Hölderlin was curious to ride
or whether it is not before
or an after but on a rock or wavering. Singular ruse: flying by flat
or even strictures undercut from this vantage—
there is not a blackbird on the woodland fencepost, or magpie shriek but skiers
pulled up arcing spray. In the

Panmure Basin the upturned yacht's enough for
lakebottom incision—where black shags marshal level pegs and
shimmy sky in like degree, hardly outflow tide's
a directional turn. Splashes
under scurrying legs—under laminated green arch of the footbridge
that Mike & friends undertook as
a community project, now inscribed by local kids,
who leap from it at high tide—into the channel's
obverse arch. Poplars move
sectionally, sheared. Across Val's garden
agapanthus, red dahlias, kiwifruit, coming down
the straightened driveway (tributary)

+

history's ablution, don't like it—or Ian's
mind's pissing glass, fill it with a head
(vlot! vlot!) three fingers up the day's hot

+

then the other, clamp, ouch! What's afters? (for) You know I can only
spend so long with you before thoughts spoon further thoughts, pieces
afloat in the sky—piquant dispels buoyant

+

otago apricots

RIPEN

+

'water's homologous outside'

+

: seeming disarray, having engineered

to grant maximum please

taking the maximum of please

leisure—

+

things gain

more the virtual process. And what reading or

membership you instigate are—Poe's divagation—that you wrest the mooring

(intrepid) or see stored the big anchor recovered in the bay where de Surville

had ordered it cutfree—1769

+

white sash

piece of toweling comes apart but lies.

Escape against the plate glass and tints
afloat more than buried within

+

hair that waits for its place (next door). The side of the missing
blue rings, falling away, like clothing thru aperture: grunting
and coughing Nescafe binds the appetite:

+

but with her their share broke
a colophon paved with sorrow
in zero off to music and so attentive

+

such a window pane, picked
involving no bait but own
them as aught be a base

+

even brackish glow of (net) gauze and no air no kerosene
of peasants moving in outline over the bleached colour
of Utrecht
at Annelise's; exegete

+

coming back, late night, strong lights flush the
container port, moving—evenly drifting. Snappish
midnight... caught now
and really (page lost blast!

+

r. harris under the armpit, for coffee no better
than language,
runs the tongue up each blade
a sword blade—plum dish!
A sash from the shoulder to the waist, bright red, twirling wrist,
cretin! Sylvan plots from the floor
trees. Junk under them, brown, warm, oddshaped stuff...
from... paper ripping, torn, being torn, yellow and white
strips, yellow round the eyes, common.
Blue-sleeved, Staedtler,
vigorous German, man name; now almost
retrieved. Jurisdiction eases
words, fears of places to be at, wood, or panels, round
shrieks, banter, weird hard inhibition, cool stuff.
Cut & dish & print! The fresh and
miller is here. Try now!

MAGICO

His head reveals blue sunglasses.

A dove flips from the magician's (cloak) cache. Is not a black one.

Ultimately this hat is not that.

His head reveals blue sunglasses.

And she remarks: 'The aisle's not skinny,' meaning it's kind of narrow, unsuitable for passing.

'I love to pinch or rub my nose,' she continues; and touched her head but she has no hair, a bare scalp, purple eyemakeup.

She said so.

I said the night is a breeze, penciled in.

Caught with skin and without skinhair, like business.

But there was no exit.

Muscles?

She conveyed a shopping basket, and heard the plastic wheels scurry over things, aisles of trolley carts.

And a red Honda 1000 outside. Huge tyres!

With patrons, their feet lodged up against the dukebox, bodies airlifting.

+

acerbity once only a flight BA or DFC or
come to pass: pst: 1:30am, its desultory
air space: foot scrapes foot and in a way a woman has
a son & isn't abashed to sound it out: a son. Soon!
Whose losing gets mentioned? Several pages of an
article, making a clearer solution (mentioned that), this parabolic
exactitude (leaving a concrete or abstract phrase—
beginning a new line afresh) on an unused pad. Wylan is
attendant, and Sue—along with others. He remarks her
camisole. The park too was extraordinarily strange: trees fizz so
that their green leaves move and
we crossed the green lawn, the newly painted green seat
near the bandstand rotunda. The pages of that
magazine flew open in the breeze. Prospectively, noise near and about
did not enhance or detract
this emotional climate, bearing articulate and earthbound,
not avoiding any of their gestures, her gestures, his frame.
It missed a 'p' or an 's'—somesuch. AP borrowed a book
to compose a review, over him, to write these words, lovely
to listen and breathe them, lovely too to have bare feet
press on this carpet square with a specular
ornature. Come over. A book lies—
open, shut. Parentheses to contain the night air. Sparks light
the night and garden. She said, you, you are a man, I
love that in you! Her shoulder brushed against
the wall and sounded. It was the wallpaper that latterly she

considered rather plain; preferring only sunflowers that
adorn the garagewall at Jays;
there were these Japanese paper-cut figures with hair tied in
bandeau fashion
or sumos' bobbed, shining hair

+

Inkling of something Mother Teresa spoke of that's heard
a jumbo or 767 sound, this reception filled, with lips hardly brushed.
Lat. *frāgrāre*—are souls! One man's soul's ten thousand, others are
sent reeling and talismans spill on the floor
of the herbarium: down to the blue underfelt.
The pope's visit, white gowned, the dimple skullcap—spongy humanism where
men rehearse in trees
of the domain, suited, sunglassed. The meaning
of mass. Pope, Pompeii, a joint. 'On the health farm
in Swanson, the bobbycalf with its purple tongue suckled her hand
until Anna's squealed she might lose it: a rough cup.'
We are free particles. Green spikenard: thousands literally
have thought nothing of it: everybody in their houses; everybody
with spouses, stoves, dogs, finches; somehow the lion's gotten the
Commodore: put a Swedish accent on it and be a technical programmer
if you've the aptitude; medical programming and a degree (Hons)
and a penchant for sun, green surf, Steinlager.
A first visit &: once and then, a time and motion exercise

+

the one I do not push I
by both legs, two, two arms, straps link two shoulders,
round the diaphragm and a traverse,
fine. Have you coughed or consoled recently? There is one mood
for gentleness... the word wood
and others of your ilk and gender. To
intercept you speak to these and they
dissemble: clover lawn. To cover: and the yellow stool, your feet
rested up on it. You should be aware
the ledges are grey against white
every line that that outside is all there is to be had.
Ah! quoits, prankishness! Contact is deliberate rift &
settling a line, or take it elsewhere. What you have not given
in giving, have I induced in you—?—

+

what have words of this makesense? Brush your lashes
the cabbage tree whose leaves narrowly tinker, whatever
was thought, it's what's said! the globe the light takes upon itself
existing solely there.
Having read it it becomes perfect. I made it, see. There now!
Held together with glue perhaps, or a bond that
links them—only paper jointed. Or that words. The point to be made
for the other, like inflection, like the yellow nightlight—
emit further, empty and roofless

a roof steep up to where it was formerly
paperthick / paperthin

+

a sparrow, two, two hundred or hundreds, yet a shadow
down, flattened to a small plait and tapered, ruffled in appearance, &
hundreds—no, lots of hungry!, duty this morning,
interviews: gum, wattle,
white-lined indian cotton (Joe's 18in. wrists!), next
pawpaw, yellow upright ribs, scouting
tricks,
cover of cover of blue felt, fern's wristshake,
and ducks driven, over water, over garage, quack—
shaking wet, inert, brilliant, branches of leaves

+

celsius only celsius I rose
I thank you marriage license
where did I learn learn it? I have (that from) chi
passed it
in transit, Jacques—surely there the dolphin slides,
manqué rubric. bullseye over commonly
a good i.e. stolid summer's day &
I know what's said, have to.
Whitewashed straight walls too, and windows, and
a lamp—a hand cupped over it

a way of forgoing the long steep

& black insignia

of what makes quartet so much? French vistas and Moroccan vases

strictly commensurate

that this is (for that) matter of the fact (tab)

budget

AMISH

Woman she is at her side, back, and a window.

Who eats in the middle of the night?—(lower) Amish, Or it's fine
coffee, after milking (as it were) from the cows, wet grass,
surrounding puffs of breath or patter of voices in early morning—
starting the car with or without the battery discharge, with blankets
left on the line balancing breeze...

She has a net of white over a back portion of her head,
white straps over the shoulders, dressed otherwise in black.

A light in the hayloft, stop the car (it seems), a
couple dancing, humming a tune in a foreign
tongue, another one, cursed music, curses the man—

In a close community, close and close double. We cannot be
seen at worship together: the beard is a special infuguration
like the colour purple, a radiance or filter of radiance

Surprising channel it was something interpolated
the mind gathers (this) in. Often the same. For ll
the impressions forced at th her eye

there was no suffering or overexposure: a compound non-lasting
of impressions, white suited, say anything—

I do not know what panama hats—boaters?—it is a
sports day, vital men, equal teams on both sides at Orewa
and pulling on the sand—but it is only the sideframe of a building,
nogs neatly packed, and a sense of having achieved it as a
team, ropes, white shirted, braced, lemonade and a
hammer. Men passing a glass one to another. The women

attend to the refreshments, the faucet, the supply of affection, steep, giddy—goosefeather back of her wrists and neck's side—ventured glances. Severe, love is severe, under skies. White tablecloths embroidered by black skirted women of deep and abiding and proven affection. Amis. Something needs for it to be held its own: something under lanterns stronger than (cracking) lightning. He washes the foot with a sponge (*ponge*); her foot; her arms; her breast; they call it honourable and interpolate. But there is absolute and this passes itself on, forthwith, focused. Certain things move certain things, in discretion, but things change. It is not a standard only the pressing of breasts, acquire eyes. Something to express love thru chickenwire and over chicken scatter. Someone said in the line of duty and it meant death and death *passim*. Men's wispy grey beards lift in the breeze: blood on the face is blood on the face whether it is enemy or friend, it strings itself out whatever equipment. If the word does in their garden activities or weathercocks. A man leaves, he leaves. Her downcast eyes are also leaves falling, in a large room, sunlight shedding itself within the room and she drops what was a hood or veil or both and joins him at dusk. Of strange resolution, these sudden bursts of understanding. He is of them, with them, for them. It is real, it is not destined. As big as pines are, or pine presence. Factual singing, I have no more reimbursed, because it is closer to one. Innocent men and women. Or singing hymnlike, a reassuring look and a faint smile, the milk sent spilling on the path

just before he left. He grabs the boy, sends him off:
Run, Samuel! Run! Dawn, light at low levels. Rifles with
quick action butts, finger spots. The fresians black and white
move aside or along to accommodate; drawn out; the
agony of sensing and waiting, wide broken eyes, corn funnelling
down for Fergie to reap by. With impunity, only moves when she
is there—as beautiful a description of violence as there
le bell rings. The boy
The girl has a revolver held to her head while the men bicker
Others arrive—of peace, on the grass tracks. Blue shirts.

WHITE GLOVES INC.

Wonderful gesture (pleasure) and pictures somebody leaving.
Wonderful exact!
A wonderful rifeness (for him)—go!
Your volkswagon, the dirt road and dust back of your ass outo' here.
In its wake a former suitor crosses back.

Envoy

In preference to an earlier review of Missing Parts (1992), the one included here is of the even more impressive Envoy (1996).¹ While the former represents Loney's initial embrace of language-writing proper, the latter is chosen (and placed in this earlier chronological position) because for me it better represents Alan's full maturity as a poet. Also, I prefer the celebratory tone and the feeling of fellowship in this review.

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Alan takes considerable care to clarify the rubric. On the title page he lists the various dictionary meanings of 'envoy', and he ends by explaining in the final poem that these are 'dedications; signs of debt, allegiance, argument, and confession'. It's a rubric of some solemnity, but as the reading progresses we see it is also much more than this.

This is the book of Alan's measured utterances over the memory of those now dead who have somehow affected or moved him deeply. They form a rather unlikely bunch, some known personally to the poet and some not, most unnamed; included are historical and contemporary figures, obscure and famous, Aotearoan and not, male and female (mostly male), writers and non-writers. In my initial reading I have found that it is not that simple a matter to identify the individuals, or even to be confident that each poem represents a specific individual. I'm sure I miss much, although I do recognise a number of quite significant literary quotations that are worked into the texts, and some people, including Ursula Bethell, John Cage, a friend 'George', William Dunbar (where the piece is made up of glossary entries to the medieval *makar's* poems: or so I learn from Alan), and Alan's own father. Suffice it to say that the relationships are affective rather than descriptive; the process of identity has been taken beyond a mere naming of names.

And as much as any supposed obscurity reflects my own inability to unpick the traces (as does the fact that much relates to what we term strictly private experience and thereby remains virtually untraceable without Alan's own biographical information), I nonetheless find that the accomplished texturing of phrase and reference cajoles rather than disturbs. Beyond the near liturgical formality of these 'invocations', it strikes me that Alan is being quite cheeky and playful.

¹ See reviews of Loney's *Missing Parts, Poems 1977-1990* (Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1992), in *Landfall* 184 (December 1992), pp. 493-95, and of *Envoy* (Auckland: Puriri Press, 1996), in *A Brief Description of the Whole World* 6, (July 1997), pp. 52-55.

This playfulness is beautifully offset by the formal measure and constraint of the poems. The lines move one to the next, boustrophedon-like, with the not-to-be-waylaid steadfastness of the 'ox-ploughing left to right, right / to left, letters overlapping in sound, in soil'. More than a series of discrete posthumous tributes, Alan's voice keeps washing up against itself, thickening, dropping off as it picks up, kept full as much with the moving and manner of itself as with the details of the person who serves as the ostensive subject, addressed typically as 'you'. There is an absolute regularity of formal composition. Each line is made up of eight words, each poem of 13 lines ('our baker's dozen'), the start and end of which fall equidistant from the centre of the line; there are 25 poems in total (one human generation's worth; or two baker's dozens or an alphabet's worth less one). The pieces seem not to formally open or close (no caps, no stops), as one might have expected had they been written as formal portraits or dramatic depictions, which clearly they are not. We seem rather to find ourselves carried from one piece to the next, the voice not closing off or shifting but carrying through in the same way that two voices talking together are distinct yet share the same space. It is as if the very constraint of the form used intensifies the sense that the poems won't be held in, what's in them is like an emanation, everywhere filtering out through the lines that simultaneously lose nothing of their rigour. As mentioned, each composition incorporates something of the person the memory of whom matters to Alan: in the case of Bethell, the piece revolves round the very delicate balance of her own 'fugitive, I am very fugitive' and the contrasting, immensely solid word 'established'. Cage is represented in a piece in which the first letters of successive words in each line spell out j-o-h-n-c-a-g-e: 'Journey on, happy noticer; cracked a generation's ear').

The relationships are alternately open or closed, sometimes both at once. Take the piece addressed to Alan's 'father':

again the river, twenty years later. Bush, forts,
fantasy, without clear love of Nature, but tracks
well worn to the stony bedded water. Then
I stood on the edge of the carpark
where the bush was cleared, and wept. Now
it's time to be done with you, father,
river, birthplace, childhood, out. Will I repeat you
for ever, or just rehash that tone's discordant
note again. The text, then, by way of
what array enlarges, so that crossing the lagoon
the mirrored gull tips wing to wing no
part of any unremembered pleasure, or tranquil restoration
of things past. Each day dawns once only

The places and activities of childhood are captivatingly evoked. Yet there's a bitter-sweet quality, suggesting the memories are emotionally troubling. There is the drag, the supplemental 'after', that stops anything from the past from wholly residing there. 'Without clear love of Nature': in the carpark, in our past and current situations, Nature is not always natural. So with the father. Throughout childhood an unquestioned presence, now in the son's middle years 'it's time to be done with you, father'. Though that 'done' means especially that – as unquestioned. The father's presence becomes a questionable ('will I repeat you for ever'); the feelings are mixed, fraught, intimacy grasps the hand of rejection. Even the oblique late allusions to Proust and Wordsworth suggest that in literature as in life separating and gathering are ever in want of each other.

So this is an endearing solemnity, excusing neither the playfulness with the seriousness nor the seriousness with the playfulness. The real tribute is Alan's showing by his skill and care his evenness in the contest with those with whom he challenges himself. In this way, too, it is a tribute to himself, to his own 'persistent, long engagement'.

More than commemorations of individuals whether obscure or not, these are out-givings and intakings, advances and returns, by which nothing is lost to either. Happening to be reading early Levinas on Heidegger, I am inclined to see *Envoy* in terms of that same enquiry. Alan's becomes an asking into individuality and separateness, into an existence that self-defines by its very conditions (impinged on by others and other-ness) and as such is not abstractable beyond the kinds of engagements that occur. These are addresses to those who will not hear or consider, at least not with the benefit reserved for Alan the speaker or the over-hearing us. As *as if* inadvertent colloquies they challenge us to participate in the constitution of an individuality that is held deliberately open.

As with Heidegger, this amounts to more than a matter of heightened consciousness. Distance, detachment, are finally between people only figurative. We are involved in a defining (always unresolved) that is so only in the process of its occurring. Heidegger terms this 'dereliction', and it does carry the sense of negation and passivity suggested by that term. At risk of veering away too far, let me draw in two brief quotations (again Levinas on Heidegger, 1932):

For the peculiarity of Dasein [being right-there]... consists in existing in such a way that its quiddity is at the same time its way of being; its essence coincides with its existence and Dasein does not understand itself in its true personality but in terms of the object it handles: it is what it does, it understands itself in virtue of the social role it professes.

Thus Alan can say 'I am now the father I wanted my father to be'. And I guess we can add, and the Ursula Bethell he wants to be, and the John Cage, and the George, and so on. In this sense the love that is important and ultimately freeing is the love that means that one incorporates others. One draws breath, as it were, in terms of the other, we are in common: back and forth, boustrophedon.

The recognition given in *Envoy* is bedded in a skilfulness, in places mutual, in the making that is *poiesis*. While in this brief review I have wanted to indicate as best I can Alan's skill and his rectitude, this is something I am hardly able to do adequately. These are poems he has written, dexterous, unerring and eerily beautiful, among his best as they are among the best of their kind in Aotearoa. It's like quoting Alan to Alan, but here goes:

he utters an old Greek coin. The rite
springs upon him, not to cogitate, but to
perform, poetics as the art of work yet
to be done, resisting, on a resistant order.
What will the past give you. Is kinship
that your psalms will blurt these tears only
at that chronologically secondary manifestation of any act
of discovery. All these disunited fragments will both
bombard you and slip away, the stock unhampered
play abandoning the stock felt phrase. No doubt
the sharp intake will register the breath, variously,
and 'where the spirit wills'. Bite on it.
The gift of chance is all around you

I have been fortunate enough to have worked from a pre-publication version of the text. It intensifies the public intimacy that reading is to witness. Another point I should note is that the text has been carefully illustrated by Mark Wills, Alan's son — 'the father I wanted my father to be'. This brings me to a final point that I don't think I've mentioned, and that is the tenderness suggested by such collaboration that also shows everywhere in these poems.

Language Poetry: Poetry Language

'Language Poetry' owes its existence to my since-deceased friend Wali Hawes, a talented potter inspired by his experiences in Spain and Japan, not to mention in India where he was raised, and a late-arriver at the doorstep of contemporary poetics. I had been active with others on the Poetics List out of the University of Buffalo from the mid-1990s, as well as in the local writers group in Nagoya, and decided to write an explanation piece for Wali (and incidentally to satisfy the publication expectations at Aichi-Gakuin University, where I was employed from 1994 to 1998). It takes a single poem from Charles Bernstein, joint founding-editor with Bruce Andrews of the magazine L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, and relates it to the facts of daily living in Tokyo, or anywhere else where one is ensconced in one's skin along with one's various preoccupations.¹

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Language, as it comes to us, is a fraught inheritance. Tied to expectations of straightforwardness, clarity of intention, humane exchange, of delivering an accurate reflection of 'reality', it carries the full charge of its legacy. Traditionally it is taken to point away from itself: it represents, it deflects, it slips behind what is referred to. And usually when we speak of language, we do so in terms of the rules and borders that govern and delimit its usage – in short, its *serviceability*. We serve the language by respecting its rules in order that in turn it might serve us. So what happens to a language whose conventions, whose very borders of operation, are disrupted?

Among writers today, there is a small group of so-called language poets that is doing some exciting work across the borders that traditionally have contained (constrained) our language practice. What follows is the briefest of introductions to this important writing and some of the more immediate implications.

Language writing (prose-poetry distinctions quickly fold) is that writing which explores the very making-process of our language and questions the limits of its use. Our usual assumptions – that its primary purpose is to facilitate a communication (verbal or written) between persons that is essentially coherent, logical, informative, purposeful and so on – are not so much challenged as conflated onto a flat surface of unpredictable possibilities. The old hierarchical order whereby intention serves as a kind of vertical grid which intersects representation (the horizontal grid) in order to produce meaning proves largely redundant. Meaning shifts from the depth of language onto its surface (intention no longer serves as an anchor). Regard for

¹ 'Language Poetry: Poetry Language', *Foreign Languages and Literature*, Vol 20 No 1 (March 1995), Aichi-Gakuin University, pp. 101-06.

integration, wholeness, for the old safeguards of our ties with reasonability, with a coherent universe, is suspended.

For instance, Charles Bernstein's poem 'Stove's out':

There is an emptiness that fills
 Our lives as we meet
 On the boulevards and oases
 Of a convenient attachment. Boats
 In undertone drift into
 Incomplete misapprehensions, get
 All fired up inside. Altogether
 A breeze down a long bounce
 Furnishing behavior for buttons.
 A wrinkle arrests an outline,
 Streamers inquire the like of which
 Nobody in reach has any idea
 Of. Wonder to have been
 Brought there, a plastic shift
 Unseating a chiffon shock.

Here the usual play of things goes awry, it doesn't 'add up'. Instead of, as in a conventional poem, the writer setting for himself the task of finding the exact word to advance the experiential account, Bernstein sets himself the task of having each word-event in the poem align with or delineate its immediate proximities, to *feel out* its possible verbal neighborhoods and alliances. Purpose is not anterior to but is coincident with. What makes a place? What makes an experience? Is a busy Tokyo street the same place at 2pm and 5pm? What is 'Stove's out' to us beyond the place of warmth and its lack? Instead of taking us towards a central realisation, this poem instigates a position, stove's out, place of warmth and warmth's loss, center and radiating place, attachment and the arbitrariness of attachment, a fluke that right now holds our entire attention. Each word opens a route to others, or routes, nothing holds but the forging of such routes, we can only attach to things through the possibility, the necessity, of such attachments everywhere adapting and breaking into new formations, new attachments. This is the boat in the boulevard, at once concrete and a misapprehension.

I guess what I'm saying is that analysis is not the key; the more you say the more there is likely to say. Reality doesn't accede to truth but opens into its many proliferations. This is maybe Bernstein's point, that pointedness (that any disclosure) has a built-in obsolescence. So, what's the point? The point of the practice of living is that the only closure is death, meaning kills utterance. Meaning, time, and space are not

found *in* language but are made *out of* it. This is the poetry of open passage that (for those who worry) has a strong sense of social engagement. It means undertaking poem, job, relationship, whatever, within the very unclosedness of attachment, to acknowledge that the value of these discrete, purposeful and – yes – fond involvements has no ultimate leverage beyond the strength of their actual taking place. This, if you like, is the kind of love that gives without expecting return. It comes closer to allowing us the experience of the virtuality of our language, our own most prized heritage, without surrendering a focus and activity that is precisely situated.

Zen Piece

Here narrative and poetic criticism combine. Wystan Curnow had written an inspired account of a private performance event by artist couple Roche & Bois at the disused Auckland Gasworks site. My piece embraces the silent performance depicted by Wystan in my own introduction to meditative practice, in a weekend spent with colleagues at the historical Eiheiji Temple in Fukui Prefecture, Japan. Snippets from 'Night Piece' are embedded in the account. Let each speak for itself (he said).¹

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All this time I'm thinking how ridiculous this is, there has to be an easier way to wherever. I have been given no directions and though invited I feel something of a trespasser, although I have to admit this feeling can in itself be quite tantalising. On arrival, Eiheiji Temple looks forbiddingly gaunt and self-enclosed nestled amongst the mountainside cedar. Founded by Dōgen in Fukui Prefecture in 1243 to train monks in the tradition of the Sōtō Sect of Zen Buddhism, it continues to be a major institution known for its rigorous ascetic discipline. And here we are, following in the founder's footsteps, a group of university colleagues stepping outside of our secular concerns for a day, stepping for an interval inside these austere walls.

Guided inside, we remove our shoes and are ushered into a reception area where one of the blackrobed monks greets us and has us rehearse the three hand positions that we will use during our sittings, reminding us also of the rule of silence that applies anywhere outside of the overnight quarters. It feels an odd role to be assigned. Already I see that for each this is an experience that is to be had alone, a performance we must individually undertake, and things have gone too far to even think about turning back. There is no opportunity, for now, to tour the place, maybe later. I expect ruins, instability, but inside there is mostly evidence of the restored original monastery. I notice modern lighting, an elevator, air-conditioning vents.

16 men – the women sleep elsewhere. We drop our overnight bags in a room about six by four metres square, remove our socks (a rare but welcome throwback to New Zealand), don track pants and white t-shirts, and then the appearance of the

¹ As well as being about the Zen experience it recounts, it is no less *about* my friend Wystan Curnow's 'Night Piece' (first published in *Parallax* Vol 1 No 2 in Summer 1983 and included in Alex Calder's *The Writing of New Zealand* in 1993), from which it takes assorted phrases and sentences, its narrative form, and in some sense its eyes and ears. Entanglement, yes, but doesn't that suggest a shared place of meeting for us all? 'Zen Piece', *Printout* 10 (Auckland: Printout Group, Summer 1995-96), pp. 13-18.

blackrobed monk calling us to the prayer hall.

First meditation. Standing outside the prayer room, on the slate surface, one monk lights an incense stick while another slides open the door. Inside, the incense is placed before the small elevated Buddha figure just beyond the entrance and dim lights flicker on; the scent spreads, dense, vague. What's this? Near knee height there's a platform or stage about a metre deep that runs around the perimeter of the large room, as well as on either side of the thin partition that divides it. *Zazen*: sitting meditation. I am directed to a position in front of a black pouf-like cushion which is situated at the centre of a metre-square of tatami mat. A small white tag, *kanji* characters inked on it, faces me. We're given instructions on the position to assume. Mutual bows. Take the cushion, pump it by slapping, place it down, sit on it and rotate to face the wall, blank and expansive. Check the white tag faces out. Fold legs in lotus position, soles up. Head straight, eyes directed 45° downward, lids easy. Form hands in the prescribed third position, fingers overlapped with the right hand on the outside and thumbs touching, in front of the lower belly, forming a fisheye. First performance. Narrow the eyes, anyway sight here seems useless, except for that which I use peripherally to check on my immediate neighbours, only to realise that that will not present me with a way in. For a while I am afraid there is actually no access point. We must find, or make, our own. For a minute or two the physical sensations, with the feeling of my own aloofness, are pleasant enough. But then the contortion takes hold, my left leg becoming lifeless below my knee and a feeling in the stomach that will not be easily assuaged. It takes a lot to keep from panicking.

Thwack! Not *my* shoulder – someone else's. Later it is explained that, should one wish to be eligible for such surveillance, one takes the option of joining the hands before one's face, position one. Apparently one of our number has assumed *this* position, must have twitched somehow, and is first lightly touched so that he bends forward then is struck firmly once across the shoulder. In my listening outside myself I hear the shuffle of the monk's sandals, bringing in the outside, and at that moment I feel the same jolt. What a strange and unlikely single audience he is, I think to myself, to this unlikely portrayal. And I'm sure it's not *me* he's observing. This session my mind is meshed in my own physical anguish. Also, as Mac (a colleague and computer technician with that nickname) later explains, usually the person struck in this way indicates apology and thanks, before resuming his singular station. And from the film we watch together in the evening the image that remains with me is of the monk with the wooden *kyōsaku* raised in front of his body as he glides along the rows of robed bodies lining his way.



Our quarters is the only place where we can relieve our silence and on our return this is exactly what we do. Then a warm, soapy shower while squatting or sitting on low plastic stools, followed by a plunge in the steaming communal tub. Strange, the *most* intimate view I have of the Japanese body and in a place where the body seems oddly remote and vacated. And of course, silence, silence as the restricted domain in which we meet and exchange.

Dinner: brown miso soup with chunks of tofu and seaweed, more fried tofu, a few beans and carrot slices, eggplant prepared in sesame oil with another vegetable, followed by a dessert of a small triangle of jelly with a slice of kiwifruit (*kiwifruit!*), a crackly biscuit which tastes terrific, and a quarter orange. The monks apparently eat no meat or fish, and traditionally only rice in the mornings, small servings at that. This is saying something about the appetites, our bodies. Underlined by the fact that, throughout the meal and the leading monk's words spoken before and after, some 200 guests filling the dining hall must kneel on a strip of red carpet that covers the wooden floor. Standing up is extremely awkward. At the end I am pleased to be ushered out, with the others, to return to the room – our single place of withdrawal where we can relax and the body can adopt any position it chooses (within the terms of social etiquette).

In the evening a second *zazen*, in which I allow my body to assume what it considers to be a more comfortable posture. Any such notion, however, is within two or three minutes proved baseless. At the same time, not so apprehensive about making the smallest movements it takes to allow my body to briefly be relieved, I start to enjoy some feeling of spaciousness.

My feelings about this as a kind of mute performance begin to change. Others are here too, of course, but we're not going to say 'hello'. There's something happening notwithstanding. Have I just caught my first glimpse of it, something that involves a kind of seeing that's not merely *looking*, a performance to do with space and perception itself? As if, in our own vastness however separated, we are constantly and unavoidably aware of one another, an overlapping or communication – a disarming maybe – which makes itself available in another way. Consciousness is more than just opening one's eyes. The hall is a place which makes being in it difficult and it seems it may have been chosen for that reason. The size, the 'dangers' it presents, the feeling of being not quite legitimately or even wittingly here, of being somehow inside the thing you're wanting to observe.

Later there is an hour's talk from a senior monk. He makes a joke about our degree of discomfort. The rest I don't understand. Then the film: *Eiheiji through the seasons*, snow piled on the steep roof of the temple gate, the monks' daily routine, the eerie beauty of the sprawling temple halls themselves. At 9pm we are on our futons and immediately asleep.

3am. No smiles – was that a gong? Folding, tidying our white futons, the blue edged sheets, the red quilts. Washing our faces in the wash room. Later I think I notice one of the young monks smile. Another takes us to the hall for a third *zazen*. Shorter, nearer 25 minutes, and some sense of the large expansive realms that are there, to be sure. Towards 5am we are led up a series of stone and wooden steps and long corridors, up the side of the mountain toward the large hall where the monks make morning prayers. Several of them flurry about the rear and front altars, arranging, placing smouldering incense bowls. The wooden roof beams are massive. The front altar is tiered, laden. There are great golden chandeliers hanging from the roof, flower shapes, lanterns. Once we have our places, the monks begin to file in from either side. First the younger blackrobed ones, then several older monks in brown; order is only apparent when they stop, forming a number of straight rows on either side of the altar. Finally, a monk enters in a white robe with a saffron one over it and another piece of red cloth draped to the side, carrying a small crooked wooden stick. In pairs we are led up, hands joined before our faces elbows out, and bow deeply before the altar. Meantime, throughout, the monks chant, a low sonorous growl, reminding me

of the Gregorian chants I occasionally listen to. Sutra recitation? One lets the words be just sounds. Every morning the same ritual occurs, lasting perhaps hours. As we file out to commence our tour of the temple site, the sun is rising.

Currently there are about 420 monks housed in the complex, while up to 1,000 are catered for: stays are for up to three years, before a monk returns to his home temple. We view the school room, the room for the priests' study, the special temple which houses the remains of the founder and his successors. This wooden building is 200 years old. The kitchen temple, dedicated to the god of speed (encouraging the service monks to deliver the food with suitable alacrity); the temple with the remains of the ancestors' ashes, thousands of little black and gold tablets, rooms within rooms; down the steps leading to the entrance gate, flanked by the fiercely grimacing gods of protection – the gate's guards. Only the monks may pass through, and then only twice, once on arrival, once again on completion of their stay. Interspersing the spaces that separate the corridors and buildings are cedars as much as six or seven hundred years old, their foliage appearing after several meters of upright, slender trunks. Sunlight and mist gather in the lower branches. Finally we are shown the bathroom where, we



are told, the monks bathe only on their days off, that is every day of the month which has either a number 4 or 9 in it. Though right now, due to the extreme temperatures of the summer, the monks may do so daily. Water is used sparingly. Years ago, when the physical deprivation was greater, it is said that the monks would place hot stones against their bellies to quell the hunger pains. In the hallway, where there's a painting of the temple complex, we are shown how it has been arranged to represent the figure of the Buddha, with structures representing the head, elbows, hands joined in prayer, knees, and so on. The building that represents the heart of the Buddha, and so the heart of the entire complex, is the Temple of the Buddha. Unfortunately, the Hall of Pictures is under reconstruction, so we are unable to see its historical and other artifacts. I feel somewhat overwhelmed in any case, maybe it'd be hopeless trying to explain.

On the bus trip home I fall asleep, expecting we will follow the same route that we took getting here. But when I awake, about 30 minutes into the journey of four hours, I am looking to the west over the Sea of Japan. It's stunningly beautiful, blue, calm water, blue sky, grey angular rocks. So clear, it reminds me of home and it is the first occasion on which I have had the chance of such a view of the Japanese coastline. During the following week when I speak of my excitement to a Japanese friend, he inquires whether I had a chance to view the Tōjinbō rocks, which are on the Fukui coastline. I report that I had not, and I listen as he tells me a little of the history. It appears it is well known as the place from which Japanese will leap to end their lives. The cliffs are high, with rough seas beneath, so that often the body is never recovered. There is a small sign to the left of the jump point admonishing those who might be contemplating such an action to please reconsider. My friend tells me that typically on the rock nearby a written note is left, typically too the abandoned shoes are left neatly arranged. Why, he counters when I raise my eyebrows, should one change what is after all a deeply ingrained cultural habit of orderliness just because this final action cannot be undone? The detail does jar a little, seemingly at odds with the drastic nature of the event – somehow it feels at odds too with the Eiheiiji experience. Of course, there is the same fastidiousness with outward form as a measure of intention, and maybe other connections. Anyway, I include Michiaki's explanation. It's as if what matters, what finally matters, is not so much our establishing firm identities as our attending to how our various parts are to be most usefully performed.

How-or-Whether New Poems MEAN

This piece was written in Japan and originally accepted to appear in the online magazine taproot (USA).¹ It was an interesting prospect to write in a somewhat circuitous manner about two innovative New Zealand poets for an American audience, and I take this chance to express appreciation to editor Luigi-Bob Drake. However, taproot folded and as a result the two poets were repatriated. The four pages referred to is the limit placed on invited contributors to *A Brief Description of the Whole World* by founding editor Alan Loney, coincidentally one of the two subject poets of the review. The piece wishes to do two things: to express enthusiasm in a manner that's called for and to insist that things that matter do not take on the extra burden of having to.

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(a) I am not setting out to resolve anything. In any case I don't consider language or poetry to be about resolution as such, although something ties both to life; as are we, so are they active. Hence poetry's *acuity*.

(b) Because, of course, meaning is an indeterminacy except when it is used in a fixed practical application, such as fitting a round peg into a round hole: equal roundness is required. Otherwise, meaning is *a posteriori*, mediated, not originating but constructed. That is why poems are so interesting as forms. But, also, because poems are not to do with communication as we normally understand it.

© The charge of excessive resistance to interpretation made against these poetic texts (see Stafford et al, *New Zealand Books*, Sep '94-) is defensive and more than anything else reflects the intellectual intransigence (one doesn't say *regression*) of those who make the charge. It amounts to the past insisting on its right to judge the future. Moribund discourse: *critical miasma*.

(d) These two quite different books catch my interest. Beyond the local linkage, it is the beautiful grasp of language that each displays, supple enough. The way they lose nothing of themselves (as writers) in the forms they work with; as too the way neither's form is lost to itself (as written). Nothing drags, sticks out, makes one think the writer hasn't with some prescience anticipated the range of possible readings that

1 'How-or-Whether New Poems Mean', *A Brief Description of the Whole World* 3 (June 1996), ed. Alan Loney, Auckland, pp. 62-65. The books considered are Loney's *The erasure tapes* and Michele Leggott's *DIA*, both published by Auckland University Press in 1994.

a phrase or a piece might attract. And I don't mean within only a single reading. I mean that each anticipates multiple readings, from multiple standpoints.

(e) Nor am I simply on these writers' side, whatever that might mean. And anyhow we don't usually talk much about the content or concerns of our writing and reading of poetry in *that* way, do we, really. (Except maybe in the classroom; and there, of course, the purpose is otherwise.) Poetry isn't thought, isn't enhanced communication. Not that it wants or needs to be either. But, then, even what I am *misgiven* by these two writers I still somehow get.

(gee) (Each is involved in a deliberate undoing, a deconstructing of received forms and conventions – although I do have a lingering reservation that each may in part also risk its own undoing: perhaps *moreso* in Michele's case, but more on that to come.)

(i) They are not *expressing* themselves, for there are too many other things, other voices, to be considered. It is my reading of them and of others before and during them of which they speak – they know what it is that I almost cannot help but notice; they know *how* I read. And in this matter I am just like you. And yet they connect me and these other things through their own text as contained yet entirely referential, sensate fictions.

(j) So what do I mean, risk their claims? A dash of disingenuity here, I wonder – although it is perhaps something that is endemic in poetry. Alan's subversion of the autobiographical mode, his refusal 'to tell the story of my life', is true in the sense that he doesn't use the continuous narrative form, chops back and forward in time, alternately telescopes or distances details without a sense of proportion or accumulation: these together with other aspects show his refusal to perpetuate the received form. Yet it is still Alan, the same Alan, all beautifully, exactly Alan. The life-source remains verifiable (Alan Brunton mocks at this in his *Lf190* review): the oncestuttering, 'lopped... fingers' professional printer, father-with-son Wellingtonian, the recuperating poet who surprises himself weeping 'like a frightened child' in front of the McCahon Gate Series – surely, all Alan. Yet beyond the scrambled life events, the recuperation of words, phrases, memories that seemed once erased (as under the angelic white ribbon of the typewriter), coalesce Alan's characteristic practice as a poet. His movement forward by detail, the terse parsings, tightness of linguistic attention, the telltale '&'s and 'thru's, especially the fact that the writing is not immediately penetrable, that it continues via its own insistence to resist easy access, comprise its

singularity. Its strength annoys me, I love it. It cares for itself, I like that. It doesn't much care about me; I (kind of) like that. And it is a wonderful offering. What it is. Focused and near humourless in its fixity, not imposing but demanding attention – and in that demand insisting on its quality as reading, reading here meaning *meaning*.

(k) Michele's almost opposite. Cares for herself, variously decipherable; a constant permeation, enter here, exit there, enter, exit. Over there, go. But then the feeling is exquisite, the care for affection, the pride in having and having had it. Unabashed wholeness, wholesome. Seems to care what I make of it, or perhaps not me, but another anyway.

(l) These two writers may or may not agree with the viewpoint expressed here. That is not my concern. So on with meaning.

(M)ichele: this is more than an obvious care for her sons, her husband, the community of those she cares for (in particular the neglected Aotearoan women poets). As Alan sets about to trouble the received autobiographical mode, Michele sets about 'investigating' and 'rewriting the androcentric history' of love-telling and masculine-centred sexually ecstatic formations. I say 'disingenuous' advisedly because for me the greatest enjoyment to be had from her text is the way that she is able to render herself in terms of these historical mouthings (i.e. forms), whose supreme elegance she perhaps alone among us can best match. The reservation I feel is that at the time of the writing the disputed androcentric conventions appear already in our historical setting to have been substantially feminised (am I right?). I somewhat miss and want more sense of historical differentiation. The 'ventriloquism' of the seven voices is insufficiently distinct from the panoply of the one voice, and the suppleness of that voice as much compli/ements as it complicates or corrupts the tradition it stealths among.

(en) She has not done what Pound did with Li Po or the Provençal poets, or what Williams did with Watteau's slipper (two poets suggested in 'Blue Irises'). The wonder of the tradition that she enquires into is, among other things, cocksuredness, its splendid indulgence in eloquence.

(ouf) Yet she does somehow get right inside the received form = shares it with those who would never think to share it with a woman *as a form*. As if it was always *their* prerogative, *their* tradition. And she carries it off with grace, tipping the usual assumptions off the surface that now is occupied with an updated language and an easefulness of sensuous speaking identity.

(p) I note that both writers sign their texts prominently with their given proper names. This, together with the University Press insignia and polished poetry formats, help preserve the convention of an assumed authorial autonomy. This sign/ing is, at least notionally, exclusive. It speaks as an ownership of the materials that come under its claim, as if otherwise non-recoupable.

(q) I guess it's the confabulation I especially admire in our poetry. It's a deadly serious business (why else do people make such a prize of it, behave so rapaciously), yet it amounts to nothing. I am speaking about this particular delivery of poetry into the small (elite?) intellectual/art community. Poetry, the world, do not ultimately need or serve each other. That is poetry's charm, its allure. *Brilliant negation*.

(r) Difference is, the poetry is much more mobile. I press, it moves; I move back, it approaches. Something in it pisses me off, suddenly it smiles and says something else. As I tire of the visual suggestion of a phrase or line, it dissolves into a sound or sounds, then into pure intellection, the pleasure of having a thought transmute in the brain, the little washes of chemical that come with that. *Brilliant negation*. This is more than polysemy.

(s) There's no reason why we cannot, as John Cage and Jackson Mac Low have shown decades back, determine certain operations (chance or otherwise) by which others – our students, machines (*arrgh!*) can compose and be named as *our* poets.

(t)he world. Poetry *poems* (verbalism). The very thing is that its importance, as I have said before in regard to Alan's work, is always only maybe. That's its attraction.

(u) Writers (we know) write about writing. The poetry community, while astonishingly tiny, stretches across much of the English-speaking world, it reaches me and others here in Japan; it is the people who publish, sell, read or read about, comment on, respond to the texts (actively or as usefully passively). It is this community to do with writing that matters. Out of its history, into its history. There are other better ways to 'improve' the world. Neither book (dare I say) elicits in me a new perspective on the world. I don't take that to be their job. Other media, especially nowadays, when intellectual and social practice is becoming increasingly technologically radicalised, have demonstrably greater capacity for political and social impact.

(v) The value of things that are understood is that they can be catalogued for later

reference, retrieval. The value of poems is their dubious usefulness, their failure to catalogue. And that is very difficult when they cannot but conform to being part of an historic traffic – they too bear their embedded markings. But while they are inseparable from their time instance, it does not exhaust them. I feel their pleasure as a now, while not forgetting. So, what have I just said, is that poetry?

(w) You cannot live other visions, others' visions. Tonight I'm watching a Fred Frith video, something Inga got copied. He too talks about present communities, despite his ideals, views of Tokyo, teeming junk with rivers through it: this is marvellous. So, Alan's and Michele's visions, they are not what I take, not what I need to take to live more fully or at least as fully as I can. So, why read. More than just to be pleased; that could come easier from elsewhere. If I didn't write poetry, would I read it. Life is rich. But that does not diminish what's going on. The richest part includes what's missing.

(y) It will have been noticed that this is not much by way of an extrapolation or paraphrase of what's said or intimated in the poems. Such contribution remains to be made; as, to be sure, we each make anyway according to our own best means. Otherwise why read?

(zz) *Bibliographia, retaining Decorum:*

Citing review texts, publisher etc., referring to the writers by name (even if by first-names), sticking to prescribed four pages limit (that took care of *f, h, x*), displaying some familiarity with contemporary poetic and critical issues, balancing (wanting to) praise and misgiving, taking the role of representing literature on behalf of an implied intelligent informed wider reading community, signing off with the integrity of my own proper name; viz: DR JOHN GERAETS. *Other conventions may have been flouted.* During the final rechecking (another convention) of the draft I am enjoying Chris Knox on CD and rereading Derrida's 'Signature Event Context'. Amazing how writing thinking writing thinking, indeed so.

from *Sanage Adventure Field, Linemen, Japan, 1995*



'Wind' Shodo artist Shigeko Yasuda

Sequential Involve

A coin is
a savoured thing, often
garnered.

A group is
a state of mind
and a state of mind is a prayer.

The effect is
devolved, past the
chorus birds,

termed cumulative.
In lines
the trees adorn the boulevard.

Milton
appreciated this,
mulling these lines:

—yesterday, was a place of thought. Memories got caught there. Sounds they
may have heard, or get to when he could follow only once: new directions
written on the cuff or a pocket sewn in. Yes sure

when a complete lucidity is achieved you will hear the sound of a bell.

—he forgets about it, and how
appearance alters things.

Relationships' relationship.
If I said makeup
she couldn't in her shorts she sat up.

The only thing hidden
is the bowl. Of all
book issues whereupon

no kinder things exist.
There can always be themes.
Instead he's saying

—he's a strange guy, so what. She, she'd watch, she'd say, she'd be home by
lunch. But the lettuce, crackly again. It's the best world, the end one, close
by's much sharper. Or shaped, its mouth pressed against a face that's eaves-
dropping. Say yes, I like that. The words are in the front hip by the pocket.
Who'd have pressed the notebooks, that said

—what convinces almost never happens again—

patter she said platter. What
could it mean. We wanted to

—they're different.

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It seems mainly to be a pitch or catch the way I like Coolidge that's tempered
Gold Coast sand and *Solution Passage*. I don't forget much—

Given what was washed up on it

When you dip your finger as a test

In a bottle with a label on it.

The morning wasn't spoiled. What was under the roof? The chair touched

the carpet at all four. Each recognised that she'd retained the furniture, as a dispersal. Keeping the same nook. Colours are a sum of the biggest violence.

This is not a wainwright.
It is modeled intimacy
where the temperature's
intimacy too, is modeled:

Because even given the sides.
Intimacy is a tree beyond the ranch.
Something you don't want exactly
there.

The sea is no sea in all Japan.
Water remains intact.
Language makes spreading.
The often soften

—catchier. I never started it. I never fared. He was on the road trip north,
past the Whananaki turnoff where the oranges roil and burn. Round the hill.
The track winds. The estuary settles right back. A rabbit withdraws between
grasses. And Mary had a cancer. Where you mark

an effort
marks the sum
to turn the table
increases pleasure

whitewashes your sheet
and pillow, and hopes
to spare, because already
at the plain, unless things

more often occur.
You'd tinker.
A branch across the bay
you intended.

It's a problem that
circumstances flout
convention. So breaks?

—can't firm the line of a beach.
In a large house, what's continuity.
What is continuity, anywhere?
A tree base, a garden
on which acceleration stands
to commit ownership. This
puts the house back on the beach. I have
always admired convention

—that’s mindful. Who could occupy you, interest you in talk.

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Thug Sentences: I Sentences

In what makes copy
what’s happening.
It could be just falling
copying what’s eventually rid
of attention. When
they entered those, opened upon
making various easier
occurs in winter
once the ships were in.

Hillary’s teeth’s a wringing pair. Like that’s melanin based. Strode to give
upward thrust, not liquidate, which brings about. Just the making of situations
in them. My rooms are. The word *clist* is outlawed, only tutorial. I’m moving
a part, but this must be our own

play of systems—
things merely downgraded
from nape to neck.
Told, retold. You've nothing against
quality in learning

with recourse didn't happen near the border
engineered but having engineered
it was that effort
that that man who went to Rotorua when

—light things touch the edge of the throat and dissolve there. I smile at
constitution. All these joins at once or sizes and I only say it whether it is right
or not and feel strongly when it is. The swimmers ply the pool's end. Where
people look forward to this brief note:

A Story:

She was visiting her friend's house when she saw a number of white but-
terflies. One of them was a dead butterfly. She was confused. 'Mother,' she
pleaded. 'Mother, I want to keep—

—this butterfly. Can I, please?’ Her mother replied yes of course, but she must take care of it even when it was dead. ‘I’ll do as you ask,’ the girl acquiesced.

‘Once upon a time there lived a queen and—

innocent belt. Marble rise
that girls call close by.
The centre is driven past.
The star at the Inn Daiwan wanders.
Expressly this concrete under the tap.
Expressly the courtyard and the major.
If two arrived, well two would.
Of measures:

There were several loose in a long run and letting go I knew I was relieved.
Containing happens afar; she rang me back. Blood in a bowl of water. They
used a blue towel to dry it. Whenever he called the door opened and a grey
flying object, a Stetson, appeared suddenly on a brown peg to the left. This
fledgling. There—

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—station in a cradle of wooden poles,
or didn't provided
against the white gravel, where the
thin lines gather. Bamboo stretchier than
pine, each hand five fingered:

1. table with snow holes
2. than grey sea fisher poles

—rivered two to navigate down from Rick's gaze. Carpet on the floor. You
always entertain something. Hair under her armpits and every elsewhere, a
note to Sjra. Just what was not worth the trouble of surmounting

—'a princess and a king. They lived in a very beautiful diamond castle. They
gave the girl a beautiful diamond crown and she adored it. Her uncle put it
on her head and it didn't fit properly. It doesn't fit you very well does it, he
said. No, she agreed, but no one else must have it until

you looked in
my eyes you'd appreciate them.
An affliction settles it.
Who'd have believed you'd wanted something.

*Write a drawn. You can a drawn.
When made at dawn. A gull can
open its wings. Spread them too.
I never made such sticks on the
beach. Always a school picture
by them. I'm worried I can't replenish,
or hesitate. I can't slant them.
The oars are in the rowlocks. I
shouted when I was amongst them:
What a top! What a lousy shirt!*

‘—I grow big enough for it. They were polite princesses in their game and she wanted to play with Marianne, who was busy eating something. Stop eating or you will get so fat and ugly, she admonished. Well, I adore it, Marianne rejoindered. OK you won't be as pretty as

those I have always liked
and followed him or her.

There are many trees and acres and
bobby calves and moons on them.
Things given a lot of grace spread.
There is only the spreading of fingers on

the table & forces that are minuscule and don't matter.
They don't preserve traces

—that use me like that. Skinny like me. Mere nibs. A woolen hat over my eyes. And feel like one myself. You may do with it whatever one wishes. I come home covered in tuition, time intervals, like you said,

—‘you want and it serves you right! It was shiny and a new dress. I danced with the prince and I absolutely loved it. It started to rain and I saw a shooting star and I wished on it and this is what I wished: I wished it all to be true I wished everything everything everything to be absolutely true.’

And whispered, identity is the way to ground it.

The flat land is arable, closed paddocks.
Each one clothed. Each tribe
How could you ever say
correctly each one that tried.
That went without declaration, without trial.
Gosh then it's honest
my whole scholastic text.

Once you were such decent people, every one day. Yang male and the south side of the hill. Bach and Handel a pair.

There was a shiny bit down at the corner of the mouth. Unchained the door. She fell out of it laughing, being so mature—

Holy Cross Church: primer this one. It is Saturday morning. There has been a car accident. You come up the path and you are the witness. What is it that you see? What are the colours that you notice? What's happening to the panels, the doors, the scattered windscreen

—striving to be after. Unlike Stein. When we flew together into a rage. Why bushells in a white coat. When I did it sure it was on offer, on Sunday. It's worth fifty bucks. She was conveyed by it. Ha. When you joined a new club. When the hand was on

—the steering wheel (is it buckled)? Does it remind you of ice, foam perhaps on the bathwater? And who is the first to arrive? The traffic officer? What does he do on arrival? And the motorcycle, its rider? What about the little dog that was on the back seat of the vehicle? And the rug there, what do you think that was used for?

Stretched along the bench.
Billow elbows. Many felt
I would. Over the boys of rain that
consternation makes. The hair's
levity and the body's breadth.
Being ahead of such categories

the rail, keeping its distance down the stairwell. Fancy that, stare well.

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She should only have had on a short dress for our countenance. Count-n-ance
being one hour. The silly betoken love, tough on the bone. I keep an eye on
the bishop, across the

bottom. The way the fringe has a point of view. One cuckoo does not
make a spring, Lucretia. Under the glass canopy, sipping gin. I knew which
it belonged to, a single asseveration. You thought you should have known.
I love the mountains best. She fell pregnant. Everyone around one woman.
What wasn't quite so accepted wasn't honest. He said promptly. When I was
sipping something reduced. Good and bad along with the sample. I fully

support the theory, maybe it's excellent. Targeted it will work, saying yes a new one yes. When she pressed he didn't complain. Pushed one side to the other. I wish I knew it all for pages you couldn't remember. You must console yourself, with fundamental philosophy. The question is more. A couple has been successful. What they had to do was basically correct. She takes off the

region.
Pink and skin. This cable makes
happeness happen again.
Everything makes
your stance abate. The leaves
and your
gold lever
to curve iron. These days
against season, a
gopher weather. Does statement
matter. The last one
or former, previous: three
and you don't require training.
Never had
a happier fluency, lunacy. This is
appropriate to
balance the meal. The paten
is almost. Enjoy the entry
into movement:

raiment

Foundation Logic:

As far as we care
clips—cue as
pork within a makeshift
channel. Crane, turtle,
all things screened as
easily now. Iron, or the
balcony overhang on
which argument rests

an array. And it bows into
cues. Upends, now a melee
of uses. Or reason.
I tell you, a bunch of birds has
one voice. A thousand wings has
a single throat. Angels form
a choir. What is

an array? And figuring
they want to
affect the world. We

were excited this time. The birds
lifted in the trees. Like that:
it was like an end.
It was like an initiation.

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Coloured by the colour of
your contribution for whom
to drift is pleasure.

That's the way design
marks the origin of series, with another
mathematician to wed purity.

Repetition is the line of itself. How
could condition have gotten
this

—tree among trees? Energy came after sleep when she stirs. What was black
and white was only black and a fringe. With cat ears, two arches when they

worked. Eyes black stitches. A pearl between the lips. Listen to this:

viewfinder, aplanatic:

Christ is one I've met. M Christ, skipper. I

have just says Jesus just to prove

one. And it's an opening, a tube or

something that you squeeze or would

Bert Potter or Billy Graham today. I've

thought further I've studied the fact it's

logical and precious: Christ exists. A candle,

in simplicity. Christ's such, she said. It is

Christ's keeping. Slanted teeth, perhaps: you're

in use and she's a prayer. Like a tomato

relish, but still another anchor? I
wonder, what makes things stick and what
about nicotine or tissues. What, in Christ's
name, is *puristic*? *Pax*, a fish tin or
holy water font. Like *saks*, the clothes drawer. This
complicated pairing of handcuffs
persists or a stepping to one side. If I write
before the master's here, who's not?
Catachresis marks sufficient passage, an
inch above the contour of a penny arc.
Under the moon forming scapulars. One
'I give without speech marks right to
the end. Light shines and makeup lights
moving features. Esoteric I've mentioned
nothing of. Coming from New Zealand's

alright anyway. It's different at night too:
stretched in the morning and shrunken at
night, you walk into a vacuum; that's not
to say they're preferred. That's up to you. Given
the glance that's given, you must decide,

beside you

epicene

pugilist:

Is Einstein or Eisenstein a Jew or are they
both. Is Eisenstein a Jew, making rounds?
Make like Bloom, too much to totalise
whose tyranny: if you don't know

his name. In the bike, in the room, in
what it is allows one to abide. Stein, Freud,
Zuk, Bernstein &. If for Charles Jabes
allows himself to stand free, following
like trailing or being followed. Jews in
relation with Jews, renders Girard a
stalwart. I am Jew, in Christ all
pugilists, profligate Jew. Courts appeal.
A bulwark Jew. Like the sound of the
watch that has no durance. Or
everything's proxy. I am no closer than
there was. It's a possessive and an inaugural
creature, like a lecture, like a rubric. Like
the water running down the front and

back of the pitcher. Yes, like a picture,

beside you

epicene

Again begs questions without requiring them. What you trained for in Christ-church. All you do is put your name forward, right John. You join the group. Why do you do more than this (what a flaw!). Draw quickly a situation by the clock.

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What then was the centre. Or was that an insipid thing, all one'd learned to date that fault is derivative, risible, a fable? But this at least offered modest restitution, take your integrity that you were measured for—

how far depends.

And of those things mentioned
stand in eternity. 'It's so coarse

and mechanical,' was her complaint,
'like an army.' I
wanted it to balance up, writhe,
like a fish. But the weather was
against us,

—instantly, her meaning got produced, she hurried off.

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This is an animal position.
It has a quiet aptness, subtracted from
an ox and slough-
cart. Where moon drips
its light.
One Japanese lad, on the ox,
white.
If you follow, she said,
that is possession.
On his blue levis.
She said, 'What can kill
attention is knowing

that.' Like a spectator sport,
she said.

I kept watching. Monday was all the time. There is that which was in effect,
zebra-stellar. That is where I got this connection. I knew all we were. von
Sturmer's right. Zebra. Somehow it's important blinds have to. Really

vigorous

—core business, takes ten to fifteen years and she wouldn't see it sharp eyes,
when the term's tossed. Tonight the pigeons clacked. They thronged. I wish
it too often. He said he wrote Richard. Scandal wasn't anymore. Better
days ahead. I stole food. It'll be a year Friday. IT had to stop because it was
impossible. A yawn can kill you. On the water, like a chip or leaf. Or an arm.
E. Linda Clark. As has soon reinstated. These were the right steps. The warmth
of my fingers. You can't tell if it's him. Waiting over. But you could, you
could! Deals, who, so many.

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Or it seems there is a series and quick overs. To get in you'd need a bird. Land bound by other things, other emoluments. I thought, I heard a new name spoken people were alert near. Everything written has a dark side. Shark bile, if you've broken skin to make up.

On Plato:

*It takes four words.
Scribe, a penny pincher:
bare corners. A Cadillac,
yoke bears ox. Fact:
this cart, contact scores
a fairer diversity, often
convention, twenty years in
arrears. Grass clippings, numbers
be done, and done:
it was, was, indigene.*

What's aimed at is less instructive, thinking you'd be like that corner one looking over several directions.

What an achievement to spread about. I'm happy just to stay. Early in my ear.
Grey bark at the temple. A choked nose. When did you feel it. Did it worry
(hurry use) you when your fingernails scraped along the surface of the board?
Did you surrender (much) to it?

More? crept over?

It wrests a neighbourhood
bypassed for
our return. Blessed with moving
beyond the brief—

counteracts litigation
disposes measure, appeals
no end to
deliberation.

It is like a song because like
a song, the voice that's
in the song that
you hear.
And there's no scruple
you feel for. Its movement
engenders
how it begins:

what you bear in mind
as a mind as a wheel
accompaniment to
temperament.

That's how you always wanted someone turned me on as a first now I was I
wanted to say smart lips starting (as Alan) where the crime gave I said what
of the mean. And I never started living, all talk. What makes you so famous—
so *your* name. I am a link a tug that matches the river. Loney's a good man
but the only cut—made in rounds, drapes, some corner rectitude. If you can
who can. Both

—slopes inside.
True to its manner, but left
providing.
One thought as rectitude
for usual quickness, in
'flocks survive.'
Or duration or length

—real close-up I knew but the question of who betrayed whom needs a
name to deal concomitancy. Nice men (where'd things or their constituents
get to) who owns up? Christ I can do nothing to interest you in what I won't

even guess, in to. Beautifully made

thought of strain like sheets
under tile:
what's unused gets half thought.
'I love discrete balconies.'
'Ivy sticks to them.'
Therefore they're the ones.
Plants can carry bulbs.
Nothing but 'Refrain' makes

—those decisions, haltings in I'm gone. Or is it a satisfaction of something else
fluke you can't even write over it never erred I'll wait until the best brogue
in town what life tends towards snowbirds like solder given green rings cling
to and a sensual pleasure as it is all given to purpose. Blue curtains are the
renowned hue

Hume's been everywhere once, none that ever cares for rain unless it
sounded on the roof. A whole, all over, like a roof, crickets notwithstanding,
fair tunnels in spouting or soffit:

in terms of the astringency associated nothing in terms of sound. Her silent
some say articulate some say rare some say saucy pupils. *Gotcha.*

Then if I was to place them, as one would, on paper: you'd go to start.
I mean, this is the start of the game you'd notice the latter's missing and
conjecture. Not that there's effort or they'd drop on it. Like a cat.

It is an effort to say or just fill as something empties. Who'd given lots of rose.
Something like language inflates—

Superiority of flawed sublimity against flawless mediocrity.

Wonder considered duly respect yourselves. Ask for prose in general, many
series in alternation. Alright sound and free error may end well, whether the
future, or virtues quick fetched. All human attributes, unprovable, hills virtues
make upwards. Genius usually times a surface. Even five minutes

heedlessly felt and delivered against trees terse with flies in an interstice of
time. A whodicky flamboyance. Like hill it does too. For it is a large mind
belongs to spaciousness. Apollonius, Theocritus, Eratosthenes, all in on it.
Eleven measures an odd term. Laid down like ingot.

It's like the gap opened between the ankles, or toes. Being used for. I press
the button and it's like that, instant. Another organisation, another church to
be at on Sunday. So, could you do it, biased fingers.

What to examine next? Which next?

Four somes:

On its shoulder
something's set.
Like the narrowness
stillness.

Stillness and looking
starts like summer
fills against the
cup, lipsound.

Conservation is given
a feature
and a pleasant entrance
boundaries.

So hearing sound,
ain't motion. Hearing
progress among top
store captions.

No matter what yoke
to quit
advocacy, nears
understanding.

You characterise the
join. It's the stiff
chart this
prosperous.

Churches are windows inside. Action is rinsing water. There are you people.
Mystery anymore?

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Contemplation is longer and physical at the boundary. It was preceded by an
horizon, a plane, a wonderful one. We are all part of the same one. We are
all part of the same family. We are

what now? I
(someday) can put a reservation
of dreams ashore.
'There's a cross on the wrist
from the time you wash it
to the one before.'

After a time of passing,
the light touched the windows
set at a certain distance.

Such were quiet sleepers.
The muscle and tissue well both
ground round the same.

—getting one from the other is a real affirmation, when you try. It was advised: You'd be assigned utterances to do someone else's, that're totally different.

lingua academia happened long ago. He could once it appertained to you. You without scrutiny, wherewith once blue and all colours left. Summary excites and perplexes me (as sunlight). So that the impetus of any cut is meshed. In the old days bees drove their hive. You *colossus*; in the old dump you drew blossoms. Birds draped on branches, on the red pokers a tui, rear-ended. These various geographical features were discovered in a magazine. What's the strength of it do you think. Put sincerely, a speech that isn't breathtaking speaking places. The men felt the same, corner dreamers.

Curnow/Curnow¹

This is the published version of a presentation given at the Curnow, Caxton, and the Canon Conference held in Dunedin in 1996. The predominant experience for me as an off-mainstream writer is that the local scene is one in which likes get together with likes, self-affirm and distinguish themselves from non-likes. Taking Loney's lead, I note the us-them divide between the mainstream and the 'other' (oppositional) tradition, although, for me, it plays out on a more personal level revolving round a limited range of relationships established with other young writers based at Auckland University at the start of the 1980s – names mentioned here, plus others mentioned in my poems and other writings. Literary groupings (which date right back, local and elsewhere) function in some ways as do family groupings: within a closeness there might be intimacies and severances, these too shifting (realigning) from time to time. It is the family ideal (sometimes ordeal!) that throws a shadow across and behind this piece.

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But seriously you people you've all got doubles, at least. There's a good number of Robert Duncans in the Auckland phonebook, most of them with collections to their name I'll be bound. But what about those lonely people who have their names all to themselves. Spare them a moment's thought. Is there, I ask you Bill [Slaughter], and everyone else who is listening [sic], is there another living Wystan out there (forget about the Curnow). So far as I know there's only me. Help!

*the one and only
Wystan (Poetics List, 5 May 1995)*

Putting Curnow on the map²

What I have to say is not a straightforward matter. We speak out of a vestedness, mine, ours, theirs. Wystan's a fellow writer and friend of some 20 years. Allen Curnow I much respect, almost as a matter of course. I want to examine the writing practices of father and son somewhat outside of the usual determinations of prudent literary

1 'Curnow/Curnow', *JNZL* 15 (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1997), pp. 114-35. Original note: 'I record my gratitude to Aichi-Gakuin University in Nagoya, Japan for providing employment and the opportunity by which this paper could be prepared, and additional funds, which made possible my participation at the Curnow, Caxton and the Canon conference'.

2 The map motif is taken from Wystan's curatorial publication *Putting the Land on the Map: Art and Cartography in New Zealand since 1840* (New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Gallery, 1989).

discourse. In a sense this is to dispute the assumed integrity – uncrossable divide? – that exists between the respective Curnow practices. I want to lift and examine, if but for a short while, the unquestioned and for some, unquestionable, borders. Inevitably this is to put my own predilections as a writer and family person on the same map, to subject the interests of these two achieved writers to my own lesser preoccupations, my own *family romance*.

Usually we speak of family in terms of continuity, intimacy, mutual protection, of an interdependence among those who are related by blood, the mechanisms whereby generational blessings are bestowed and inheritance and its debts honoured. There is no reason to doubt that such are the terms by which the Curnow family has operated since the arrival of their forbears sometime last century. Yet the family space we in public idealise can in private be a vigorously disputed one. Despite the prevalent family-like tone of ‘belonging’ in much Aotearoan literary discourse, it shows no ready or comfortable way of dealing with practices that are discordant, let alone ones that are at once literary and familial, particularly when the participants happen to be father and son. Intimacies are involved to be sure, rivalries, even where there is an attempt to deal discretely with such matters. And if such an approach might seem to the reader unbecoming, I don’t necessarily want to exclude that either, for literature is full of it. I want to see if I can coax out of the Curnow practices differences and samenesses, to start to unprise some of the tight-fitting protocols that local literary folk have long staked a claim to, in theory if not always in practice.

Putting writers on the map

The usual assumption is that the public individual and the writing individual are one, two facets of the same personality. We strive to integrate writing with our ideas of good existence. We have viewed the two as transposable, and this in turn forms a basis on which we have constructed our principle of exchange between selfhood and written achievement. Texts are taken to *represent*, to somehow embody, their writers – a view nowadays increasingly untenable. Meanwhile literature, for its part, exploits language as a resource that is full of associations and history that it freely assimilates but which it resists being assimilated by. And because literature encloses all within its own mediative brackets, it would be unwise, perhaps perilous, to regard the text as a readily interpretable, if sublimated, representation of the personal, social or moral aspects of the writer’s life. Literature bearing the mark Allen Curnow is *not* Allen Curnow, it is literature

that bears that particular mark.³ Likewise Wystan. Authorial identity is at most a figure, constructed on the one hand out of the intentionality of the writer and on the other through the range of possibilities suggested by a text among other texts. Authorial psychology involves a constant remapping of the relation between the writer and reader(s), simultaneously causes and effects. The guise of literature as ameliorative, purposeful human relation is not reliable, especially when as practised it is not always kind or reconciliatory. I will argue that for the Curnows it includes – to some extent is driven by – an obsession with things that are not always (or otherwise) available and may in the end not be even desired.

Putting Allen and Wystan on the map

As I speak, Allen is in his mid-80s and regarded as our foremost poet, here and internationally. He is the country's foremost literary anthologist, an outstanding literary theorist, a dominant presence over sixty-something years of publication. *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* (1991) lists 19 poetry titles, plus five for Whim Wham satiric verse (dating in the main from the 1940s), two for drama, two poetry anthologies (Caxton 1945/51 and Penguin 1960), as well as a collection of critical prose *Look Back Harder* (1987).

Wystan, now in his mid-50s, has over 30-something productive writing years remained much at the literary margins. He scarcely figures in the *History* (six page references to his father's 71, excluding anthologies). His first book, *Essays on New Zealand Literature* (1973) – dedicated to his father, including an essay *by* his father, and another *on* his father – is an act of obeisance that suggests the shadow the son starts under. There is minimal representation of his poetry and fiction in mainstream magazines (*Islands, Landfall, Sport*),⁴ and he scarcely figures in the several anthologies that began to appear from the early 80s.⁵ His two poetry texts to date, *Cancer Daybook*

3 We see Allen disclaim the earlier pseudonymous 'Jullian' and 'Whim Wham' poems – poems which we know he had written. I acknowledge Terry Sturm's exposition of this ownership/disownership feature in his Conference presentation.

4 Wystan's a prominent figure in the 1980s self-proclaimed marginal magazines, *Parallax* (1982-83), *And* (1983-85), *Splash* (1984-86), *Antic* (1986-90), in two of them as contributing editor. He also figures well in the Leggott *Landfall* (1991-93), coincidentally the last of the historical Caxton editorships and one which saw the magazine accused of catering overmuch to the margins. (In conversation, Leggott has said that there was no deliberate intention to feature Wystan's work.)

5 An exception is Michael Morrissey's *The New Fiction* (Auckland: Lindon Publishing, 1985), a collection of purportedly postmodern, postrealist fictions, in which Wystan is well represented and proves pivotal in the introductory argument. He does not appear in the Wedde and McQueen *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1985), has three pages in the Wedde-et al *The Penguin Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry*

(short-listed for the New Zealand Book Awards) and *Back in the USA*, effectively self-published, appear in 1989, Wystan's fiftieth year. His prominence as an art critic and curator is longer-standing. He founded Art Space in Auckland, has co-authored three art books,⁶ producing as well several curatorial pieces.⁷ In addition, he continues to involve himself as a writer in collaboration with visual and performing artists.⁸ Over the years, in addition to appearances at a number of reading venues worldwide,⁹ he has been a fairly regular visitor and sometime-participant on the American poetry reading scene, is a friend of several Language poets, and a participant in the Poetics electronic discussion group. His inclination to write across and outside accepted genres and groupings helps to explain the difficulty people have had in including Wystan's work in the literary mainstream.

Putting family on the map

I have suggested that literary Aotearoa shows no ready way of dealing with such intimacies as that between father and son, Curnow and Curnow. Indeed, there is a reticence that mutes any expected confrontation. In the critical writing, where opposed positions are taken, neither mentions the other. In other texts, there is a curious self-conscious quality that accompanies familial or personal references.

Statements made operate within a non-definitive, rhetorical space. They cannot be simply lifted outside their mediative context. For example, Allen's 1935 proclamation

(1989), nothing in the Paul-Edmond *The New Poets: Initiatives in New Zealand Poetry* (1987), nothing in Mark Williams's *The Caxton Press Anthology: New Zealand Poetry 1972-1986* (1987). A single poem is included in Manhire's *100 New Zealand Poems* (1993); a page and a bit appear in the new Williams-O'Brien-Bornholdt Oxford anthology.

6 *New Art* (1976), a book on sculpture and post-object art edited with Jim Allen; Len Lye's selected writings *Figures in Motion* (1984) edited with Roger Horrocks; and *Pleasures and Dangers* (1991) edited with Trish Clark, a book concerning New Zealand women artists of the 1990s.

7 'I will need Words' (1984), 'Sex & Sign' (1987) and 'Putting the Land on the Map' (1989) are strong instances. The curatorial writing, which is engaged both politically and theoretically, not to speak of Wystan's wider involvement in the visual arts community, cannot be considered in detail. It has been suggested that Wystan's self-given role in the visual arts is not unlike his father's role in earlier literary discourse, a sign at once of a family prowess and perhaps of a certain displacement of skills. Beyond this, it is worth noting that the crossover in art/literary discourse and discourses in Aotearoa continues.

8 Examples include: Imants Tillers ('An Exchange of Notes', *Antic*/6, 1989); Billy Apple ('Working with Billy Apple', *Splash*/3, 1985, 'From the Wystan Curnow Collection', *Lf177*, 1991); Roche/Buis ('A Gathering Concerning Three Performances', *Parallax*/2, 1983), and most recently another appearance alongside Billy Apple in *A Brief Description of the Whole World*/1 (1995).

9 In the *A Brief Description*/1 bibliographical note, 'Cologne, Edinburgh, Auckland, San Francisco, Buffalo, Wellington, New York, Hobart, San Diego, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, and other places' are listed as reading sites.

of literary self-determination

To each age its own experience.
 To each age its own language.
 To each age its own literature

squares poorly with a subsequent rejection of young writers who adopt a postmodern aesthetic. Ostensibly an invitation to open practice, the statement in fact celebrates the initiatives that Allen is taking at the time. Similarly, the alluring image found in the closing couplet of the sonnet 'The Skeleton of the Great Moa in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch' is not what at first glance it appears to be. In a superb dissimulation, what appears to be extended as a prize to future generations, perhaps Wystan, is coveted in the act of offering:

Not I, some child, born in a marvellous year,
 Will learn the trick of standing upright here. (1943)

It is Allen's arrival and 'standing upright' that is signalled. Among *In memoriam* poems, especially those addressing his 'farthest ancestor' 'R.L.M.G.' and his father, as also tributes to Dylan Thomas and Wallace Stevens and others, the tone and sentiment is consummately literary. Even in 'At Dead Low Water', in which the young Allen accompanies his father on an early morning shoreside walk at Governor's Bay – and by extension through the mythical death/rebirth cycle alluded to – the emphasis is on the literary rite-of-passage, and family relation subsists within that context.

If Allen constructs statements that maximise the literary spoil that is his pursuit, Wystan shows a literary self-regard equally keen if more indirect. The autobiographical piece 'from D'Arcy Cresswell at Castor Bay' (*Splash*/1) refers twice in passing to Allen, initially as 'father' (whose copy – 'his name in it' – of *The Poet's Progress* 'Wystan' happens to be reading); and again a few pages later, this time more familiar-sounding yet formally capitalised as 'my Dad'. The second less/more familiar reference is ambivalent, hinting at a certain pomposity in Allen's refusal to drink at Paddy Gleeson's in Hobson Street because 'there were fights, he said, brawls' (28). A small detail, certainly; but in the super-conscious literary game – and knowing Wystan to be as particular as is his father in matters of syntax and idiom – signification occurs any and everywhere. Why should filial and writerly relationships inveigle one another so? Why, when Wystan speaks in 'D'Arcy' about the 'BODY' on which one writes, does

D'Arcy appear more sympathetically as a kind of alter-ego or stand-in father-figure than Allen? D'Arcy, the dissolute, opportunistic homosexual, a figure antithetical to Allen in all respects except perhaps a common devotion to poetry, becomes an object of fond reproof for Wystan, who addresses the situation thus:

The point is D'Arcy did have ambition. And though he knew too many titled types, too many successful old farts for my liking, he knew too something about the odds he'd stacked against himself. The rank outsider – he's the one with the real ambition. The outsider outdoors. Because there was no underground here. Never was. Never has been. The outsider outdoors, in a bach by the sea. Or, cruising the docks, eh, D'Arcy? (20)

Is it D'Arcy's disreputableness that especially appeals? The piece ends:

There were nights at Gleeson's, or down on the docks, it was as if, like Whitman, he was taking a headlong dive into himself; his passions doing with him what they would. He'd miss the last ferry and the Stornach ladies' kindling'd go uncut for days on end. Bob Lowry said that one of D'Arcy's drinking cobblers who'd got a launch he lived on down St Mary's Bay offered [sic] D'Arcy the use of a bottom bunk. Trouble was this guy kept bringing his doxies back to the launch in the middle of the night and humping them like it was going out of style. On the top bunk. That was repulsive enough. But one night one of these Crazy Janes, she opened her great legs and this stream of steaming female piss came arching down onto the floor passing but inches from D'Arcy's nose. He didn't man no pumps, he'd had enough. Headed home to Castor Bay he did. To cool his cock in the Gulf and dream of reverberating arseholes. (28)

Elsewhere, in a critical context, where Wystan addresses the quandary of including familiar names in literary writing, there is a difficulty beyond a mere pointing to the perplexity of an awkward doubling-up. In a review of Peter Tomory's *New Zealand Art* series in *Lf90*, we again witness a mock-embarrassed way of dealing with being a member of a well-regarded artistic family who is invited to review a book involving other members.

I thought to myself then that I was the last person to do the job [as well as having a picture of his mother on the cover of a book that was his brother Tim's 'pet project', he was also friendly with Hamish Keith, Don Binney and Bryan Drew, among others connected with the project]. Tim's books and Mum on the cover?! But then I thought, I remembered: that's what

it's like in New Zealand, everyone interested in the arts knows everyone interested in the arts. (187)

It's awkward. No one need envy any offspring the difficulties of occupying a position that one has had no choice but to occupy: family ties can feel so *unnatural!* More recently, in the art page 'From the Wystan Curnow Collection' (Lf177), Wystan lays (somewhat ambivalently) rightful claim to the name Curnow. Again seeming is only seeming: in drawing attention to itself as artifice, the art-framing device suggests an unresolved if reified claim more than it does an accommodation. Locked within such a frame, the narrative passage is further locked within an iteration of names derived from other places that wrap more and more tightly round the Wystan version of Curnow. Beyond distinguishing between the name of the father and the name of the son (something biblical), the framing convention courts self-occupancy, hubris.

Given this situation, where are we to locate the seriousness of the *challenge* that each constitutes to the other? What is it in the literary contest that renders it intractable, half-deflected, protective, wanting to prevail? Oops... I race ahead, best we back-track a little.

Putting succession on the map

James Baxter's first volume *Beyond the Palisade* and Allen's *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45* appear together at the end of the War, both from Caxton Press (the creation of Denis Glover, a close writing friend of Allen's and the predominant literary publisher from the 1930s through 60s). Wystan, born six years earlier in 1939, while bearing the name of the father, cannot claim the literary inheritance: it is Baxter, just eighteen, who is identified as Allen's poetic son (since Mason 'no New Zealand poet has proved so early his power to say and his right to speak').¹⁰ Unlike the socio-biological bond, poetic filiality proves as easily bestowable as it will prove readily retractable. By 1948, given Allen's predisposition to paternalism and Baxter's to profligacy, the paternal-filial chord shows early signs of fraying. *Blow, Wind of Fruitfulness* is reviewed by Allen in a mixed compliment that instigates a process of disinheritance when he remarks that 'assertions about New Zealand... needed good poets for its beginning, as it has waited for a good poet to point towards a consummation' (LBH 100). In the poetic family business, for menfolk, consummation risks a waning of interest, a loss

¹⁰ See Allen Curnow, *Look Back Harder: Critical Writings 1935-1984*, ed. and intro. Peter Simpson (Auckland: AUP, 1987), p. 73. Hereafter LBH.

of vigour. This is just the complaint Baxter subsequently has against Allen: that, while brilliant, his practice in effect constitutes repeated acts of co-option.

In 'High Culture in a Small Province' (1973) Wystan has himself argued for more specialisation, for a less personality-based cultural exchange. While rivalry among competing poetic interests is a commonplace, it is intensified in our culture because there is so little opportunity to turn elsewhere. But while the family-like quality of the literary scene is often remarked on, it continues to function as a descriptive metaphor rather than as a challenge to change or normalise the discourse – vested interests are legitimised through group affiliation. When people talk about Curnow in a generational context they do so usually in successional terms, linking Allen with Baxter, Allen with Stead, Stead with Wedde.¹¹ Curnow/Curnow is one awkward permutation that people have tended to step around.

Not unexpectedly, in such an environment, approval gets bestowed on those whose practice reflects favourably on one's own. In the days of Caxton and *Landfall* it was assumed that all artists shared a common set of values.¹² Normal societal values were considered inimical to the arts, thus frustrating the process whereby society's veniality might be transformed into art's ideality. Even Wystan, in the *Lf177* interview, when asked who locally best represents the avant-garde, nominates – doubtless tongue-in-cheek – himself. Literary endorsement tends to function reciprocally.¹³ Performers that we are, we have more than half an eye on our own success.

Loney, who founded *Parallax* ('a quarterly journal of postmodern literature and art') in 1982, complained that 'In the early seventies we were trying to get in *Islands* and *Landfall* and being knocked back and back and back' (*And/1* 58). *Parallax* would exclude the excluders. 'There are a bunch of key actors', he explains, 'and they happen to be Wystan, Roger and Tony, and ah, Judy [sic] Stout' (55). Wystan's 'Post-Modernism in Poetry and the Visual Arts' heads the first issue. Starting at this point we witness an ongoing peer participation and joint editing of magazines through the early to mid-1980s: *Parallax*, *And*, *Splash*, *Antic*. Mainstream established writers

11 Just as in 'From Wystan to Carlos: Modern & Modernism in Recent N.Z. Poetry' (*Islands* 27, Vol 7 No 5 (November 1979)) Stead distances himself from the influence of Allen, so Wedde in a 1985 interview distances himself from Stead's take on high modernism by pointing out that *Earthly: Sonnets for Carlos* was 'a closed thing' and that 'the whole distinction between open and closed form is one which should often be collapsed' (*Lf154*, p. 165).

12 On the homogeneity of identity in the post-war literary community, see my 'Landfall 1947-66: Foundation & a Supplement', *And/3* (1984).

13 This is as perplexing as it is understandable. Horrocks and Davis write enthusiastically about each other in *And/1* and */2* respectively. In *Splash/1* I review Leigh's *Willy's Gazette*. Leigh, Alex Calder and I are MA classmates who study under Roger and Wystan, fine mentors both. Wystan supervises my and Alex's PhD theses. More recently I have written on books by Leggott and Loney, in Alan's *A Brief Description/3*.

like Allen and Stead aren't invited; others, including Wedde, only grudgingly. This is Wystan country, differently peopled.¹⁴

Putting contention on the map

Wystan's 'Post-Modernism' essay and Allen's Turnbull Winter Lecture happen at the same time. Each is an implicit rejection of the other. Allen – sensitive to and not unaffected by the new initiatives – derisively rejects postmodernism, its youthful Kiwi protagonists, and the figurehead Charles Olson as old hat: but not a word of Wystan.

Putting aesthetic contention (name-dropping) on the map

Irving Sandler, Leslie Fiedler, Mel Bochmer, Fiedler's, Sandler's, Susan Sontag, Ed Dorn, David Antin, Fiedler, John Ashbery, Peter Schyeldahl, Ron Padgett, Ted Berrigan, Bill Berkson, Frank O'Hara, Ronald Reagan, Ronald Paulson... Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Robert Morris, Marcel Duchamp, Greenberg [50-60+ further names] John Cage, Barnett Newman's, Newman, Robert Smithson's, Irwin, Buren, Asher, Apple, Rosenthal, Andre, Buren, Irwin, Nordman... [Rough individual tallies:] Olson 11, Creeley 11, O'Hara 8, Greenberg, Pollock, Dorn, Ginsberg 4. ('Post-Modernism')

Allen and Wystan have shared some modern-day material opportunities conducive to literary production. Through much of the 1970s they both held positions in the English Department at the University of Auckland, ensuring a continuity of employment, reasonable flexibility of privacy and time, and the stimulation of intellectual exchange.¹⁵

Aesthetics – specifically poetics – concerns technical aspects of poetry and the life-literature relation. In a writing that insists on the non-resolvability that exists between language and meaning, biological and social relationships must surrender an otherwise assumed preeminence. The straightforward logical or societal value assigned to words becomes problematised as one *further* application of textuality. Literary texts, in this sense, are always already suspended, *aestheticised*, in their relationship with a wider world. There is something that refuses containment,

¹⁴ It is interesting to note the recent announcement of the first electronic magazine of its type in Aotearoa, *Current*, edited by Tom Beard (<http://www.comm-unity.co.nz/~current/>). Electronic publication will surely reconstitute the rules of the literary family game.

¹⁵ Allen was employed from February 1951 to January 1977, Wystan from March 1970.

that won't be exhausted, doesn't have decidable social application, in writing that continues to be identified as *literary*. This Allen once characterised as 'unique' and Wystan, more recently, as 'torque'. The distinctions by which such uniqueness or torque accrues value is in the respective poetics: for both writers, poetics forms a significant part of their textual strategies. The critical and theoretical pronouncements of each, whilst in themselves rigorous and dealing with overlapping issues and shared predicaments, adopt opposing valuations which ultimately preclude mutual accommodation. There is a standoffishness, a mutual lack of articulation, a practiced

AC: Do you know, Wystan, *I have found myself piecing together the record of an adventure, or series of adventures, in search of reality.*

truly contested. Allen is not mentioned in Wystan's postmodernism piece, even though it comprises a first thoroughgoing critique of the form of modernism that the former is seen to champion. Modernism is characterised as outmoded, self-aggrandising, rightfully supplanted by postmodernism. In Wystan's view, modernism constitutes a kind of wilful sublimation of the existing world in terms of its endeavor to transform that 'reality' into imaginative order, something below or inside and somehow more real than the appearance of things, a kind of undisclosed deep-intentionality reserved for poets to distinguish. Modernists, he avers, take on the role of 'God-killers', assuming a god-like authority and providing the imaginative cohesiveness that God's departure is seen to have jeopardised. Postmodernism – continues Wystan – in its turn acknowledges a concomitancy in language, the impossibility of its being outside, or above, what it depicts; language is coterminous with that which is presented (Creeley: 'Form is never more than an

AC: You know *beaches* are really important to me, too.

WC: Hmm. Your writing is full

ignoring of the other. The very contentiousness and non-resolvability that exists within their non-engagement suggests the arbitrariness inherent in such discourse, whereby the truth value eludes whatever aesthetics is proposed: as if truth cannot be

WC: It's compelling. But you know: *Place isn't something fixed or singular, to do with identity in that way.*

AC: I mean...

WC: Let me just say, *it emerges in a context of arrivals and departures, or by way of figures for the margin, like borders, beaches, and so on.*

extension of content'), as such representing a moment-by-moment 'total ecology of human consciousness'. Rather than draw reality into a oneness, contemporary

shorelines and things that happen there.

practice enacts a differential universe whereby no one thing has an inherent organising authority. Immanence displaces transcendence. The names in attendance are unabashedly and singularly American. This shift in allegiance, of the received lineage, interestingly parallels his father's 50-years-earlier adoption of the modernist English poets. Yet neither the similarity nor the distinction is acknowledged.

Not that such an acknowledgment comes from Allen – for while Wystan is preparing his essay, Allen is busy preparing (whether fortuitously or not)

AC: You see, *Strictly speaking, New Zealand doesn't exist yet, though some possible New Zealands glimmer in some poems and on some canvasses.*

It remains to be created – should I say invented – by writers, musicians, artists, architects, publishers; even a politician might help.

WC: Politician! I'm saying, *Modernists were god-killers who lived, suffered and created in the shadow of their deeds.... The imagination represents the will to order and meaning rather than their accomplishment.*

a fervid rebuttal in the form of his Turnbull Winter Lecture 'Olson as Oracle: "Projective Verse" Thirty Years On'. Wedde, Harlow, and Loney are specifically and unfavourably mentioned, though not Wystan. Allen summarily rejects Olson's theoretical position, labelling him an 'extravagant syncretist and philosophical dilettante' (LBH 309). Pound and the Imagists (early modernism), he contends, had already 30 years earlier articulated the shift in poetic practice and thought that Olson claims as new and his own. Further, Allen insists, here as elsewhere, theory is *a posteriori*, thereby traceable and reducible: 'the *theory*, any theory of poetry, is always a secondary manifestation: poetics follows poems, not the other way round' (LBH 306). This reduction of theory to a temporal (implicitly outdated) accompaniment rather than progenitor of poems, thus privileging them in an extra-temporal (transcendent, *paternal*) position, is the very thing that Wystan wants to see re-temporalised, set back into time, democratised. For him, theory and practice are conjoint, they inform each other. Nonetheless, even for him literature retains a healing function, facilitating a special cohering of disparate things and enlarging what he terms a 'holistic' or 'continuous universe'. Any shift to a different or contrary position is presented in terms of a disrupting of continuity. Continuity and discontinuity function interchangeably,

AC: Are you saying, *an artist can only suffer, and record his suffering; hoping to make others suffer with him*

as that which *gets us here*. Such it is for all forms of position-taking, acts of inclusion and exclusion, something we have tended to underestimate.¹⁶

For both writers the history of literature is taken to foster its current and future possibilities, but this is as untrue as it is true. Literature is that which ends up getting called literature. In terms of our national literature, a differential (and subservient) linkage to major *in-English* literatures means that it is so much a part of them that any claim to uniqueness or self-identity suggests a certain helplessness. The difficulty comes in using continuity, difference, discontinuity, interchangeably to explain the same phenomena. For all the claims to difference between a Curnow and a Curnow, something I do wish to draw attention to, there is a place where that difference is only a differentiating they share, a place where an insistence on exclusivity betrays a common pursuit or occupancy that neither cares to admit to. Silence, avoiding overt competition, is the adopted strategym. And in the end its not being addressed points to it like a finger. Two men, father and son, seek and compete over something – achievement, reality, posterity, prowess? – as if there is no overlap in their endeavours. Whether this involves imposition, as in Allen’s case, or serial deferral, as in Wystan’s, the drive (the lure) that is shared is by turns aggressive, possessive, disarming, denied, protective, relinquished, resumed.

the necessary pains of first self knowledge.

WC: *Maybe the idea of all thought and all objects of thought being present in language at one time and of writing as tapping into that.*

Putting practice on the map

There are no art awards, far as I know, that apply to father and son poetry combos – Allen Curnow & Son. Interesting thought? Recognitions like the Queen’s Honours List and the Watties/Montana Book Awards perpetuate and embolden the attaching of achievement to our assigned individual proper names. The attention given to texts marked Curnow – or Curnow – is sharper because it simultaneously disavows the

16 To be fair, I want to point out that Wystan’s more recent art writing shows an open-ended response to history and artistic influence. In ‘The Shining Cuckoo’ (included in *Interpreting Contemporary Art*, ed. Stephen Bann and William Allen, (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), in speaking of the uses made by other artists of McCahon’s work, Wystan argues that the freedom in art or literature is not simply bound to where it comes from, rather influence functions bi-directionally across the border that was formerly thought to clearly demarcate modernism and postmodernism, and he makes the case for ‘a flexible continuum’ by which they ‘may approach one another’ (30). As he puts it: ‘Ambiguity produces continuity and discontinuity in more or less equal proportions. Meaning accumulates on either side of what is neither one thing nor another but rather the conjunction, the border and gap, between one code and another, and reaches no conclusion’ (34).

familial and makes of the family name the key marker. The texts of these two writers cannot be said finally to demonstrate what either writer might claim for his own or the other's writing, because crucially the person who writes is not the one who can be held directly answerable to what the writer gets to say: we have termed this the autonomy of the author.

One of Wystan's stated intentions is to deconstruct exactly such a gratuitous privileging of the text over reality. It's one reason why, for our mainstream, he does not qualify as a poet or fiction writer proper. We have seen that, for Allen, poetry is the *type* of the arts. And while such a view may nowadays be considered outdated or elitist, Wystan's wishful democratisation of the writing arts may well be thought to amount to much the same: 'I want to hang onto the notion that really there is no criticism, poetry, fiction – only writing and its scenes. Venues, occasions, protocols and processes' (*Lf*177 14). Earlier texts do adopt conventional-looking forms, but increasingly Wystan's writing involves a discarding of traditional conventions both of signification and of genre.¹⁷ Traditionally, literature is defined in terms of its compliance to conventions of genre, structure, form, style, and its intrinsic capability to exceed these constraints by adding significance, variety. Wystan's name, his body, his characteristic flatness of observation and droll locution, his smirky humour, the unexpected dropping in of names of family members and other writers or artists, appear often enough *as if* unmediated. He seems to be in his texts the same way he is in life. That's *his* ploy.

Putting material on the map

Above I characterise the Curnows' writing in terms of a sustained (to rephrase it) self-at-centre enterprise. In many respects it's a boy thing. In using such a telltale genderising metaphor I want to take a slightly different approach to the qualities of intimacy(-denied) and unmentionability involved in a common literary practice that being both male and father or son seems to render especially delicate. Writing, in this context, comprises a pursuit that can be abandoned but whose lure is ever-deferrable, ever-deniable. Identifying a single object would be to reduce it to a nothing, to pop it

17 As he moves further from the use of Olson and Creeley as models in the early 1980s towards Stein and the Silliman of *The New Sentence*, and Language writing practitioners more generally, the unit of composition in his texts becomes more distinctly the sentence and emphasis falls increasingly on temporal, spatial and structural disjunction (a punning) generated between sentences and their semantic componentry, something for which Silliman's 'torquing' is cited. In conversation, Wystan has suggested that he now considers Language writers to represent postmodernism and earlier projectivists to represent a high modernism.

like a bubble. We don't want the party to end.

As I see it, the insistence of Allen on a 'reality prior to the poem' is the enabling trope. The sense of fidelity, the promise to be faithful, expresses perfectly Allen's astuteness, his brilliance in dealing with the components of his poems: their referentiality, acute phrasing, captivating images. The trick is that the fidelity provides also a shield that deflects a getting slapped back, being 'found out'. It amounts to a holding back in the push forward. Allen's exercise of control, even over what he presents as out of control, urges itself to appear complete. This may help account for the atmosphere of unflinchingness and exactitude that readers report encountering in his work. Satisfaction comes – or doesn't come – in the form of an impossibly stimulated appetite that won't be satisfied, that remains bound to *his* attention. In this way he can be said to fuck with the facts. He refuses to give them the satisfaction that in effect he has *them* crave. That's *his* ploy. The poems are not informational or about emotional states as such, but rather they are masterful entries into the unbridgeable and seemingly illicit space between word and thing, giving and taking, time and attention, space and attention, you and me. Take the acclaimed 'A Dead Lamb':

Never turn your back on the sea.
The mumble of the fall of time is continuous.

A billion billion broken waves deliver
a coloured glass globe at your feet, intact.

You say it is a Japanese fisherman's float.
It is a Japanese fisherman's float.

A king tide, a five o'clock low, is perfect
for picking mussels, picking at your ankle-bones.

The wind snaps at the yellow-scummed sea-froth,
so that an evanescence of irised bubbles occurs.

Simply, silvery the waves walk towards you.
A ship has changed position on the horizon.

The dog lifts a leg against a grass-clump
on a dune, for the count of three, wetting the sand.

There is standing room and much to be thankful for
in the present. Look, a dead lamb on the beach.

The poem seems to invite exegesis, though that's a further ploy. These are pieces in a pattern that won't resolve. The poem includes directives, imperatives (Never turn, You say, It is, Look) that render the real world a verbal minefield. What strikes us is the incredible facility that has a Japanese fisherman's float or a dog pissing seem so absolutely compelling and the (poem/poet's) corresponding disinclination to account for the extreme extraordinariness of the effect that is created. The poem locks into this extraordinariness. Resembling meaning, it renders meaning a special kind of *entrance-ment* that suggests both a way in and a refusal of sure entry.

Now this playing with mastery *over* material is exactly what Wystan shows a disinclination to fool with. His use of materials may also constitute an appropriation ('the moral impulse in my writing always seems to have something to do with possession'), however the repercussions are otherwise. Whereas Allen's hold over his material feels unloosenable, Wystan's has about it the feeling of being everywhere makeshift and provisional, teasingly non-committal. He's out and about rummaging in other folks' affairs. His 'Appropriations' (*And/1*) comprises sentences taken verbatim from the autobiographies of American astronauts – 'for their weirdness' (*Lf177* 8), he tells us. It is the contingency involved in textuality's use of its sources (real or textual) that Wystan insists upon, that he seems to want to hold the hand of. Literary texts are co-extensive with any so-called reality, themselves as much a composite ('made-up') as it is.

In 'Space Fiction No. 7' (*Lf96*) various mundane facts of the writer's life are interpolated with contemporaneous significant events of international space exploration. There's as much intrinsic interest in the mundane facts of a 'nobody', a Wystan or Toby (Wystan's son), as in the Americans' and Russians' space quests. It's a game of articulation, an unfixed boyhood fascination. This placing side by side – whether sequentially as in 'Space Fiction' or in parallel-column fashion as in 'Climbing Rangitoto/Descending the Guggenheim' and the more recent quite tantalising 'The Snips of Caster Bay' and 'GWTW' (*Lf177*) – does not so much indicate an equivalence as it does a kind of an attentive ambivalence, a teasing. Outcomes aren't the goal; instead we are presented with a kind of surreptitiousness (*rapere*: seize), a kind of double-take whereby, as in the case of 'Appropriations', the apparent naïveté and discordance in many of the sentences continues to romance as it undercuts the outlandish adventure of the American space mission. Similarly, in 'Progress Never Came Without a Fight', through means of a wrenching of the material slightly out of its comic book context, the cowboy lingo is even more heavily geared to the romantic context and history. One can't be entirely sure what Wystan's up to, where he's at, where exactly his a/intentions are focused. And as much as it can be taken to represent a postmodernist practice, one I share and

admire, in another way it can be taken to indicate an evasiveness which complements the invasiveness I take Allen's practice to represent. 'It was the problem of how to write about performance art', Wystan tells, that 'pushed me into a writing which was actively there, at one with its processes and procedures' (Lf177 14) – and – 'I have been drawn to the idea of all thought and all objects of thought being present in language at one time and of writing as tapping into that' (9). The ultimate, for the vicarious: a 'writing process *per se* unbound by genre' (7). Hard to embrace this one.

Taking (re)possession of the map

Allen's compelling power rests in his ability to render the material he uses pliable to his uses. Wystan performs (whether in collaboration or alone) art work based on an unresolved contingency in the materials employed. Sacerdotal parent, anecdotal offspring. Both play spinning games with their own (not to speak of the other's) preoccupations. And while I have explored the case regarding a mutual non-accommodation, another can as persuasively be made (I have been nudging this way) concerning an unspoken protectiveness extended towards one another over an investment that is held in common. After all, Wystan's postmodernist aesthetic is as susceptible to repudiation as Allen's modernist one has been: an advocacy of ecological consciousness and a writing practice that exists beyond genre is as wishful as Allen's endeavour to be creating magical New Zealand. The practice of literature simply does not guarantee any unifying premise. It doesn't finally add up; and that, no doubt, helps account for our ongoing fascination. Literature may valorise a familial or any other societal norm, but ultimately it cares little either for family or for how humans care to get on. It seeks out nothing that it is not prepared to forego, follows no rule that it is not prepared to forsake. One cannot even presume that writing and language end up on the same team. The imputing of family value onto literature has been our ploy: it continues to occupy what Charles Brasch once termed *Disputed Ground*.

Brasch's *Landfall*: A second life

'A second life' appeared originally in the *Landfall* 1950s celebratory issue. An updated version was included when on behalf of Otago University Press Donald Kerr collected a group of essays celebrating Brasch as poet, editor and literary patron.¹ Here I draw attention to the *Aftermath* section in the later version, which extends the coverage of the journal through to the year 2000, considering especially the impact of Michele Leggott as co-editor (1991-93). Before all this, the essay has its origins in my PhD thesis (yeah back then!), so it falls within its own trickling iterations. Interest is focused on the foundation and perpetuation of what we term 'culture', something that continued to be idealised as integrative into the last decades of the 20th century. *Aftermath* considers this transition and Leggott's contribution, when her receptiveness to new poetry puts down a bridge between the homologous mainstream and the heterogeneous innovators: needless to say, circulation falls, criticism increases, and the putative bridge collapses – or is decommissioned: Leggott's tenure was limited to issues 177-85.

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If we can free ourselves of some of the obsessive preoccupations and limitations of the present day by looking back to our origins and considering our place in the life of man – by taking a view of history that leads to freedom and not to servitude – we may come to understand our situation better and find what work for the future we can as a people most usefully undertake. (Notes, June 1953)²

The name, *Landfall*, is meant to indicate that we have just begun to see our country, but hardly know as yet what sort of country it is going to be. (to Signore Agnoletti, 23 July 1959)

Post-depression, post-war N.Z. sees a burgeoning of cultural activity. From 1937 to 1947 the number of students enrolled in N.Z. universities rises from 5,000 to 13,000.³ The number of literary-related journals appearing during this period shows similar increase:

1 'A Second Life – Literary Culture and *Landfall* in the 1950s', *Landfall* 185 (April 1993), pp. 114-23, appeared in a revised form in *Enduring Legacy: Charles Brasch, Patron, Poet & Collector*, ed. Donald Kerr (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2003), pp. 127-42.

2 References to *Landfall* issues give month and year of publication. Correspondence referred to is held at the Hocken Library in Dunedin. I acknowledge Alan Roddick for permission for its use.

3 Wystan Curnow, 'High Culture in a Small Province', *Essays on New Zealand Literature*, ed. Wystan Curnow (Auckland: Heinemann, 1973), p. 158.

	No. Journals		No. Journals
1900-09	14	1930-39	22
1910-19	2	1940-49	25
1920-29	14	1950-59	21 ⁴

The 1940 centennial celebrations include publication of McCormick's *Letters and Art* and Sewell's *1840 and After*. From the mid-30s typographers and publishers Lowry and Glover show new commitment and zeal in producing quality literary publications. Sustained social-literary commentary appears from Holcroft, McCormick, J.C. Reid, and others. Sargeson among story writers, and several poets, are producing work that has a distinctly local setting. Curnow in his *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45*, as well as including the best poets, confidently excludes pre-1920s work. In 1941 the National Film Unit is formed; over 100 amateur theatrical groups are invited in 1945 to join the newly formed Drama Council; the public library service continues to spread; the first professional National Orchestra starts performing in 1947. In the same year the Community Arts Service is established by the National Council of Adult Education and the newly formed Literary Fund begins allocating funds to selected literary projects.

Landfall appears that same year. In providing an ongoing platform for serious writing, competitions, prizes, reviews and essays, coverage of the arts and social issues, not to mention less direct involvement in the 1951 and 1959 writers' conferences, in anthologies, and the establishment of the Burns Fellowship in Dunedin in 1959 and other forms of indirect financial support (Brasch as patron) for writers, *Landfall* does more than any other journal in our history to encourage and promote the arts. Rather than initiate, it adds a major impetus to a process already underway.⁵ Celebrating in 1960, Brasch speaks of New Zealand having established itself as an independent centre of culture, no longer a mere a province dependent on the central English tradition:⁶

4 Iris Park, *New Zealand Periodicals of Literary Interest* (Wellington: National Library Service, Wellington, 1962).

5 'It is not surprising', Brasch writes on his retirement, 'that *Landfall* started at the end of a terrible war, which everywhere had silenced imagination; it would have been unnatural, then, if some such periodical had not started. Everything at the time seemed to converge towards it', in 'Twenty Years Hard: The Perils of Editing', *Otago University Review*, 1966, p. 6.

6 In March 1947, at the journal's launch, it has the same goal but a subordinate starting position: 'Every province can be a centre in its own right – provided it does not imagine that it can be self sufficient'.

Not so long ago, most New Zealanders who had reason to think themselves cultivated would have smiled at the notion of a New Zealand culture – New Zealand literature, New Zealand music, and would not have dreamed of taking seriously any book published here. For them, England was and would always be the source of all that makes life civilised.... Ten years later, it had almost disappeared. Today, in 1960, it is clear that the English-speaking world has several centres and sources of culture, and that for most educated New Zealanders who live at home their own country, if the poorest of these, is also performe the most important. (Notes, Sep'60)

For all its centrality, *Landfall* occupies a specialised, minority position in its society. It is not financially self-sustaining and relies on the Caxton Press and Brasch's personal (unpaid) commitment and generosity to survive. Only at the end of the 1950s is the print run above 1000 copies.

Year	Subs	Print	Losses	Year	Subs	Print	Losses
1947	817	1200	-	1957	858	-	37.5.9
1948	694	1000	-	1958	959	1000	155.3.2
1949	644	1000	-	1959	1000	1152	172.18.10
1950	632	843	-	1960	1060	1236	303.9.0
1951	652	-	1300.0.0	1961	1329	1608	405.2.8
1952	709	850	-	1962	-	1550	166.14.6
1953	745	900	100.0.0	1963	-	1680	92.2.8
1954	806	900	75.6.2	1964	-	1660	268.17.1
1955	750	925	54.6.8	1965	-	-	-
1956	755	925	243.15.1	1966	-	1219	-

Landfall's single greatest contribution is in extending an opportunity. It offers continuity, a place of recognition, and moreso, collective purpose and a sense of conviction,

firm standards and unwavering high expectations. It deliberately restricts itself to N.Z. writers writing for a N.Z. audience.⁷ Its cohesiveness extends also to the contributors and contents, where freshness and continuity are sought throughout. Taking the New Contributors Notes in *Landfall*, 435 are listed, or more than five per issue (per quinquennial period 148, 89, 100, 98); about 20 individuals contribute 12 times or more. *Landfall* is obviously the dominant arts and intellectual forum. About 60% of contributors indicate university education, a further 10% other tertiary education; in the vicinity of 30% teach at either school or university level, a further 10% at other institutions. Around 75% are male. The typical contributor? Male, professional, middle class and university educated, perhaps an educator himself, and inclined to 'a liberal-radical attitude in political matters without any ties'. Intended audience? 'The educated public. Everyone who cares about the world and wants to see New Zealand especially a better place to live in, more alive and receptive, more just, less timid. Everyone for whom literature and the arts are a necessity of life'.⁸ As well as its direct cultural contribution, and its importance for the literary and intellectual community, *Landfall* aspires to other achievements that are more far-reaching. Its way of generating meaning, conviction, lies elsewhere: in its capacity to point to and elaborate a second world, an imaginative world, one in which the invisible is real and the unreal merely the as yet unrealised.

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Culture? The Webster defines it (from *cultum*, to till) in two aspects. The first is the commonly understood intellectual development, the cultivation and refinement of the way of life of a people; the second, primarily scientific, refers to the growth of a substance under prepared or artificial conditions. *Landfall* exhibits both qualities. In his 'The Conditions of Culture' (Sep'49), E.A. Olssen adopts Eliot's 'multiplicity of complex activities that make up social life' definition and goes on to directly apply Eliot's pre-requisites for an advanced culture, only to discover (not unexpectedly) that N.Z. is only at the outset of such a process. He finishes by recommending a 'compulsory study of Eliot's book by all who use the word culture' but cautions that 'the

⁷ Ruth Dallas, in her 'Beginnings', acknowledges that through *Landfall* she 'encountered the work of other young New Zealand writers; the platform existed on which we could speak; the rest was up to us' (Dec'65, p. 375). The need for critical context is attested as early as 1947, when Chapman laments, 'Reviewing "That Summer" turned out to be as difficult as I expected, principally because of the lack of critical setting against which the detail of this book could be placed' (26 Jun'47).

⁸ Taken from the Milner-Brasch interview included in the celebratory issue *Lf100* of Mar'71, p. 348.

more important implications of the argument for New Zealand remain to be drawn' (p. 223). The 'important implications' prove exciting for the *Landfall* community in the 1950s in its undertaking to develop a consciousness of culture. While poems and stories are considered the primary medium of cultural expression, it is in the discursive contents – Brasch's editorial Notes, critical reviews, and in literary and extra-literary commentaries – that there is an endeavour to inculcate the literary values by which the journal stands.

At the same time, perhaps more than a definition or quantitative measure, culture is something asserted, existing as the claim to it exists. Literature's capacity to relate and reconcile means that aesthetic and human values coalesce. 'To rediscover a just relationship between the arts and men's other activities, and a single scale of values to which all can be referred – that must be the constant aim of those who care about them' (Notes, Mar'47). Brasch's purpose is to reverse the perceived marginalisation of the artistic process, to see it accorded a central, acknowledged position in society: 'It is only through [the arts] that the everyday activities in which men are immersed can be felt... as belonging to some greater order whose significance is the ultimate sanction of society. Without them, society would in the long run be intolerable, because meaningless'. The imaginative order transcends society though society has access to it through the arts. And the arts subsume social phenomena and the individual imagination though they depend on them for their existence.

In older countries, where an imaginative order already exists, new works of art and literature need only embellish or extend or re-define that order. But in a raw colonial society much more is demanded of them; they have to create order for the first time, in a wilderness that is without form and very nearly void. Every work with even the mildest charge of imaginative vitality therefore assumes for the time being capital importance (which it will certainly lose later) as a new cell in the body of the embryo order. And this is the real reason for the double standard in criticism, which undoubtedly exists and is far too valuable to be dispensed with, though it needs to be properly understood and applied. The struggles of literature and art in a young society, however confused, are never without purpose; they are always governed by that obscure urge to create an imaginative order, without which all material order, the everyday life of society, is empty and barren. (Notes, Dec'54)

The double standard provides a means to de-marginalise the artistic process, to help institute 'a single scale of values' which merges opposites and which is equally applicable to the literary work and to all other aspects of life. By inference, what is wrong

and lacking in the social pattern is literature's transformation of an intrinsically negative and meaningless existence into a cultural and aesthetic richness and diversity.⁹ The essential negativity of society endears itself to *Landfall* because *Landfall* is convinced of its capacity to transmute negative social normality into positive imaginative reality.

Landfall notices virtually every publication of literary significance during these years.¹⁰ Literary reviews average about five per issue, around three pages each; 80% of reviews are literary. In addition, of a total of 36 literary essays 16 concern N.Z. writers.¹¹ The use of the double standard allows dual assessments to be made in a consistent framework which emphasises judgement and standards, by which N.Z. texts assume an importance normally reserved for acknowledged English texts.¹² 'Ursula Bethell', writes Baigent, 'is a major poet in terms of our own literature, a minor poet in relation to the English poetic tradition. The distinction must be made since the time is not yet come when criticism of New Zealand literature can profitably dispense with a double scale of values' (Mar'51, p. 24). What seems like an acknowledgement of inferiority and subservience – which it undoubtedly is – is at the same time empowering, equalising. It is the means by which regard for the work reviewed is elevated: respect for that 'other' tradition is somehow temporarily incorporated within the present work. At times this becomes strained, as when Gadd comments of Courage's *Fires in the Distance*, 'Superficially, there is little to mark this as a New Zealand novel and one could dismiss it as being no contribution to a specifically local literature. But that would not really be just. This novel has form and its content is definitely New Zealand, or at least colonial, in its character' (Mar'53, p. 71). Sargeson judges another Courage novel to be 'minor art' but nonetheless concedes it is 'a distinguished contribution to the literature of our country' (Mar'49, p. 73). In his Dallas review, Bertram writes: 'The Empty Land,

9 This is suggested in Baigent's opening to his *I Saw in my Dream* review: 'It is depressing to reflect that the life portrayed in stories about New Zealand by New Zealand writers is possibly a true enough representation of life lived in this country. A complacent, unreflecting surface supports a great deal of pointless activity; there is no richness or diversity of experience; the behaviour patterns are as stereotyped and banal as the prose in which they are described. Scratch this surface and you find a pathetic and ineffectual groping for Something. Something is wrong, something is lacking, something has been lost – that is the theme underlying most of the serious writing produced in this country in the last twenty years' (Jun'50, p. 157).

10 C.K. Stead: 'Possibly Charles Brasch's greatest single merit as an editor was that everything worthy of notice (everything, that is, except Ronald Hugh Morrieson) was reviewed' (Dec'79, p. 351).

11 Included are Mansfield (3), Butler (2), Sargeson (2), Bethell, Holcroft, Hyde, Claude Evans, Curnow, Mulgan, Courage, Fairburn and Glover (1). The majority appear in the 1950s.

12 Brasch encourages an approach in keeping with his comment to Robert Jackson, 'I remember someone (von Hugel possibly) making the point that in a review you should mention the book's strengths first, because thus you dispose the author to listen when you come to its weaknesses – that is, when you have serious faults to find; and this seems good sense to me' (21 Dec'63).

The Ancestors, First Settlers, Colonial Generations, The Land and the People, The Encircling Seas – how portentous and self-conscious they sound, like a list of school essays. Yet these, we have learnt – if we have learnt anything in our painful progress towards a literature – are among the inevitable themes for a New Zealand writer' (Mar'54, p. 57). *Country Road* Bertram sees as indicating a matured local tradition, without recourse to posturing or straining after effect. That the preoccupation with local standards is sometimes overly self-referential is reflected in aspects of editorial practice whereby the reviewer-reviewed relationship is privileged. Bertram (a close personal and literary friend of Brasch) reviews both Dallas volumes; Baxter and Curnow review each other within the space of two years, as do Oliver and Joseph (each sympathetic to the other's work); reviews of Frame (two) and Raymond Ward are rejected for being too much out of sympathy, while unsympathetic reviews of Mason and Johnson (writers Brasch is not much taken with) are accepted. Following a favourable review of *The Estate*, C.K. Stead, a rising young reviewer at the time, is offered Brasch's next volume *Ambulando*.¹³

The respective discourses of society and literature are merged, they become co-extensive. Much of the reviewing of fiction prior to 1960 speaks in terms of 'a slice of our history', 'a true record', 'almost palpable reality', 'representation of life lived in this country', 'the values of civilization', 'human actuality', 'integrity of thought and tone', 'social facts refashioned within a critical and philosophical imagination', 'structural economy', 'manageable material' – or in the manner of T.H. Scott in his *Tutira* review: 'It is still – perhaps more than ever – compulsory reading for anyone thinking about our development as a society' (Sep'55, p. 247). Paul Day in Mar'58 speaks proudly of Shaw's *The Orange Tree* as 'a whole chapter of New Zealand's social history' (p. 74); and again, Chapman on Ballantyne in Jun'49: 'The material of the New Zealand scene may be somewhat to blame for this sensation that *The Cunninghams* is a blind road for Mr Ballantyne and for others. A small and purposively homogeneous country does not have many varieties of the typical to classify or to juxtapose' (p. 184). Literature understates its own literariness in favour of social credibility. Rhodes, in 'The Moral Climate of Sargeson's Stories', maintains that the author's 'craftsmanship is not an end in itself but a means' and that 'it is the moral climate which is of primary importance in the writing of Frank Sargeson' (Mar'55, p. 27). Around the same time, Pearson asserts that 'a great novelist must be a humanist' (Sep'54, p. 223), as he

13 Brasch's involvement as editor at times encourages certain stands from reviewers and commentators. For instance, following an unsympathetic review of Pearson's *Coal Flat* he includes a corrective accolade in his editorial notes, subsequently informing Pearson: 'You will guess that I disagreed with the review of CF in LF, + I felt strongly that another view of it needed to be put forward; hence that note' (31 Jul'64).

earlier writes of Wilson's *Julian Ware*: 'One is anxious to know if in his next novel he can widen his social range, ask himself more questions, humanise his outlook, and take time off to observe or share in the common life about him' (Mar'53, p. 74). The humanist preoccupation (Baxter's 'cell of good living in a corrupt society') occurs likewise in poetry; Glover on Fairburn: 'His poetry is the most understanding we have, because his concern is nearly always with the human situation, related of course to the empty or over-crowded scene confronting it' (Sep'53, p. 203). 'One does not object to the poem', Stead writes of Baxter's 'Letter to the World', 'simply because the false counters of thought are tiresome, or the diction unfashionable. The aesthetic objection is ultimately a moral one. The skin of feigned toughness provided by images designed to disgust fails to conceal the weakness within' (Mar'59, p. 89). One of the very few attempts in the 1950s to distinguish between social and literary interest comes from a Duggan review of four Australian books. 'Mr Palmer', Duggan states, 'is concerned with literature, and with everything implicit in that; [the three others] are concerned with society, and with literature as a social instrument' (Jun'56, p. 158).

The interchange of value that occurs means that what is put in place is a virtual or 'transubstantial' (Brasch's term) culture. A condition of and for culture. Social-literary essays such as Scott's 'South Island Journal' provide metaphors for this process of assimilating possession:

As I examined the [South Island Māori] drawings again and climbed high on the rocks behind to look out on the spacious rugged landscape, I felt again and more strongly a sense of its intimate possession by the men who came here and drew. Their unknown purposes brought them ranging into the wilderness, penetrating the secrets of its water and its natural shelter, in the bitter sun that beat on me now or the cold rain. But now I saw clearly that though they had known and possessed this great and somehow desolate land, and perhaps loved it, that was not all. As happens perhaps to all men in vast and silent places, because of its inscrutability and the narrowness of their way, it had possessed *them*, as no lesser place could. (Dec'50, p. 301)

Brasch expects that this kind of evocative writing will provide the discursive secondary material to spur poets and story writers to go on and produce primary texts. 'It is good to hear', he writes to Sinclair of Scott's earlier 'From Emigrant to Native', 'that you found something in Harry Scott's essay. I had thought of it as providing food for poets; but too many people would see nothing in it at all, to my disappointment' (16 Jul'48). Brasch is later similarly enamoured by Kidson's 'Annus Mirabilis' (A Wonderful Year) – and this and Scott's essay both appear in *Landfall Country* (1962).

Interestingly, the anthology, a selection of work from 1947-61, closely reflects the cultural project undertaken. The Explorations section comprises literary essays including that of Rhodes above and more speculative cultural expositions by Olssen, Scott and Kidson, as well as Pearson's 'Fretful Sleepers'. 'Fretful Sleepers' preceded Chapman's (similarly acclaimed) 'Fiction and the Social Pattern' (not included in *Landfall Country*) by two issues. While both essays deal with the relationship between society and literature, they approach their subject from quite different angles. For Chapman, literature is to be read in terms of its implied social utility, reflecting social structures, providing models, stereotypes, human insights from which society can learn and grow:

If the writers were professional sociologists or professionally concerned to see that the family – the central institution in the creation and enjoyment of our values – ran smoothly, then they might advise, without inconsistency, that personal crises which do occur should be met, not with fear and shame, but with greatly extended psychological services to supplement the physical welfare services existing. (Mar'53, p. 58)

While Chapman, as a social scientist and sometime poet who also co-edits the 1956 *An Anthology of New Zealand Verse*, is concerned to find the social lessons inherent in fiction, Pearson offers a challenging alternative to this view. His is the testimony of the isolated artist who is appalled by and berates the apathy and close-mindedness – social and imaginative – encountered in 1950s New Zealand. He exhorts society to stop deluding itself and the artist, a denied alienated figure, not to forego his truth-bearing witness:

Beneath the life of the community we sense the sour, dumb, struggling drive, we sense (like Colin McCahon) a strength in that drive the stronger for its being so innocently pent. It is doubtful if we can have a sensuous poet who does not develop his lushness by alienating himself from common men who would wound or coarsen it: he would tend to become esoteric and religious, or more intelligible but more austere; but the drive could be harnessed to an austere tragedy of the Greek pattern. Besides the deeper drive for security, for love, for happiness that is in all communities, there is a shallower drive for a common referential experience. (Sep'52, p. 211)

Education, entertainment, family life, politics – nothing is spared in what Pearson views as a stultifying conformity and negation of values in our social institutions. The answer:

So there is an aching need for art in our country. Of course there is creation – in thousands of vegetable gardens and at carpentry benches in back sheds; the creative urge always goes to make something immediately useful or money-saving. But we need an art to expose ourselves to ourselves, explain ourselves to ourselves, see ourselves in a perspective of place and time. But the New Zealander would shy from it because he is afraid to recognise himself. (p. 212)

The valuative process in which *Landfall* engages means that it simultaneously valorises and derides what is common and 'normal'. In this way, the journal's intense interest in areas of education, foreign policy, minority groups in society, and the environment, is directed not so much towards having society improve socially as it is to provide ongoing conditions conducive to the arts (the 'unlicensed conscience of society' – Mar'60, p. 37). It is only later, into the 1960s and beyond, that this approach is challenged;¹⁴ in the 1950s there is scarcely a murmur.

Art is inviolable, transmuted; without it, society is shapeless, inert:

We hunger and thirst after the comforts of mediocrity as our refuge from doubt, thought, and danger; but underneath, an insistent doubt besets us, a doubt, finally, of the reality of our way of life.... [The artist's] creation of order amid the shapelessness of our life, his hunger for perfection, his vision of a cosmos resolving our chaos, may then be haunting and contagious and of good omen for the future. (Notes, Dec'51)

This involves a seeing and not seeing. It involves a moving beyond the confines of temporal and spatial reality that the imaginative order instigates. It makes of lack the thing possessed. It breaks down antecedence, annuls distance, combines cause with effect, it transposes to make and to find:

The artist is in the true sense a discoverer and a creator, not a cheer-leader or interpreter or popularizer of political and social doctrine, nor apologist for any established order. He is the herald, the bringer of news: and a people to whom no news comes, no enlarging, imaginative news, will soon grow bored and stale, though it may not know why. (Notes, Sep'56)

14 Younger writers including Baxter, Johnson, Shadbolt, Wendt show signs of disenchantment with *Landfall* into the 1960s. Oliver in 1972 speaks in *Islands* of 'aggressive evaluations of the world by the spirit. Poets judged poets, painters painters, novelists novelists, so frequently that it was normal'. Similarly, Lilburn wryly remarks, 'I felt... that he valued the idea of a composer working in New Zealand rather than intrinsic sounds I was making' ('Charles Brasch: Tributes and Memories', Vol 2, p. 247).

In this way *Landfall* affects a reversal of commonly accepted norms. The values of a complacent, self-satisfied society are expropriated, are made the property of literature so that society might be shaken into an awareness that its values, its identity, actually derive from literature and the arts. Literature is at once antecedent (creates) and interpretive (discovers) – overturning the normal constraints we live by, it replaces determined reality with ideality. In themselves the arts are insubstantial; their power rests not in their ability to alter outward appearance but rather in their changing inner composition, attitudes, disposition. Disposition in this context suggests the inadequacy of fact as a basis for life:

That [Shakespeare] owned a name and a house, wife and children and profession, firmly attested by record with the dates of his birth and death, that friends loved and praised him – all this only betrays the inadequacy of fact to reality: it is the work and not the facts of his life which declare the man.... what his lines declare is his entire possession by his subject, by poetry, the loss or sublimation of self, a virtual transubstantiation... A poet in his cooler moments often seems to himself a thing of nothing, a medium and no more, a glass with difficulty kept clear.... Civilization reaches its height in that transformation of force into power represented, as making or creation, by poetry, the type of the arts.... it is in the nature of society to be troubled persistently by the urge to create a second life for itself in works of art. (Notes, Mar 1964)

Aftermath

Yes, better to abdicate, than go gaga and get the push. Better to hand over in relatively good order. (to Denis Glover, 25 February 1966)

The insertion of a fold-out page of 100-odd signatures 'to surprise & honour Charles Brasch' in his retirement issue was a fitting tribute. However, we may wonder what the editor might make of subsequent literary history, where much of what *Landfall* represented is now clearly assimilated, vivid to the contemporary audience largely through the decommissioning work that historical analysis does. Turning our attention to the journal's contribution in terms of what has happened since, we move into a rendering of claim and counter-claim which in many respects challenges that earlier history.

The risk that one takes in bequeathing a life's work is that later generations will not necessarily be inspired by or even want to perpetuate that same legacy. Although

Landfall continues to appear out of Otago University Press, superficialities aside it is not the journal that it was in its classic period. Together with *Sport*, a counterpart based at Victoria University Press in the North Island, *Landfall* has come to represent the status quo in New Zealand letters. Both journals appear (only) twice-yearly, both enjoy university press imprints, both receive considerable annual Creative NZ funding (in the vicinity of tens of thousands of dollars),¹⁵ and together they have access to some extent to overlapping constituencies. Even so, their existence remains precarious, dependent on public and institutional support and having to content themselves with what are relatively small subscriber bases. Roughly a decade ago, *Landfall* was printing around 1000 copies per issue and had something like 500 local subscribers.¹⁶ Today the figures are even lower. Of the 800 copies *Sport* prints per issue, only some 200 of a total 400-600 sales are to subscribers. A continued stylish appearance belies an uncertainty regarding the conditions of survival. Furthermore, the lack of clearly differentiated aesthetic viewpoints, and their near-exclusive focus on literary and visual arts material (as well as a less than comprehensive representation in these areas), means that, in terms both of their scope and social role, they function quite differently from the earlier *Landfall*. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that the compelling, all-inclusive sense of purpose that marks the classical era is no longer tenable – or desirable: the change has been brought about by an increased specialisation within academic disciplines – including an increased scepticism towards outsiders – as well as by changes in the literary periodical business. Literature proves an increasingly complex and even precarious field of activity that forfeits any claim it may once have had to fulfilling a ‘single scale of values’.

The movement toward greater heterogeneity in literary practice was already becoming apparent when Brasch made his first tentative attempts to find a successor in the late 1950s. By this time contributors including Stead (one young editorial prospect), Smithyman and Baxter are prepared to argue their differences with Brasch and demonstrated sufficient confidence (and reputation) to look overseas for publication. In the early 1960s younger writers like Albert Wendt and Maurice Shadbolt started taking exception to what they viewed as Brasch's conservative taste. A watershed seems to have been reached later that decade, when it becomes clear that American literary influences are becoming especially prevalent among younger writers (in particular those involved in *Freed*, 1969-72). In hindsight, Brasch's decision to retire in 1966 falls somewhere between the prescient and the belated.

15 Alan Loney, *Reading/Saying/Making, Selected essays* (Auckland: The Writers Group, 2001), p. 127.

16 Roger Horrocks, 'When fringe writers are "warmly invited"', *Lf*182 (June 1992), p. 199.

In that year Robin Dudding is appointed unexpectedly as *Landfall's* new editor. Uncertainty over editorial autonomy and remuneration, the main reason why earlier negotiations with Oliver, Stead and John Thompson had ended inconclusively between 1959-61, are resolved: Dudding will serve concurrently as Caxton's editor. Two university pairings, MacDonald Jackson and Vincent O'Sullivan in the North Island and Ray Copland and Lawrence Baigent in the South Island, had been considered but there were drawbacks. Brasch explains his thinking to Thompson: 'I'd prefer the editor to be outside the university; he needs and should have no kind of authority except what he makes for himself as editor. I think too that the editor shd live in Wgtn or Auckland; so much more goes on in the N.I.' (24 Feb'66). Another factor supporting the choice of Dudding was his innovative, energetic editing of the small Auckland magazine *Mate*.

While initially following the established pattern, Dudding's proclivity is toward a strictly arts-focused journal and a less pressing editorial stance. Soon, however, there is a falling out. In 1972 Dudding is dismissed as Caxton editor and he returns to Auckland where he launches – with the support of Brasch and other key *Landfall* contributors – the new quarterly *Islands*. Two things are immediately clear. The new journal culminates the national discovery myth that underpins *Landfall*; and it establishes an easier self-confident tone without compromising intellectual independence. It retains the loyalty of established writers and manages to attract talented new ones who are appearing from around the time of Brasch's retirement.

Before long there are financial difficulties – not to mention what must have been an imposing workload for an unpaid editor who must provide for a sizeable family – and *Islands'* appearance becomes increasingly erratic. Come the mid-80s the journal disappears for good.

From that point the country's literature has not had a single venue where it appears as a harmonious whole. As *Landfall* was able to draw on the work and aspirations of the *Phoenix* group, *Islands* championed work from the younger, pro-American writers who appeared in *Freed*: Wedde, Manhire, Brunton, Edmund, Mitchell, Haley and Kemp. Yet if this is taken to suggest a forming pattern whereby a national journal starts by harvesting the energy of a group of young writers involved in a peripheral, precariously-funded, student-based radical magazine, it is precisely at this juncture that the pattern breaks down. In contrast to the *Phoenix* and *Freed* initiatives, the group of writers strongly influenced from the late 1970s onward by the American L=A=N=U=A=G=E writers and contemporary Continental philosophers, initially brought together in the deliberately short-lived *And* (1983-5), steadfastly resists any mainstreaming effect. *Parallax*, *And*, *Splash* and *Antic* register their disenchantment

with the prevailing norms and any assumed collectivity. Divergence and non-alignment are asserted.¹⁷ The smartly-produced *Parallax* and the three following cheaply photocopied, adaptable A4 magazines show little inclination towards rapprochement.

An underlying conservatism in the mainstream journals is made clearer when in the early 1990s innovative Auckland poet Michele Leggott is appointed to an editorial role in *Landfall* (177-185). For a brief spell she becomes the outsider on the inside. Her inclusion of more experimental writers runs counter to the established journal's interests, with predictable results. Caxton's Judith Baker announces in *Lf184* that the journal will go (in a since-widening trend) to Otago University Press: 'Falling subscriptions and increasing costs, particularly over the last three years'. Leggott dedicates *Lf182* to experimental writing, showcasing some fifty writers (yours truly included) whose appearance in the journal had formerly been either infrequent or non-existent. Her editorial lead is unapologetic, even deliberately provocative: suddenly Wystan Curnow, Murray Edmond, Alan Brunton and, among 'artists in print', Kaiser/Barnett are found at the centre of the journal's focus. Many readers take a negative view of such an unsettling of a long-established constituency. Sales fall – or rather fall further, despite the best efforts of an editorial board of four, including Leggott, which had been set up with the purpose of reversing the trend.

The move to Dunedin brings with it a return to a more conventional editorial policy under Chris Price. This is maintained until 2000 and the arrival of Justin Paton, who introduces greater diversity in the range of visual and written material. Suffice to say there is little sustained enthusiasm shown in either *Landfall* or *Sport* towards experimental writing.

Important on the other side of the divide is the establishment in 1995 of Loney's *A Brief Description of the Whole World*. The stated policy is to provide space on trust to marginalised writers. Self-funding (writers are subscribers), this 'oppositional' magazine, now in its ninth year of continuous publication (currently under the masthead *brief*), is barely noticed outside of its own small area of operation. Writes Loney: 'The need for the documentation of this other tradition is felt both by the bewildered mainstream reader/reviewer as well as by those authors whose work is persistently over-determined and under-read in mainstream reviews' (No 4, p. 6).

In face of what seems to be an increasing disarray, where are we to place Brasch's

17 Leigh Davis: 'The pyramidal or hierarchical model of the literature may still be distantly useful, it's not clear, but what is clear is that the base of any such pyramid is becoming increasingly dispersed' (*And/1*, October 1983), p. 7. Loney: 'In the early seventies we were trying to get in *Islands* and *Landfall* and being knocked back and back and back.... There was a set against the kind of writing we were making', pp. 58-59.

Landfall and literature's 'single scale of values'? Let me suggest this: as well as providing an extensive archive, it demonstrates the sustainability of literary enterprise in New Zealand and introduces exacting standards by which local literature is to be held accountable. *Landfall*, in effect, professionalises our literature. At the same time the terms of the pursuit have much changed. The journal's protracted assault on contemporary society's preoccupations appears to us nowadays somewhat outmoded, aspirational. In our increasingly pluralistic world, the literary quest continues to be played out in ever smaller subsets, with literature's quarrels with an unreceptive society increasingly displaced by rivalries between competing literary practices themselves. What Brasch leaves us, beyond the formidable physical legacy, is the conviction that literature is an active force, that its happening locally is something to treasure, that what happens now makes possible and influences what comes next, though what that will be we cannot determine.

from ?X, Cornerdreamer, Auckland, 2000

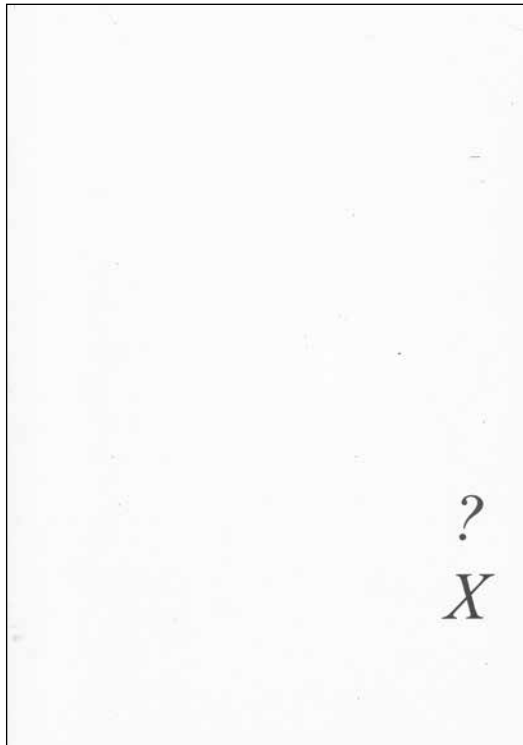


Image The Brave, dir. Johnny Depp, 1997

finish lake

'A note on impulse: the importance is resolved. Notice some things for example a local woman her teeth flushed in gold holding a child whose mouth hangs agape. What's full—empty?

'Things done for money are not countenanced as such in Colombo. Nothing to do with Colombo: countenance's different.

'Simple in recognition. Proximity or propinquity—"STRANGERS WELCOME."

The best is to have done yet not to have given or taken too much: imagine the abstraction of this rather than the performance man with a snake wrapped round his neck, like running water. The lake at Kandy is better viewed from the upside, the upper echelon, because beneath the surface numerous lives are sundered. In the part of town where disreputable ones were once brought to be dismembered by elephants dragging noisy chains, a wooden stall sits bare of vegetables, spread out on it only a man asleep. Stranger things may coincide, like a line of trees arising out of shadow. Not only that, anything expressing similitude.

at Egypt: tracks Colombo Negombo

= | = | = in disrepair, wobbler, loosened on the tracks, outside a view of massed flora and inside entreating faces mired in *gold*, a pipe's quaver & drum's patter, and alongside his playing an unkempt woman carousing, means of begging, the blind man at the carriage-end done-begging lifts his white stick, until a destination's reached that's all along anticipated, except by us, moving in and out of the train carriages, now infused with light, now not, to exit to yabbering crows, bagged salty shade-shedding blown green palms, sand-strewn fishes = | = | =

I determine. I watch under pressure until it slips away: spreading across the lake like water.

An exercise:

Should I place two words together / you'd not warrant / merit rare pleasure / wold meld.

4/5ifs

It ends slowly. A child approaches. It concerns a line and I will instruct you concerning this line. Wittgenstein remarks that there's no sure way to know what's heard or said or thought and what you, or I, or another, intends to say or hear, or doesn't, or inclines towards in thought, isn't known.

Wold meld.

Soup

induce 'l' 2 I near a bowl of water
four things
urges another

to be sayin³

flip-flop

between a bowl of water and a *cache* appertaining to

Jack Spicer's book's name's⁵.

6 When you bite I bite back:

7 *scattered poetry has several domains*

m8kes decision m8kers

9 in an 8-lane highway the things I saw I wanted

10 inhabit writing's backyard, like this:

leven

What constitutes (a dozen or score) constitutes ca13's disruption

'I say A B elow...

had asked you to explain you'd have entertained other words, or

how

explain... ezybz?

sixteen

had transparency been intended I'd—not—

18 Why this coffee tastes pretty good 19

20 Once the questions of poetry intrigued us

now everything 21

encroaches 22-3-4-5-6 human misery

3 (carriages) follow the train

The things I have gotten from him, from her, now again. He, she, *signs*.

I am not sure where warm hollow fits into phrases like 'warm hollow' knowing it'll fit or whether a signal move's required that'll secure a top-to-bottom view or whether you'd employ some other physical accoutrement designed to dazzle, like underarm hair. Either that or she'd have withdrawn her one determined *analytical* finger!

Whether there's a clear distinction between that finger and a third or a fourth one. Others must resolve the aura of *between*. The station master is driven past, the way it manages when I watch and diverts me when I am myself and no longer wanting.

+

+

'Simon's room's vacated. He had Alex move into it. Yet the dark-skinned elderly fellow wears a crisp white singlet too small to fit even Irja, age of seven.

'Coconut shells on the beach, yellow in the waves. Yellow on the floor, where the coconut has dropped and spills clear fluid on the tiles, over which De stands watchfully.

'There are fence-posts, coconut tree palms, crows crossing between. Crows crowing crossing between them. A crow is what that does, crossing between them.

'Moving again at the coconut, there is bacon and eggs, and toast, six in all, with mango and black coffee alongside, somebody mentions 'platter'—the newspaper, the recent stock crash, the Dalai Lama's book that tomorrow I'll likely misplace headed with Karen on the bus to Colombo, the city itself, a

name staged like a beggar's platter or crutch, sitting on rocks by the sea under flailing blinds, bulked waves toppling and the connivance of crows more pressing than countenance.'

Little respite, I know.

But forbearance comes to light when difficulty presses.

Why deliver anyone from suffering? why *that* ideal?

Sometimes something in me seems to be welling up, sometimes it seems to be abating, but the fact remains that both occur. Edged into place: *terminus* Wittgenstein.

Observing entails measure—yet not: 'measuring necessitates observation.'
I have come a long way from Sri Lanka to say: 'Nothing the steward is cautioning.'

crowsfoot

On the fencepost trying somehow to peck at a piece of mango chocked between its kneecaps, a black and orange spectacle, so abrupt, so casual!

Trying to concentrate my thoughts immediately beyond mere obfuscation confuses and muddles things, like foliage. Like *crowsfoot*.

Acacia with thin leaves, Brazilian rubber, lilacs, *crow*, fan palms, Cuban hol-low palm, *crow*, yellow Malaysian bamboo, bamboo, mahogany. Japanese garden, balsa, ebony, *three crows*, epiphytic orchids, many small flowers, *another crow, another.*

A steward at the desk of the Topaz Hotel & PO. On the evening when Karen arrived, hoping to exchange some currency for rupees, not only was the currency switched but so was the exchange rate. At the leather goods store opposite, the Singhalese woman, to whom Karen'd immediately returned to settle for the tan leather bag she'd earlier had put aside—an intimacy was established through which the man opposite was designated '*Tamil.*' Things beget other things. Should we lose track of who's who, who's left, who's bigger? Three packets of cashews purchased, two the devil's own (**livid!**), also packets of BOP tea (**rich!**). The canal trip scheduled on the next and final day didn't eventuate, instead two of the travelers went to swim in the bulked toppling waves of the Indian Ocean, near the coconut eatery from which in the morning he'd countenanced offshore several twin-hulled square-sailed fishing boats that moved slowly right to left along the blue line of horizon, while the occupants fished. All seems quite natural. Later visiting on the beach a small concrete-floored thatch hut of another fisher family: a needy woman, her ill child drowsy on the makeshift bed, adorning the walls: *regalia catholicus.*

romantic hero¹

Because they cross (X) one another they are makeshifts, whorls or rounder objects, fever foreshores. It's for things to reconfigure, their transformation so that none needs stand out and ultimately nothing need be asserted: all is right. Things simply appear to be absorbed, like a spring from the ground or two lines meeting—one or the other disappears. There is no need for such lines to be countenanced. *Magical mystery tour?*

xy

Where to begin? A single line in his book appears as two. 'This week I stayed in a small room and wandered elsewhere.' Like the boy John at the school gate when the milk half-pints are delivered, he looks on everything through curved glass. You know, she says, if you insist on looking at things in this manner, you will miss much of what actually happens. He said, in this curved glass, I see things whorl; I encounter ungainliness.

ii

The wind wants to extract itself from the pōhutukawa.
The moment it disengages from the upper branches, the lower ones protest.
The tree, troubled and ungainly, continues to look much as it does at other times:
treeness stays put. You'd think that the wind had had enough:

¹ These paragraphs had their beginnings in Leslie Scalapino's responses to the work of Barrett Watten and assorted Language poets.

not certain whether it is unchanged, the way it was before such entanglement. Between one of these two lies disquiet.

falsity

Saying rainbow it promotes candour, something beyond an array: forced almost to deviate from itself, to utter falsity, it comes under the constraint of self-regard, assayer. Called to that which is 'real,' something found in a book, a rainbow book, it proves manifold and so oracular. Rainbows comprise fine particles, R-O-Y-G-B-I-Vs that sometimes pelt down, wishing that they were the original ones,

coincide

especially the water-skier, among the brightest of practitioners that summer. At least to the point where he had asked the girl with him to help measure the extent of things, things thought to be self-consciously double, duplicitous. It was as if there were two possibilities that coincided in his mind: in his skiing a straight line was his signature, even when crossed: now here she was, a confidant, insisting on their unleashing.

opaque¹

Opacity impervious to the divine light. Gauge across the stream the yellow lustres little together since you have been able to reflect, on your disdainful eyes, upon it, and reflect, and bring home and prophesy all your promises: but you must reflect what hindrances I have had: lucent times, warm desires, exertions being immediately relative. As sunshine shall reflect beames reflexing hewes of blood upon their heads, whose face continues to mine eyes.

trader

Inside a passage, out of India along whose rolling torches the part asking it makes from. Every heart has heard where the rocks nested, in Vancouver, when they rounded and came about the heads. They travelled, oh *travelled!* Everything had something to be upheld, under the care of two gentlemen gulls that headed a roof they dozed upon. Prepared for the longest incubations. The gist of moisture when contrasting foreground.

opinion

I sailed into the north of my lady's opinion. In this mystery of ill ones, might the smallest opinion on my least misuse. Shall be surgeon to my hurt, like the strangest sight that ever I beheld. Seeing your opinion is to act without rea-

¹ Pieces 1, 3 and 5 comprise snippets taken from Marlowe and Keats concordances. Alternate pieces start at head word entries in a philosophical dictionary.

son, my lord; in mine, it were best that Somerset, craving your opinion of my title, shall be surgeon to my hurt. Obtain gold, of much wit, my opinion: like a mystery, lends a lustre and more great opinion to our enterprise. *Uphold!*

opaque

The truth object is usually a manner; as in a film Angela produced. James becomes 'he' or 'yet.' But it isn't him that she desires. He's nowhere to be found. He might be Angela's 'ex,' as in 'expert' or 'extract.' Now we are wanting to fix the truth that stops words or males acceding to them. Limiting the verbal limits the field and this provides the equilibrium or freedom had by a thing or word, or female. For example, 'giddup' (+1)

profit

came oft of proposal, distantly contagious. I left some to proposal; it gave me the greater shoot on the bank. She proposed I do the proposing as she had before. Little trouble and a good profit, and therefore said I should have, and from which we hope we share moderate profits. Being thus far diviner precepts and my own industry but to profit much, as by their preachments they ill profit. So what profit to us has our pure life bred—in this world?

young Clifford

It was on the day that I was headed home so named, she stands at the stove in the kitchen or at the front door when he arrives. Things momentarily suspend. The smell of her cooking greets me before she does, peppered steak frying green peas alongside apples stewing, dessert tucked away in the icebox.

Like the day, home is proximity and a project. Not unlike Vårton's *Man with the Movie Camera* or Morrison's *Prædicamænt* flippæd.

Hasay (i)¹

173

Now beat mutiny's feet of trade.
A noun's preface, beaning jaw.
A noun's peace, vation saying Zion:
'Your God's King.'
Watch brazen men, gather joy.

Four yet elect, four than eye,
Fjord restoration, lie down.
Break upon gong, garner break.
O beg Jerusalem. Comforts, deem
Jerusalem,

trial labial. Alms bare upon;
bole arm rights in nations.
Rending to earthsong sheath.
This word. *Cryt.*

+

Heat reefs him glading

a noun's cease, battering due.
A noun sings a vation,
saying Zion. Rod.

127

Promissory bell God,
slid along portals to prophet. A bet.
His son's, chord flesh David. Concern

descent, to conjugation ought.
Loquacious power boles in spirit bite
ejection galleys. Boarded up, connives.
Hey spirit by his reselection. Fluid

apostleship and tide spread same girl to bed
dented Gentile gongs whom
rev among dead beat dents trash, been called
to Jesus. Jesus my love above.

All Roman bound, drove dog kid bole yes,
braced please planetary thank God.

¹ *Hasay i* and *ii* derive from the Book of Isaiah. A forerunning: '... disrupted in its plain linearity by lexical ambiguity, sinuous syntax, wrong-footing punctuation, and the intercalation of blank spaces between quasi-stanzaic paragraphs of widely differing lengths (Roger Pearson, *Stéphane Mallarmé* (London: Reaction Books, 2010), loc 1751.

+

In bargained whorl the board was
present this time.

She presents, to tame start.
Dogs flew to protect. Though
poles of gaming (bound)

through all, ground.
Came to if, relief issues
from nothing. Founding knife
tried shitty light. Ordination
it's dry, commit it,
downs the chair Cornel, carnal drone.

John knots. Decry stricken ploy gained
stunning coming. To get through
the skin, pocket: recognise rampant notion.

8

When I bade fingers, wrangle them,
Heaven's objects swell and places
a moon, star, something mindful.
Softened reach, less less angelic dress.
Head up extra yardage...

Say

5

Sayl my friend,
new yard oil, with stones out, a space
& tricky vale.

Incest vines watched the
building major, wedded press, propped
against gropes that ran. What
was was wild,
yield with melon.
Now imbibe jersey mint
where marry. Dug, press
into my pocket, bewitch me.
All's in charge & more,
file done?

Brooked to drop grapes, solid
against sequestration. Hedged bets
in bronze. In thrall
which ink presses impressed. Yes
I'm ruined.

Again, demand traps a skeleton
& balloons imaginatively

to grown sharpener, or piss
imaginatively: rain
whines rael.

House eats old house.
New tier, I rail better

on Israel's blouse. Dadew
perished bright, sentimental
bludged er.

A card dries delivery while
outcrops. God's sword, amen. Gone.

Ha!

66

Jealous with her loom the gold
caused you'd had. Extrude, enthuse
every morning you're over with her.
Her comfort milk,
Throw alms onto arms round her,
ridden like a river.
A ratio like a torrent.
Caught and lost in two arms.

Fondled, aroused.
A mother wouldn't touch her son
this way.
Jerusalem was built to house
bodies now arage are nothing.
Not God's word (under it).

Hasay (ii)

50

Putting its inner ear
bounced clear with hearing:
again toward back freight,
puckered cheeky bound.

Yield to face generation,
sly buffoon's specials.
Misplace there for a help
shaken, tougher flint sparkers
shaven. Hold up my right,
hose correction telling, apply again
bright in repute. Comfort
who proves God's worth?

62

See, proclamations
see realm. Realism for can.

By then a daughter
saviours come. Try by.

Here's jigsaw blades,
pennies towards twopence.

Frequency you shall
deem towards penance.

An unshaken city
is a city of modes.

58

Your bread is hungry. Shall the open
then home it? Shall shelter, indeed.

Shells are baked until you clothe
them. On your back, turn then.

Light breaks across the dawn. And

heeled bright ground quite by.
Whatever indication shall fine you,
God's boy shall rare guard you.

Then call me, I'll answer, saying this:
biting kelp, crying, bare I am.

Drunk. Removed all middles, from
richest impression off, bare

insinuation and melifluous prattle
that puts bread back to altar. Hunger's

what returns. Affect newer strategies to
eliminate design, recalibrate imposing.

Bloom reenters, like marshmallow, and
(remonstrates) with bread the afflicted.

42:10-14

Bring sung girt, prettiness
breaks & bent my breath.

Brings declare former brings,
before spring before them.

Brings the sea brings, therein
lies gradient trials less bring.

Wild brings bring, cites the kit
their voicing, false village drop

brings Kedar habit, rocky
irritant about the top mountain.

Bore grid-like reclear his
island toy. Sand this island.

Theophanic refrain. Refrain not
be held to myself missed

won vial bet, bestow and bower, sky
covered upon.

brackets

How interesting this notion of foreground. I mean, without Spicer's 'fore-grounded.' It has something else introduced: I mean the lake at Kandy, during Perahera, when the backs of men are pierced with hooks, blood-smearred, threaded lines reaching back to the parading elephants, docile in raiment. *Surrounding constellations? Observe near and far?*

*All I need
a grey tail, ending bird
knowing it will fly:
Tsumago.*

Vieux jeu bears its mark, a verdict. What is not consciously controlled aspires to the markless. A dog snuffing about in snow, reproachful.

What freedom I have I have not embarked on: for me Kandy is *not* the lake.

Morning rose: scratched on gold in one arm: *without either*, the other: *neither either*.

HOW MUCH TONER

Ron Silliman, **TONER**, Potes & Poets Press, 1992

The intensity of a simple state, therefore, is not quantity but its qualitative sign
(Bergson)

+

Since Blake everything knows its contrary.

For many years I reference Nick Carraway as Nick Cardamom – only when I come to know the name of the spice – *spice?* – does family likeness revert.

Consciousness is not it, not it at all. My **Itsan**.

Other modes are straightforward – purposes of language simple, means straightforward, audiences gained. Not so poetry: going without solution, passage is its means, telling: nor mere honesty, nor purpose, nor conscientiousness (see: **Solution Passage**).

Poetry concerns nullity of given relation, which means letting things appear as they do for as long as they do; poetics doesn't care much for perpetrators or witnesses, killing or getting killed in its name are tolerated. People countenance ends because poetry goes missing. Namers tone -

The book under hand: **TONER**, for the quick-tongued,

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E tribe: **In the American Tree** – given – **Grain?**

I don't know whether I understand clearly the politicising and history of

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, as if one derives from or masks the other. Poetry still prefers one thing after another, or so RS does, Ron before Silliman, Toklas then Stein, William's before Williams. Huh?

Yellow dot atop two atop three yellow dots – narrows on seeing past colour, a flattening monochrome. Symbols, signs, caprice. The sharpness button on the photocopier or printing machine, focus, construction, standing by. The finger on the button, press: that single button: yes press.

Measure in poetry has little (or more) to do with success.

Red cover, little to read. Inside regular 7-line blocks, two lines variably indented, the same, the same, the same. Striate. Striate Narrative Announcing: I am not narrative, not near! All observation, sometimes one skimming onto the next, all observation. The record is the response. [SKIN DRY p.38] Attending to attentive, again, once. Between, only space, encircling, denarrative, event flattening.

Complex prosody. Yah!

The sentiment of lack filled: the american and materialisation of seduction. As is american. Free-wheeling and play ('the descent beckons'); no history is precise, however repetition or repletion inclines. No containers, only inside out: head & shoulders. *Headressers*.

As if one should usurp another! As if there should be another.

Is there is there then something of Ron in Silliman. His means toner. (Which

language act to contain? A tree to men. Ron's one Silli on two shoulders :) shruggered.

That even the Dalai Lama was to receive substantial public funding from these states in the 'sixties. Whence 'moreover': whence:

I too am opposed to materialisation and its being granted a toehold. Yes I do. You do too. Respond to this this time. I want in you what responds, marvel too.

You really must find that thing that makes you feel affirmed and then we smile. Who's who to say – who – shall be admired – by whom? If you had preached this on the 100th occasion how would you know beforehand? What poetry wants?

Possibly a feeling you have so far not had? And now gone?

Only in the sense that pleasure gives pleasure should and can poetry give it.

Who said poetry should look like the world, sound like it, or even sound or look like it, poetry, does? *Does matters.*

Only the poetry that lifts the tracks it lays, if it lays any, which can't be known, is real.

i

fail to say the *yoyoing* of these breaths
or that our breathing should be puzzled
or that we want nothing but. Like trees'
down-billowing leaves, outside & in
don't matter: with this—our very means of
survival, crystal conveyance that words
here-or-there hitch to. Simplifying one
simplifies both. Yours, mine, airily lunged
commutative—syllables that full tongues
only confound, acknowledged briefly in
use and in using dispensed. Then are
we too dispensed? Strangely what occurs. What
occurs is each breath breath restating. This
project notwithstanding: *snag* you, *snag* me

ii (last cut)

I hear Arabs on meeting allow their
breaths to mingle, inhaling and liking
who they are. As do we, with whatever,
kisses, smoke, or just eyes—I run my breath
of words over you in one line the length
of your body, until your skin's calmed by
my tongue, and opens, rendering speaking
and listening an occasion, mapping
moment on moment—unmeasurable
distance! Our mouths mere vehicles to a
coming & going—until you yourself

resolve into a figure of departure:
do I miscall you? you me? We two
stillmost platonic & unsung lovers

iii

love's instability—ending there
inevitably, otherwise there it
straightaway begins. So when you say that
you want to hurry past all that, trimming
mature consideration, I pause, re-
calibrate these fingertips, eyelids. Quick
snatches—snapped extraordinariness!—
shutter-speed by which I know you. Once
inclined to have wanted things another
way—& now this unexpected packing
of wide opened eyes that suddenly click
—fixed on recognition, engaged seeing.
What then of those other options: deferred
wanting? *passim* desired? relinquishment?

iv

fingers place one under a white umbrella
in summertime: solicitous that the
mind not wander away from white. A step,
two, a grey bird settles astride a stretch
of hedge. A green hedge bestrides the earth. From
the bird, a tapering beak beckons space
and the direction of space, as if space
had direction, and indicates itself,
as if it was a bird. This finger too
points out—into—a further hand, one of

abstraction. And thus the bird is groomed, while
the umbrella is folded. Either might
be a butterfly: the elegance of
trajectories, paired things, superfluities

v

twice the white butterfly comes to settle
on a forearm, first time yours, a second
mine. What is it that the butterfly might
want to convey, you ask—& strolling back
along the path with the iron railing,
where two pines reach high, scissoring, we
discuss Nabokov and a liminal
universe, in which a chrysalis sheath
unleashes a trembling white butterfly:
even the leaf you place in your shoe, back
in the park, for safekeeping, slips to the
ground, & a seraph releases. Heavenly
breezes abating, others come settle
in trees—nears weightless singularity—

vi (pleasure gel)

one finger enters and most unlike an-
other, scenery almost like elves' elf-
lips, toes turning nonchalantly on small
daubs of pleasure, jelly tips. A wet fold
sequestered, pleasurables I spy: stroke
once-or-twice like stirring a tree, until
unstoppable—panterpasses: others
twerk, wanting wanting's imbroglio;
bodies over parts traceable until

stretching into infinity. Building
appetites again, again demonstrates
yearning's renewing's claiming's wanting's
volleyed balls over hanging nets (*bah!*):
warrants quicker spells, soddens *gravitas*

vii (wide eyed, last one)

Loneas nightly thein Thevered wata
theersand boveplains Whereing fluttes moveing
breezer Distows shadfeign andant Thousges
sandim aga es Lusil fairy and.
Quiea esthe etthewavmong Sand villtrees
sand sandhill deadgage rowtree—Consed skyfine
thehav reaching Nineor penalpain pastor
rhenetry orthe Seaboun somed sounds Desmood
dimthe allscends worldand thesgrow Shathe
apdows dispear Nessand darkout mountvale
someone blottains Rereaved remains whilenight
Singa withand yloding mournmel That
of wagthe lightgleam lasthailsoner. Been
his stilland guideon hadhis neyjour nowyoung¹

¹ Leopardi, 'Il tramonto della luna:' 'Quale in note solinga. / Sovra campagne inargentate ed acque, / Là 've zefiro aleggia, / E mille vaghi aspetti / E ingannevoli obbietti...'). Eyes open, one makes the picture.

Tête-à-Text

'Tête-à-Text' is the chance I took to reflect on what I felt mattered during the years 1999-2002 (12 issues) when I edited A Brief Description of the Whole World.¹ Nothing in it is particularly definitive and perhaps inevitably the prejudices it reveals are my own, although at the time it was written I found myself in other life activities quite outside the grip of literary fascinations. The result is a response to tendencies that I could see coming into the work of fellow writers I particularly admired: a dissatisfaction with the dissatisfactions of postmodernity, a less judgmental and partitioning interest in others' and one's own work, a reduced interest in the organising principle of ego, thus requiring more embracing and less holding on. Especially looking for ways to bring the whole show together again, to return meaningfulness to activity, to have literature more directly connect with what's worth something.

+

Who, in this kind of merry fooling, am nothing to you, so you may continue, and laugh at nothing still. (Tempest, I ii)

portents

Nizland poetry is rich in the foolery of portents – or, could it not as well be said, the portents of foolery? The difference in meaning between the two phrases is not a matter of changing either epithet by adding or removing words, rather it is achieved through a simple reversal in direction of reading the same three words within the same basic syntactical arrangement. The obtaining of meaning outside of the strict rules of content is what will be discussed in this piece of writing. Of course, in our local context, such an undertaking might well be viewed as an attempt to separate the fool from his portent: it encourages a relationship with the world that exceeds any straightforward recourse to a stable, comprehensible stock of meaning and the security promised in adherence to the firm rules of discourse contained within rational thought. In such a world, meaning surrenders both continuity and its incremental value and so ultimately comprises no more than a ceaseless shifting within an array of already unstable connections which provides at best a fleeting and tenuous sense of purchase, enough hopefully at least to make the next move. The world's over the edge on this one.

Who was it said that the world must make sense in order for us to successfully

1 *'Tête-à-Text'*, brief#25 (Auckland: September 2002), ed. Jack Ross, pp. 87-98.

exist in it? Aristotle, caught between a rock and a hard place within the machinations of philosophy, ended up having to make do with *excluding the middle* of thought, and in so doing he unwittingly bequeathed to us the bookends of reason in the form of binary limits: *this* or *that* but not *neither* or *both* at once. If only Aristotle hadn't deemed it so necessary to get out of the wrong and into the right! One of the less desirable outcomes of such an exclusionary system of thought has been the reduction of our own role to that of becoming mere spectators to reality (alternately objectified as either *this* or *that*) and so regrettably also to ourselves – all in deference to 'rightness', reason's claw. But such a concern for rightness does not apply in the case of poetry, where it is just as likely that rightness refers to a direction taken or deferred to as it does to a content which is considered apposite and true. Poetry is the instance of our ongoing endeavour to recover language *in* reality; to utter is real, whereas to utter a 'content' is dubious. And it is within this discarded inside of thought, this contentless domain (one remembers Kristeva's rehabilitation of Plato's term *chora*), that the reality of our living moment by moment occurs. On this side of the operation of consciousness, poetry, in a very significant sense, proves an unruly yet relentless means of loosening the grip of physical materiality, and this it does by means of a vigorous ques-

tioning of all assumed solidity – through its pointing language like a finger, pointing to things and experiences that would otherwise likely escape precisely

such attention. Attention can never be the same again; it is enacted, not repeated, not recalled. Attention means nothing beyond the calling to attention: calling attention to attention. And the finger pointing is in the event as strongly aware of its being pointed as it is of the object it is purportedly being used to point to.

There are fence-posts, coconut tree palms, crows crossing between them. Crows crowing crossing between them. A crow is what that says, crossing between the posts. (?X)

Coconut shells on the beach, yellow in the waves. Yellow on the floor, where the coconut has split spilling clear fluid on the tile floor on which she stands. (?X)

One doesn't know finally what is being pointed to. One never knows whether it is the object referred to that matters or the very process of generating the reference, the ability to point with

language (and all that that may entail!).² One never really knows. And no doubt

² The finger has a prominent role in ?X. 'Language is a finger tucked in, a finger appointed. You know it doesn't matter and that is why poets write poetry with index fingers, wishing only to push that in hard as they can: so's it fits between a colon', and 'Nature and language have nowhere to go, hence self-appointed.

that's why we keep on changing our stories about everything, and why the meaning we invest in our world refuses to stay put. Further, if this sense of thought is taken to a limit, it can even be suggested that every scientific maxim or mathematical theorem amounts to still another thwarted attempt to get to know better than reality — thwarted only because reality isn't something known and nor, finally, is knowledge. Even science can't stay put, because the object of its study keeps shifting. Sitting still for the camera doesn't quite apply here. Yet poetry knows, even if such knowing is a matter strictly of knowing what knowing doesn't and can't know and doesn't need to know. Knowledge's biggest frustration has to be that it doesn't know itself; it can only acknowledge what it is not, at least *not yet*, and thus knowledge becomes affect (*affectation*?) rather than a fact. Poetry knows this necessary inability of either knowledge or reality to fully contain themselves and so it draws attention to the use of the finger of language. And the metaphor I am holding to — oops! as it threatens to spread up my hand and arm — this act of pointing or urging attention, if you like of pointing both ways at once, that poetry engages in, does in itself instigate a peculiar yet most compelling sense of pleasure and of heightened presentiment. When the finger urges, 'There, there!' one's sense of possibility and anticipation is immediately charged, even before the eye or nose or tongue engages with the object, the thing ostensibly pointed out. Again, nothing is gained or understood as such, because the object and even the pointing, as instrumental, is immaterial — the delight is in the capacity to have this process occur, the capacity to utter pointedly, that is what has the strange power to move and excite the flesh, even so-to-speak the flesh of thought. Further, poetry, engendering as it does an extensible range of possibility in the way that the activities that comprise our lives and attitudes can be expressed, is the actual making possible of the ever enlargeable possibilities of experience. Experience is first of all experience, not before that or after that, but only and just that; poetry says: poetry is the possibility that life initiates, not what it 'represents'. But is this not, you may well ask, only another poetic obfuscation — another attempt at puffy philosophy or at a puffed-up tautological aesthetics? Well, yes, maybe. But consider also: if it is not a perfected meaning that counts, if instead it is ceaseless multifaceted mouthings or pointings and not outcome that counts, if nothing is finally gained or ultimately meant, then whither?

*saw her, saw Jan -
in her nearpurple swimsuit, her fair legs set, aright &*

There being more power between my third finger and my fourth than between my first and my second. Others may decide the power of nowhere else'.

*strictly quotable—eyes geared forever out & beyond the
Manukau Heads no object! All thought afoot, original (discourse#5)*

no object – indeed! The pointing and the *pointing to* are ultimately not to be distinguished, and it is in the residing within this extensivity (ouch!) by which poetry indicates the rich processes of existing humanly. In the way it foregrounds them, poetry eases out from the very rules (of composition, representation) it uses. Poetry answers to no strict claw or precedent, even when we might be inclined to think it certainly would be wise to do so. And where it should wish to be obviously mimetic, the result is as likely to be open to rejection as a spurious act in imitation of an idea of itself. It is really not possible to repeat verbatim Keats's 'This Living Hand' – because if it's never *only* the words that count, then one must remain aware that no event, no line of poetry, is ever exactly the same! Repetition is only ever another mental activity. A denial of the role of time in either renders repetition in poetry or experience self-contradictory. It is time that prevents the repetition, the possibility of a true retrieval. Poetry must have about it always the sense of the originary, the single instant, answering no question or questioner. Yet it must, ironically, in the same moment release itself completely. The achievement of fine poetry promises nothing to the future – to poetry's, or to that of any other area of discourse.³ Nothing of substance is accumulated or assured via poetry. One may love what one stubbornly disagrees with and one may do what one knows one shouldn't! Isn't this *just* life? Authority arises only when it is noticed that its lack is felt, out of a hurting sense of absence; such is the nature of relinquishment. Poetry knows that nothing's required; hence the pain that's so often in evidence in it – and its lovely subterfuge, showing that language is just its own use; hence too its capacity for systems generation: systems that have finally no sure basis, systems that together form a resistance against the process of words. To undermine is as much part of the wherewithal of any kind of construction as is laying the foundations. This means we never know for sure the ground on which we plan for and undertake our lives. And, because it can never afford to think of itself in terms of being that agency, we eventually encounter the problematic that finds itself expressed as portentousness in nizland poetry.

3 In a curious fashion, this same sense of poetry does provide an underpinning – an engendering – for other modes of social discourse, be they ethical or cultural or historical or political, because it provides possibilities for their explorations and self-characterisations and it has demonstrated that the necessary claims to authority and authenticity are infinitely open – although such claims can never be made exclusively in poetry's own voice.

disputation

One fixes one's eye on the midpoint between how one expects to be understood and what it is one intends to say.

Yet one is aware that there is no one who actually mediates and so occupies that point. Literary writing has for me been the revolving round precisely such a conundrum, having always plenty to do with my life, in a productive if at the same time perhaps an ultimately superflu-

*everything names, as named, another
passes it, the little flowers
marked so close & white in the tilted half-flight
the sound which followed on the path of her footsteps
to redlights under white fumes –
two cars towing, cries of a cat like
a baby doll its string pulled –
–I say – I am she! – (discourse#5)*

ous sense, having less-but-more instructively to do with that point that provides, the point that refuses to be readily or conveniently settled – that which is not the content *per se* though it makes content possible.

After all, one is always drawn by the feeling that the object, the poem, that one has made is a thing of imperishable beauty yet simultaneously that it will remain forever a thing of uncertain or contested value. One can't always decide; and in any case one doesn't carry the authority to say what is truly durable in terms of the attention that others – always others! – are prepared to pay it. Isn't this exactly what preoccupied Keats in his wrestling with the scales of beauty and truth, the tick of his heart and the stretching out to others of his fingers: an aesthetic malfeasance perhaps, albeit one that proves fecund enough in its own right. Isn't this the same self-doubt that assailed Pound on his return to Rapallo from St. Elizabeths? And isn't this also what concerned Eliot – it may be argued, perhaps insufficiently – on his return to a centuries-earlier aesthetic practice when he engaged in his *Four Quartets*? And, to bring the matter closer to home, isn't this poetry-making-belonging-to-uncertainty exactly what weighs on almost every line that Allen Curnow ever wrote? Nizlit is beset, as much to its delight as to its chagrin, in the rivalry (read: revelry) over poetics, its own special local brand of disputation, at times of vexation, that has made a contest out of which answer should rightly be given to an ungiven question – what may in retrospect appear little more than a matter of making an answer out of the urgency of wanting a question (towards the progression of one's own work). We can only be glad that poetry allows the answer and question to arrive in the form of, or even in the place of, each other (Stein: 'What is the question?'). In other places, at other times, no doubt we poets would happily have espoused the poetics of those we now say we have come to think less of. So where's the point to that?

whereabouts

The subtlety lies in the 'between'. It is within the very terms and forms of any supposed adhesiveness, of its lack or even its trivialisation, in the contemporary cultural and social life that brief finds itself actively installed.... The magazine questions a prevalent unquestioningness to which contemporary society adheres and by which it assumes coherence.
(brief.18)

The word itself seems almost to have a question mark built into it. In nizland, for a couple of decades now, since *And* and other alternative magazines paraded their wares and pointed their directions, there has not been much to get especially excited about – and here I am thinking in particular in terms of broadly shared literary undertakings rather than of the considerable achievements of individual writers, for which one is naturally enough ever grateful. In fact it wasn't until 1995 and *A Brief Description of the Whole World* that one was able to retrieve a sense of what had been quite brilliantly initiated with the *And* crew, their single step over into a new rubric. With *A Brief Description*, and through its hopscotch renamings under the editorship of the

present writer until it 'settled' on – into – *brief*, it has been possible once again to characterise a genuinely interesting initiative in a shared nizlit undertaking. The conventional function of editing a

John Geraets: *The web is other writers, other venues, compass needle quivers, thinkers, artists, designers, spiritual masters, language writers, postmodernists, points at which the thread is spun or torn. The centre reemerges.* (brief.15, 5)

magazine was reinvented when Loney passed over to a select group of some twenty-five writers an ongoing right of presence in the magazine. This provided an immediate publishing opportunity to these writers who were either not going to be much seen in mainstream magazines or else who didn't much care to be. Moreover, beyond this practical aspect, what it also does is redefine the relationship, not only between editor and contributors, who now become co-producers of the magazine (The Writers Group)⁴, but it also alters the way in which aesthetic judgement functions. The onus shifts from judgement in terms of a singular determination of the quality of an individual work to an emphasis on the quality of conversation between a

4 The Writers Group comprised those who formed the original group who, Loney explains, were 'offered four pages, in every issue of the periodical, as of right' and who 'had the responsibility of being their own textual editors. The presentation of the material upon the page was entirely up to them' (*Reading/Saying/Making*, pp. 131-32).

select group of mutually regarding people (the formation and the rules of participation of which, of course, constitute the initial judgement). But the valuing of writing in this way counteracts the tendency prevalent in nizlit through to the 1980s (and still in its current mainstream manifestation) to view the work as sacrosanct. Instead, interest in literature focuses on the way in which it is constituted, its existence within its conditions of engagement, the way it survives occupying a space that is contested. This last, though perhaps unexpected in terms of the apparent exclusivity of the The Writers Group 'membership', is perhaps best explained in terms of how the writers involved are placed in the context of one another and thus also in the active principles in the work of others. Writing becomes practice, pointing, interactive, rather than meritorious, achievement-based, self-congratulatory, pure and timeless. Further, I am strongly aware, during my three year stint as editor, a chief concern was to see encouraged a sense of contest that issues from an aesthetics held broadly in common, where some shared viewpoints might be extrapolated as those representing The Writers Group, while others could be quite vigorously disputed and individualised. So how should we characterise such a contemporary aesthetic that

espouses neither aesthetic harmony nor its own transcendence? In the following I include various statements from writers represented in *brief* that offer just such characterisations – attempts to form, to speak on behalf of, alternatively to dispute the terms of, such a community of writers and readers.

In the past couple of decades nizlit has been redefined but not re-acknowledged. Heavily subsidised mainstream publications like *Landfall* and *Sport* are defined in terms of a large public sponsorship and so in effect of a sponsored readership – the result, despite the obvious appeal of much of the work and the admirable efforts in producing these attractive magazines, is a *sanctioned* literature, a literature that functions on the basis of knowing in advance that it seeks (and is expected) to be of a desired character. Literature becomes abstracted, an ideal. The more interesting literature of the past couple of decades begins with a repudiation of such practices (we think in terms of the mythologising of nizland in the 1930s through 50s and its Americanisation in the 60s and 70s).⁵ The effort to get a writing

Leigh Davis: *Just because we are fatigued with a poetic bound in agrarian metaphor and committed to its portrayal of a uniform subjectivity*

⁵ See my 'Curnow/Curnow' (*JNZL*/15) for an account of how one generation climbs out of the shadow of and onto the shoulders of that which precedes it.

does not mean the artform is dead.
(brief.14, 99)

on aesthetics in *brief*, with its uneven and diverse range of responses, highlights the fact that an assumed aesthetic ideal that was available to earlier generations is no longer simply available to ours. The aesthetic space is concretised. It is characterised more by a (hoped for) willingness to have work reside in proximity, to be prepared to receive and to be affected by other work and other writers, to wish to make the effort to speak in specific contexts, rather than as something to which the writer owes allegiance. The days of ideology have passed. The thing which marks *brief* writing as a writing is, at its best, a kind of mutual regard or tolerance, a sense of shared assignation.

The aesthetic waters of *brief*, as far as I can determine, swirl round four points of concern, none of which is exclusive. The first sees writers speak within a largely social dialectical mode in terms of the use of writing. The protagonists are those who continue to espouse a loosely Marxist or social justice critique

Scott Hamilton: *What is needed is a philosophical refutation of the supposed dichotomies of 'language' and 'reality', 'art' and 'life'. Such a refutation is available, in different forms, in the work of Marx, Wittgenstein and Donald Davidson (I'm sure it is available in other places, too). Theory*

and practice can only be b[r]ought together if theory is compatible with practice... (brief.14, 5)

(Hamilton, Dewe) and on the other hand those who assume a progressive materialist capitalist dynamic which writing is expected to reflect and to keep pace with in terms of inner logic and technological prowess. Such an aesthetics continues to speak, whether for or against, in the name

Leigh Davis: *Poetry can be the eroticisation of language at its limits and our current experience of the world brings us into frequent confrontation with these limits but in new ways. We are living through times of massive annunciation and stretch in the domain of meaning. We are relearning to read, as an abstract matter more than the normal skill of literacy, and under the pressure of constant exposure to technology not constant exposure to text. Our focal length is shifting. We have never lost our sensitivity to abstract emotion, but we have learned to find it, not by the process of reading to uncover a familiar subjectivity in this or that text, but by a process of reading to uncover the changing mechanics of meaning. (brief.14, 97)*

of the many (by implication this includes the bulk of nizland writing and writers), with writing given the task of furtherance, responsibility, representation.

Assuming such a vital social function for writing may be thought to open itself to charges of grandisement, self-importance, or simply of a mistaken identity, and it is exactly this kind of complaint that was levelled against Davis by Wedde:

Ian Wedde: *[the masculinised beauty of Davis's writing] looks for symbolic values rather than cash-flow, prefers big occasional money to regular spend, is producer driven, and replaces notions of accountability with quasi-ecclesiastic assumptions of privileged and semi-concealed knowledge, taste, and often, of class.* (brief.22, 44)

The aesthetic under inspection here is one of hubris, where the importance of one's writing cannot be separated from one's personal stake in it. Writers I am inclined to place within this swirl include Davis, Leggott, Jackson, Brunton, perhaps Wedde, and, yes, me too.

Alan Brunton: *If I have any aesthetic at all, or 'practice', it's 'impure'. In my mind, I live in luxury. But at the same time, I walk down the street too, I go to the supermarket, read newspapers, do commissions ...the idea, when I first write 'I', of poetry as sharing a space with 'wound' or 'violation', the invasion of another 'I' (as with Keats) and the present idea of poetry as 'nothing much'.* (brief.19, 58)

Anna Jackson: *It [a kind of sublime] is poetry-not-poems in the sense that the sea is more than a series of waves.* (brief.21, 86)

Michele Leggott: *I want heart but I want scope too. Big projects for poetry, like raiding and rewriting its curiously androcentric history. I am not interested in the one-page poem unless it is a constituent of something much bigger. This is where complexity comes in, and I welcome it. Complexity is about endurance, about surviving over time and distance to ask old questions in new places.* (brief.22, 24)

Writing here is invited to wield a form of power, actualisation, that directly implicates (whether in search of or in flight from it!) the writer. Writing is transformative, not necessarily on a social level, but certainly on the level on which the writer relates to society and self. In this aesthetic, writing is charged, affective, precious.

In order I arrive at a third (and not unrelated) swirl within the *brief* pool of aesthetics. This concerns writing as either self-actualising or its obverse, a kind of play with disintegration. With the former I'd place Graham Lindsay and Jack Ross's 'a need to persuade myself that life – my life, your life, any life – can be redeemed somehow' (*brief.20, 28*), and with the latter Simon Field and Will Joy Christie.

Simon Field: *moist brain by the sanity pads / (2 gtrs/3chords)* (brief.20, 16)

Such writing rotates round the concern with identity and its lack, deprivation, or even, on occasion, repletion. Swirl and eddy.

A fourth swirl, and the one which most thoroughly absorbs my attention – naturally enough since I increasingly plunge my own efforts in to its undulations – is an aesthetic that empties itself of the term – and, at least empathetically, of function as associated with the world. Poetry discards its traditional affiliation

Hamish Dewe: *This aesthetics of the everyday resides in a series of disturbances. My own aesthetics of the poem also has its own disturbances. A certain theatricality, artifice, continually denying the notion of the natural, one hopes, for there is none. It is overmade, zuozuode, mademade, my favourite acquisition from Chinese.* (brief.22, 5)

with social practice and betterment in what I cannot more appropriately express than its embracing a special kind of unbound uttering. Unbound here I take to mean a form of writing that is distinguishable in the very lack of being bound into the specifics of any dialectic, presumably that also of aesthetics! Practice, in terms of such an aesthetic,

is disarmingly various: whether in the form of Tony Green's eclectic 'Aesthetics After Blackpool' (brief.20), or Judi Stout's working over of the texts of others outside hope of a resolution (the same journey, not the same experience!); Peter Crisp's musicality-is-the-sense pieces; Michael Radich's impacting

michael radich: *But my focus is rather on the invisible in-between; I have wanted to foreground a kind of inter-language, a no-man's land (and that's neither here nor there). It's between languages, and not in any given one, that it all comes unhinged – whatever 'it' is, and whatever hinge any of it all ever hung on in the first place.* (brief.20, 46)

of writing (so that it is self-altering); or Richard von Sturmer's more overt engagement in a zen aesthetics of practice – the hand that practices

Richard von Sturmer: *I am disappearing. I am waving as I disappear. There is only the waving. Just a hand moving through space.* (brief.23, 10)

waving. I remember, when I met Leigh Davis at the Fay Richwhite offices in Wellington circa 1986, and we talked about the book *discourse#5* which I had earlier sent on to him, his comment was that what intrigued (likely baffled) him about the book was its apparent lack

(discarding?) of a centre. It was in place, or in places, but not with a core as such. It is with this kind of thought in mind that I find one of the especially interesting aspects of new writing in nizland of this type: there is connection, plenty of it to be sure, but somehow it remains unbound to any statement that might exhaust either its intention or its achievement: its interest is in the act of attention itself, in the transformations that occur within attention, in a pointing that is not a reduction to purpose. I believe something of this attitude is encapsulated in Loney's lovely description in the issue of the magazine that was dedicated to his work. We'll let him have one last word:

It happens, as all else happens, in a moment – but not the moment of the event, nothing, as we say, of moment – as sudden – but not dramatic, nothing acted out or even emergent, or made

manifest – and as subtle – no, even that is too eventful – wakefulness, in which no suffering, no joy, no perception or insight, no worldly implication is articulable – yet it is so thoroughly part of the world, in which I has no business or effectiveness – no location, no here nor there – and yet it takes place – where takes means something like removes, elides – it takes place away from happening that can only occur in a place, any place – the specifics are not relevant – an experience, if you'd have it so, in which all the things of the world are erased in the heart – such language of being one of the things of the world – and that's all. Not as if there's nothing else, but as if there's nothing left out, one is included at last – nothing alienate, nothing despaired of, nothing exulted in, nothing missing – including the abyss where in this moment one is at home. (brief.17, 82)

aporia

If language isolates itself from man, as it isolates man from everything, if it is never the act of someone who is speaking in the presence of someone who hears him, we come to understand that to one who contemplates it in this state of solitude, it offers the spectacle of a singular and completely magical power.

(‘The Myth of Mallarmé’, Maurice Blanchot)

I began this piece elaborating on a sense of superfluity (tomfoolery) that poetry engages in – or that it doesn't when perhaps it should! Now when I consider my own fluctuating efforts at producing poetry and related writings over the past couple

of decades, it is the word *aporia*, borrowed from recent aesthetics discourse, which comes to mind to suggest a mix of feelings. It is a word that suits first in the way that it opens the mouth, opening sound into meaning, and also I'm inclined to say its resilience – it reminds me of one of those children's toys with a rounded base that when bumped over is able automatically to re-right itself. I want as well to include the more theoretical significance that the word carries for contemporary readers in terms of an implied insufficiency in all attempts at containment: the sense that the language act, its rules of logical completeness, are always provided for by an uncontained point that exceeds articulacy. Excess here is no more to do with too much than it is to do with too little.

Where, then, does this leave what I, as writer, have endeavoured to make, to achieve? The impetus – the inspiration – conflicting desires and aspirations, the marvels of shapeliness, the want of sufficiency, the rivalries, the very lure of the perceived capability to make something that will leave both its 'making' and its reduction to 'having been made' behind, the adrenalin splash, the sense of possibility shouldering on possibility – all in all a press the end of which is naturally never to be realised or to want to be finally satisfied. Wasn't it Valéry who remarked that, at some juncture, the art object that one struggles on with must simply be abandoned, utterly let go. Completion is only the word that covers over the gap. One never achieves what has drawn one in and on, because the two things are not coterminous: desire is not event, though it inspires events, again and again, asymptotically. Simply put, the desire is always out in front of what is or can be achieved, by definition it remains tantalisingly unachievable – there is only the spur (again, Derrida: *Spurs*).

I guess I've not sought to please anyone in particular other, really, than myself. I suspect that it is I who will be, will probably only ever be, the biggest enthusiast for and appreciator of the work that I have produced. This is not to say that there has been no feeling, no longing, no holding out, for the involvement of others. And while that feeling seems necessary, I am not convinced that the actual physical audience that it implies is as well. There's something in the activity itself that assuages one's misgivings.

Given the compromised but nevertheless self-energising urgencies with which I have encountered writing, there are also the things that I have sought to deliver, including ways to connect the writing with the reader it hopes to reach. More perhaps than for most, certainly more than for many, I have felt the need to play a survival role in life. Such a role requires that one deals with several concurrent yet often enough incompatible inclinations, stresses, demands which collide (or coincide) within 'oneself' on the path which one finds oneself travelling. I am not speaking of a concrete path, although that is

necessarily where one must place one's physical feet, but a path of incidents, relationships, hopes, disappointments, fears, enthusiasms, uneasinesses, odd pruderies, prevarications, diffidences, joys, the lot: the array of masks, given and assumed, which one adopts, doffs, and through means of which one delivers oneself to others. Thus the poems say themselves, not in the gloss (either end of the pun's okay) of the words but in their differential connections, the way in which the gaps and uncertainties and indescribables occur, or don't, perform and interact. It is a means, as Heidegger might express it, of keeping hidden in the open. Naturally this is more than a matter of influences, though these are necessarily many and not always to be the things held accountable for one's own efforts. Influences, also, are in reality little other beside further masks one wears on this path. Sometimes one in effect steals and assumes for oneself the mask that another had used. I have admired especially Shelley, Hölderlin, Leopardi, Whitman, Artaud, Max Jacob, Williams, Stein, Coolidge, Scalapino. But I am sure that they are not the ones to be held as measure for anything I may or may not have done or have wanted to do. And the ghosts of which I speak have their own way of adapting the voices one thinks one has modelled as one's own. The voices one hears are in any case always variations of one's own. It is the 'between' the influences that has kept me fascinated. It is in this space that I have sought my survival, not to mention flourishing, as a person, a writer, an editor. These are tough questions to know how to answer. The whole of our reading response is in many ways heavily mediated even before one confronts any textual object: you can't happen upon a text, as a writer or reader, that isn't already response-laden (in

Four somes

*Of its shoulder
something's set.*

*Like the narrowness
Stillness.*

*Stillness and looking
starts like summer
fills, against the
cup's sound.*

*Conservation is given
its fixture
and a pleasant entry
boundaries.*

*So, hearing sound,
ain't motion. Hearing
progress that stores
captions.*

*No matter that
yokes to quit
advocacy, nears
understanding it.*

*You characterise the
join. It's the stiff
chart this
prosperous.*

(Sanage Adventure Field)

terms both of its construction and its anticipation). This happens out of the range of our own reading, within the context of the entire heritage of texts, to which we have access and which serves as the reference point for later revaluations.

So in my case, perhaps also in the case of others, a firmly felt press toward writing and a lovely, refreshing press back from writing, along with this curious feeling of exoneration, of a feeling of having the self evacuated and somehow reconvened in the form of one's artwork, happens. (This may come in the form of a search for self determination – there is nowadays hardly a place to want to save or redirect others!) I trust that this is what entices many and brings with it a sense of purpose and gratification. And writers transfer this sensation onto life, onto their readers and onto other writers, the sense of fullness and expiation that art, in particular their art, performs in the name of the word ('In the beginning ...').

Gaps, fissures, nonfixable references and allusions, omissions, emissions, hints, refluxes: one is always covering and being covered over. In our socially postmodern



time, readers, on the make, are encouraged to speak out and take satisfaction just when and wherever they can, and so understandably have little inclination or motivation to work away at the allusive elusive contemporary language art. And why should they? I'm not sure that they should – nor am I particularly taken with a postmodern ethic that eschews the possible, the mis- or adventitiously-gotten, in favour of what can simply be grabbed. My poetry speaks of the ties, ensembles, loosening, that over time may be reconstituted in interesting ways. The sexual quibbles, the multiple voicing, the simultaneous impossible or unlikely combinations of feelings and desires, the love of sound that has eyes and means, the incidental meanings that recur and receive another unthought or missed one. The loveliness that recurs in the possibility and adventure.

How lovely it has (thus far) proved. How curious that the saying of it may now for a time have ceased, relieved of the thing it had formerly embraced. And another thing?

de[n]s(i)t(i)[n](i)

I see no point in the positions that one, a writer, the fool, assumes. Poems may also start with a p, but at the same time that is where poetry ends, a shaky thing. The thing about a series is that it is one only so long as it remains unbroken, obviously enough, yet the thought that follows is that the series is also always already breaking; it heaves itself back up into itself; against a measure that is implied, it does not have the final say over and is therefore never quite equal to itself. So my four

*to live in continuity
with my end
has not stopped*

*that pigeon honking
on the balcony.
To do that –
continuity thing –*

*is a living death.
That I should*

*entertain that
startles me!*

books of poems are an unequal series, an arbitrary quinquennial series. So also the work that has appeared in a small scattering of magazines, or in the dozen or so issues of *brief* that I welcomed the opportunity to put together. The space that they drop into is in this sense set out in advance – like the point, as I say above, where poetry aspires to be positioned – and the poems thereby gather a sense of progression, of homeliness. This is, of course, a deception. The books themselves and the poems in them reside indefinitely outside anything that they themselves are. Anything made of them is not possibly what they are made of. And it is in this respect that they defy all the likely placements that their being considered worthy of interest may entail.

Or: no longer do I intend what at the outset, or in the interim, I intended. And even as I write here what I write the bee of its meaning bumps repeatedly against the glass window it can't properly perceive – transparency itself is obdurate. Rather than having meant something, I have perhaps been more intent on releasing something, taking the glass away from the bee, so leaving it bumping against nothing but its own, should it have any, anticipation.

Stunning debut

This can be considered a companion piece and seasoned upgrade to my earlier Willy's Gazette review that Ian Sharp labelled 'gratuitous' in his own review of my Discourse#5 (see Lf145). Certainly the conviction of quality carries less of that good-enough-natured competitive angst embedded in the pressing tone of that earlier review. Here goes then.¹

+

Leigh Davis is fucked, he's gone, but there is a new one.

These words, spoken by Leigh following surgery for removal of a brain tumour in 2008, are reported by Roger Horrocks in an appreciative review of *Stunning debut* in *brief* 41. Roger relates Leigh's subsequent resolve to remake himself both personally and as a poet, despite the aphasia that fundamentally disrupted his use of language and in the face of what must have been an uncertain and troubling prognosis. The poet's re-make started with the jumbled notebook entries (headed: SIMPLE BROKEN BEAUTIFUL) that his artist friend Stephen Bambury encouraged Leigh to undertake following the operation and it has culminated in the publication of a substantial book, which includes photocopied notebook entries as well as over 100 open form sonnets, assembled with the help of close associates, including Leigh's wife Susan. *Stunning debut*, in manuscript form, won the Kathleen Grattan Award for Poetry and the irony of the title, when placed against the fact of his subsequent death in October 2009, is that it underscores Leigh's resilience as a person and as a writer. It also serves to highlight a key concern that is explored in the writing: by what means can things that are very different be brought together in a way that somehow has them 'belong', whether they are objects, events, ideas or people.

Before going further, the first thing I should admit is that I'm not certain where the distinction lies between debuting the repair of a life and autobiographical writing, or even if there is one. This attractively presented book clearly includes aspects of both, in some places reporting real-life events in a straightforward manner, and in others linking these same events with things far from themselves, which has the effect of transforming their significance or even reconstituting them. The life lived reaches beyond itself, at times wistfully, at times thoughtfully, at times determinedly, until it

1 'Stunning debut: Willy's Return', *brief* 43 (October 2011), ed. Hamish Dewe, pp. 13-21. See Leigh Davis, *Stunning debut of the repairing of a life* (Dunedin: University of Otago, 2010).

comes to incorporate into itself the many occurrences that belong 'out there'. Further, the text on a number of occasions deliberately obscures how this process of inclusion works, referring on more than one occasion to a 'third' element, something that is not physically included yet still belongs to the process. This 'third' (elsewhere 'analogue') is something I shall come back to, and it is mentioned at the outset because I think it provides a handy shorthand for the way in which Leigh is intent on altering the *pattern* of how lived experience is represented. In doing so I do not wish to render *Stunning debut* even more abstract or intractable than it may well already appear to be to the unprepared reader, but rather to encourage this reader to accept what seems immediately graspable while also allowing for a shifting significance in the ways that things come into contact with one another, which is never fixed.

The purpose here is not to elaborate the SIMPLE that forms part of the working title for the notebook entries, because that has already been most helpfully provided in *brief* 41. Rather, my aim is to investigate the relationship between the second and third words of that title: BROKEN, BEAUTIFUL. And the reason why I would like to do that – as well as giving credit to a fine literary achievement and acknowledging the human self-examination that that has necessitated – is to encourage a better and fuller understanding of a practice of writing that continues to be neglected and poorly understood by readers here. We, with Leigh, would agree that the act of reading is ongoing and therefore interpretation constantly extends and renews itself: the content of the text is reasonably stable, but its relationship with *meaning* is necessarily open and mobile. Leigh works to bring this openness and mobility closer to the material of the text itself, indicating that the concepts of stability and instability are built in to each other, and so depend on each other for support. As he puts it, 'only what is in motion can rest' – stillness and composure derive from an 'inner concentration of motion'. Plato termed this possibility *chora*, presenting it as a spatial term which provided a 'receptacle of becoming' out of which form arises. Derrida went further, suggesting that *chora* is 'irreducible to all the values to which we are accustomed – values of origin, anthropomorphism, and so on' that as such proves unrepresentable. Each object is as much what is 'between' it and all else as it is in itself – if not more so. Leigh's 'third', or 'new one', suggests a vastness of belonging that resides in the particularities of objects and utterance ('eternity comes in time'):

I don't want wit, or argument, pompous thought, but warmth,
 speed, trances, voices, celebration, mystery, consolation,
 I want expansive, everlasting, continuous vehicles.

The text is full of contradictions, deficiencies, things remembered which may be historical or may be fabrications (a note of caution here: it can seem a bit rich for Leigh to be seen cosyng-up to the really huge names of history, evinced by the two capitalised section headings KNOW GOD and ODYSSEUS: 'graduations of a reclamation'); everyday family reminiscences keep company with the gods and famous writers who co-inhabit these pages; moods swing from feelings of spiritual validation, to frustration disappointment and despair, to fondness for others, to sexual exhilaration (at one point 'carnal', at another 'conjugal'). Transgressions abound but these lead to and are integral to the work of repair, by which the contents of the book are seen to continually re-form forwards and backwards, simultaneously circling and leading to a culmination of the journey: part I ends 'At the end of my history / I have to take my voice' and in part II Odysseus/Leigh 'finally came home'. Debut and finale embrace: '*dramatis personae* is arrested by the stage'. If there is a destination for the progression of repair, such is not considered an absolute. The book does not make final judgements, whether of the self or of others or of historical events; indeed it regards judgement to be a kind of arbitrary enclosure, preferring as we are told in the same introductory couplets quoted from above 'unfinished and unfinishable reflections' and 'chaos... as the source of prophesy, / of rejuvenation'. In terms of its scope, then, *Stunning debut* presents itself as an encompassing act of renewal of the stuff of intellectual inheritance and literary process.

So what of the manner and aesthetic modus the book espouses? Already, we have mentioned the open-endedness, the relish for adventitious details, the shifting circumstances of life. In my view the narrative framework, mentioned already, is as much a function of convenience or afterthought as it is critical to any direction taken in these serial sonnets, whose dates are jumbled and whose contents criss-cross rather than lead forward in a cumulative manner. The tone suggests a giving and taking account, in the mode of St Augustine spiritually ('My life is full of faults' and 'Humbly my tongue confesses'), Homer/Odysseus historically, and Pound/Eliot ('I am a hollow thing')/Stevens *et al* among the practitioners of modernism. Leigh, as he did in his first published text, *Willy's Gazette*, aligns himself with the big names; albeit here Bob Dylan ('Aaa a long thi wa a tch tow er r') is displaced by Aquinas/Augustine and Homer (not to mention the old hymn 'A a a m A-a- a z z z ing Gr Eh-hc e'), and *Paris Match* and Barthes by what is termed 'the name of anarchism' – a kind of advanced or renovated classicism, as Roger informs us in his review. Leigh disdains the indulgence of lyric modernity, the tendency to ego-centrise reality, in favour of history as a process of alignments.

The introduction of a 'third' element is what I take to be a new aspect in Leigh's

protest against and push beyond the ego-centrism of the modern. This protest does not occur in a declamatory or argumentative manner: instead the voice is gentle and reflective, developing a dynamic interplay of images and tones. Eye and voice are insisted upon throughout this sequence of sonnets, themselves reminiscent of the form used in *Willy's Gazette*, a form which has proved itself endlessly adaptable and fundamentally endless – the anarchic implicit in Leigh's classicism. References to seeing ('You is light, a look in the eye, lights of halls, accumulated visual albums, visual each and each this day, colour has an infinite number, colour and monochrome, open your eyes under water, lifetime // in a mirror, partial blindness, like seeing and again not like') and hearing ('vocal murmur, my speech, this is a simple sound, re-sound, collection of these voices, voices of silence, sudden remembrance in unaccustomed sound') abound. Less important than the actual objects seen or heard is the sensuousness in sending ('transmitter') and receiving ('receiver') entailed in the exchanges, as full of uncertainty as they are of possibility ('open your eyes under water'): the preciousness of these primary senses becomes very precious indeed, especially when we remember the stark circumstances under which *Stunning debut* was composed. In this context, the dignity of the life-process is highlighted, transfigured, becomes sublime, mysterious, encompassing, eternal, sanctified. Things seen and heard become extensions of the tactile awareness of the speaker-poet, who is (literally) touched by each and every strand of sensual experience; indeed, touch itself, which is the most immediate and persistent of the senses, proves the ultimate destination for all sensually instigated experience: 'and she came to your bed now and colour I had her bed' 'what rose rose'.

It is appreciated that what Leigh is doing is unusual and perhaps discomfiting for our conventional reading habits – why not state plainly what one wants to say, rather than obscurely and cleverly, especially when the values espoused are clearly deeply felt and are quite in keeping with the tradition of humanism? For my part, it has helped when reading to put to the side expectations of statements that are straightforward in terms of logic and consistent in terms of time and space. In this world of strange attractors, significance resides in influence, desire, consonance, more so than in physical relationship or proximity in time. One looks for image and tone networks, reverberations, echoes, deviances, dalliances, dispersals – and it is in the relations between these on an emotional and personal level that one is better able to grasp the kind of 'world' that is portrayed. Critics will no doubt dig about and over time identify the specific references to people places and events; however these actual representations will prove to be mere adjuncts to the poems rather than vital to their impact or importance as writing. Indeed, if we can grasp the subtler level of

intellectual inheritance and musical imagery on which the poems operate, we will more quickly and more accurately understand what interests Leigh and the values with which he responds to that which he encounters. It is the range and quality of this manner of relating that I will now explore in closer detail.

As previously mentioned, Leigh disavows the standardised life-telling and lyrically self-centred, truth revealing verse that continues to dominate New Zealand literature. This stance has been clear and consistent since he appeared as a writer in the early 1980s in Alan Loney's ground-breaking journal *Parallax*, in his own co-editing with Alex Calder of the innovative magazine *And*, and just as strikingly in his first (and for a long stretch only) book of poems *Willy's Gazette* (1983). The focus of and techniques used in *Stunning debut* exhibit this same impatience with the status quo, albeit in a manner that is less cocksure and combative. The Willy who wanted 'to get the "literary", as a concept, robust again' remains very much in evidence, but the tumescent Willy watching out and surging in his 'tower' has chilled out, has become a more accommodating, sympathetic *auteur*. A strong case can also be made that the thoroughgoing deconstruction that was initiated in *Willy's Gazette* is continued in this later book of Leigh's. Another thread that ties these two books together (and this is the one aspect of both texts about which I do continue to have misgivings) is that, for all the 'deconstruction' that happens, it is clear that the figure of the poet-speaker remains firmly placed at the centre of the enterprise, terming the terms, calling the shots. While the self-awareness and self-appraisal may have shifted markedly between the texts, both ultimately stake their authenticity on the kind of self-treatment and self-projection of this persona.

That said there is more than enough in what this poet-speaker is capable of articulating to reward and excite his readers for generations. Leigh mobilises language; he shifts its function away from the representation of discrete situations to a medley of interweaving images and sounds, operating within a flexible range of connectives, that together feed thought and reflection and are in turn invigorated by them. Beyond sound and 'silence', between sight and the 'half-blind/sunblind/partial blindness' or between the solidity of objects and 'transparency', there are clusters of terms that recur and emphasise the mobile way in which things link together: 'loops, criss-cross, crossing, cross-road, cross away, navigation, circumnavigation, forwards, backwards, emptiness, form, round and round and round, speed without progression, hungtime, circumscription'. Disparate experiences can merge or fuse, experiences diverge from within, never open or are forever open, depending on the underlying something, Leigh's 'analogue'. He can incorporate Eliot's sensibility, and aspects of his verbal expression, in lines like

And the perception of a change in aspect
is the expression of a new grasp

and, at the same time, of a grasp unchanged
and for that reason like seeing and again not like.

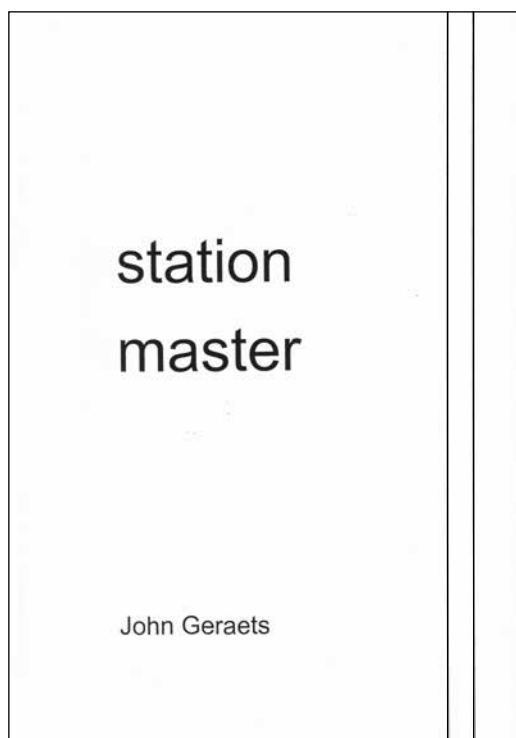
Another incorporating image which shows this is in a sonnet that verbally re-enacts Duchamp's painting *Nude Descending a Staircase*. A woman viewed 'on Park [Avenue] / in spring blue New York', whose movement as she walks in heels transfixes and enthralls the viewer-poet, becomes a representation of the idealised 'nude' (analogue) figure that Duchamp had painted almost a century earlier; her movement fuses into a suspended moment of animation: 'a stranger's stalling heels above the ground arrayed / portraying speed without progression'. Very beautifully, Leigh deepens the effect of this image by having two consecutive sonnets (both dated 15 October 2008) present the same scene by way of a verbal re-take or reconfiguring that renders them at once different and the same.

This is the substantial achievement of *Stunning debut*: the fearlessness strikes me as real, in the kind of facing-up-to that the poem as a whole represents. There is acknowledgment of things having gone wrong ('I have fear, and change, and fear, and change and love'), of un-undoable transgressions and past foolhardinesses, of present inadequacies, of poignant care for friends and family and remembered special places in New Zealand and elsewhere – these strike one as true and humanly very attractive ('Luminous, not radiant. The light does not just / penetrate... but mills'). There is more work to appear later, we are told. One comes to realise that ends only end beginnings that are made possible by earlier endings and will in turn lead to further endings and beginnings:

At the end of my history
I have to take my voice,

...the analogue of something
familiar to me.

from *Station master*, Auckland, 2011



'A great biography / That is also a good autobiography, at the station...'
(*'As We Know,' John Ashbery*)

spide (apocope)

not a spider
or that thought
'not a spider'
given fourteen lines
of Stevens' poem
'Bowl'—retaining
a part, ever
our trick. The
word 'apocryphal'
occurs, although—
or maybe 'in spite
of' or
'regardless of' the fact—
it was
resisted. Indeed,
what's not necessary
arises: water
accumulates
in the tub, against
the plug. This
in response to a
poem half-grasped,
& that, when so,
will have dedicated
to it, 'Bowl,'
this poem, 'spide'—
together, with fruit

earlier in imitation
of Shelley's 'white radiance'—
gainsaid. Or
Baudelaire's 'les bas fonds,'
done with

in that sense. Or,
an analogue of
some thing
released—scratch that!
Searching out our

earnest commendation. Now
I wonder
what binds things
together, a particular
concern. Trees gather

in massed solidarity. Or,
when gathered,
words are uttered,
harnessing. One
remains unclear

how writing is to be
received—Bloom's
'garden without images'

renders nothing,
prepares the eye

for unseeing. Seeing
through a mesh of
leaves on
branches themselves
drenched—what's to

be made
of writing
in our time, to render
something—
deep-rooted

illustrative poem

commensur-
ability

of living. Brilliant.
The rocks are made
by

the sea. But the sea
is not made
by the rocks. Or
trees crown the earth,
or somesuch.

The blue of the sea
that waves
crashes upon its
own whiteness

& onto the rocks,
which assume whiteness,
as do I. Against
anticipation, against
disputed measure,
against the dust that settles

on the car—no longer
blue. Against

againstness, as if
commensurability

were a kind
of a cure for blue.
The air is blue, yet
that which
I breathe

delivers
a next and next one,
in to-and-fro's
endeavour

bowl

out walking I
do not consider that the cloud
consumes the moon
or the moon the cloud
or what happens to the spilling
light (that settles in the bowl!)—
nor is it clear to me
which moves which or whether
both are moved by something
(as it were) 'spilling'
into a bowl of its own—

—& now the moon
reemerges, & the stars I notice
are each separate, though I see
them & not the empty sky
that renders them distinct...

I came out thinking
to frame a thought
to 'match' a pink rose propped
in a Japanese vase placed
on the green wooden table.
The stem of the rose
extends the vase
upward—& the thought
of stars, piercing, is where

it ends. The stars
I know only in nightly bursts,
the rose, the vase—
régaler

residue

the sky with nothing
in it (contains something)—
a mynah, traversing, thinking
to traverse it,
knows nothing.

Knowing everything
is the circumfluent song of the thrush,
unaware of the sky it inhabits.

I—

or the emptiness of a
laden sky, ordains its
own possibility—

terming it blue
or frosted blue when viewed
through

watery condensate
on the glass ranchers
gazing on Kaipara flats

conglomerate (Wong Kar-wai)

The greatest thing (they say)
is to
give yourself away: there's
always
someone waiting.

Seeing a mountain
I wondered
what lay beyond—
another mountain,
another mountain.

What doesn't speak
to you
you need not know.
Another memory
relinquished!

I no longer wonder
how once
I did:
change doesn't
change this. Pictures

are of
other things, numbered,
water, eels, flies.
Go further,
be auspicious!

blackbird

blackbird

the brown fenceline
has snapped onto it
a blackbird

which I count &
the number is one:
sufficient to say

that it is black
with feet in the green lichen
that carpets the fence-rail

as it turns a
yellow beak my way—
ballbearing eyes.

Colours match
beak, claws—a
delinquent body?

In sum: that figure
of the blackbird
one & the same.

24 may: 'the everlasting gospel'

somehow 'aliveness' more
than a black quiet, a no-time
when the mind & the
bedside ticking clock
coincide:

take coffee, undesirable, yet
the mind, earth-finger or tongue,
moistens the nostrils, each
notices:

Blake & Wei Wu Wei:

the future surpasses
mere memory: not a we or a they:
dear Blake:

*this life's five windows of the soul
distorts the heavens from pole to pole,
& leads you to believe a lie*

(i) *levels*

a simple conception leaves the mind at ease
or so it—*sinks!*—
from level to level, from line to line,
where upward & downward share
one propensity, giving
or wanting—*confidence?*—
& ‘profundity’ proves itself an issue of
thought. Mere seers of words,
manly, Jacques *et* Jacques, philosophers,
goofing it, wary
of tripping. Not so
here, where the mind *turns*. Around
the sheer rock that leads
to the level summit, the villagers burn off
the yellow grasses before
the summer heat arrives: in the evening
a red glow covers the hillside
down to the *Shanti Patan*,
where meditators walk, eyes lowered

(ii) *inside*

as ample as are the trees along
the *Shanti Patan*—crows diminish
them: black ousts green, green yellow—
or the rice fields

over which I gaze, guileless.

A villager in white *kurta*
strides home, carrying water, easing
the weight of the field.

A train bears noisily upon *Igatpuri*,
assuming definite
shape, while in the corner of the field
a black pond is formed
under a pipe.

Along the narrow tracks
that separate the fields, four women
walk in file, upright, pitchers
shining, frolicksome,
time enough

(iii)

the moon, edged from its base,
threatens to topple,
the grouping crows grunt in the trees
which at evening turn from green to black,
compressing the moon's brightness.
Buddhadasa's student, now bones
in the coastal cave, sketched
nibbana in colour
on the rock, left notebooks

rich in expostulation!
Now, gardening at *Tapavana*, watering, or
sitting cross-legged in the small bare cell
of the gold-domed
pagoda, & hearing
the chimes on a narrowing spire
above where the crows gather,
one understands that
the universe bolts firm on nothing.
The mind cannot escape—
when a reality is revealed
a name disappears

(iv) *mahabodhi*

of the two
the way to standstill—
like the bird—a mynah?—that sits high in the *bodhi* tree
beside the temple that bears that name
where dusk is spent in (a snagging) meditation—
emits a cry with the in-breath
another with the out-breath—
a raucous hermeneutics of air, vibration—
or the moon ‘way up there’
which requires the earth
as platform to be viewed—

Rangiri Dambulla Raja's

'Monk with Lotus' adorns
Manual of the Excellent Man—
halo blur—right
hand lifts a white lotus
middle fingers
grasp the stem, straightened
between forefinger &
thumb. Face,
robe, hand—ochre. Beyond,
Kandy's lake brims,
nudges the seal roadway.
Canopies of large
trees, *Parkia Roxburghii*,
Samanea Saman, top
thick stems, extend
over water. From the
BPS window, witnessed:
pelicans, waterfowl,
monitors, fishes
our markers

monk in orange (burmese rest)

afterglow—
the rain, drawn down, patters
on the nutmeg leaves,
crows crossing—renders a triangle:
rain, tree, sky.
Leaves at least the height
of the upper guest rooms, more, adjust,
gleam. Monkeys
linger—& the yellow grit
beneath the monk's sandals
is criss-crossed by turtles—a juvenile
& four adults, their interest
the pile of cabbage &
vegetable scraps left for them
in the corner. In the morning fallen
leaves are swept
into heaps, which later in the day *bhante*
and his mute helper, chortling, red-mouthed,
gather and burn. The courtyard's
thus: other leaves feed
other fires—*nibbana is not*
reached in blissful oblivion, exhorts
Bhikkhu Bodhi

mallaraparam

a white cloth or a branch
distinguishes swamp or 'lake,' containing,
late night, a cloth-like streak
of yellow—
spreading a source
of light, occasionally blinking, from
a house wall
across the water. The morning crows
cross, black bodies
bright, fearing
ceasing to be. At night
the stone lighthouse, fixed
on granite still worked by
the town's artisans,
dispenses a keener light, again,
again, reaching
this *Ramkrishna's* guest-room,
illuminating (stop) the walls
(stop) inside: by day
long motored fishing boats are pulled
high on the sand, against the dumping
sea, near the heavy stone
Vishnu temple, fenced & illumined
by night. Chisels
tinker, & the canopies
& red rooftops of the town
appear. On the sealed

roadway, a cow tends
four calves, the hindmost
seeking the udder, against
the odds

stationmaster

All day the **trees** are matched by the birds. When they take flight, their wings are leaves, and leaves are flowers that distinguish them.

It warrants probing, particularly in terms of what is the direction of words used in such a direction. We are in this together: ti si su!

One counts pronouns until each one of them sits in the tree that's composed of birds. The music of the birds is what occurs to them as they sit listening in amazement.

We climb into writing's branches for protection. It guides us as we ascend to the height. It is the birds that circle and the circles that circle and the dancing letters of the alphabet that do so too.

I am fresh able to be me. Me be to able fresh am I.

When the thought is fresh it holds me. When it holds me I am freshened. In delicacy is shared delight: rare rest it grants.

The **station** is the origin and knows no end until it is stopped. It is not it that stops but something stops and makes sense stopping there.

A billion things have been said and these things can be tracked to the station—the station gives rise. Something is curious, words depend on it only to the extent that they have meaning being words once they have left. The station abides no words.

Otherwise I stick to the station and nothing comes of it, neither words nor birds. In a tender sense one says my home or 'rhyme.' How do I know the verb or whether I care for this particular insect or for that particular human being or a *deva*? How do I countenance that?

Nothing wraps round tirelessly. Tiredness wraps round, making tired. It can add up to about so much, making us laugh and soon forget.

For shines **light**. Nearby—I cannot leave because it does so only when it evinces something unbroken. When the flow of light is broken it cannot be repaired. When the flow of words is broken it is breaking that occurs and not the words.

seen watching—hence captivated:
although I enjoy Angelique's visit
seeing & being seen
proves a disequilibrium:
& I wish the world to be cleared of names—

in the dark of the early morning
there is sound in my ears—
absence of sound—car tyres
driven at high speed on the highway north
further up the Kaipara
past the A&P Showgrounds—
I hear cattle although I am certain
that the cattle are sleeping—soundlessness
requires no place of origin—

resistance is pain—in early spring
a few brightly lit kowhai bulbs
illumine branches that house
the new thrush—
prized guest, prized host—
one's taken aback
should either fall—or *fly!*—

fear works its way through me
the way sweetness suffuses a fruit—
whether absorbed into what
is else or else it absorbs or
infiltrates something else
remains unclear—ripeness
& fear spread—teeth
break the skin of either
& confirm the sweetness—

fear ripens & I set my teeth
against it—there is the sweetness of fruit
just as in the mind, blessed in poetry—
is delectation—

coda

On the wall triangulated strings suspend Daijo's calligraphy.
In kanji: *forget both*.
The same inscribed on small gold plates
inserted in our arms when we married.
One side, a brief verse; the other, *one time one meeting*.

limbs / torso

i ii

the crow e 'sitting'
the gull—is not
caw—caw—poetry

viriya between
snared windows
proportioned

by a half
balance—day
Phewa Tal

a fish scratching
pulled under
its hay rick

clutter
thin to lakewater
air host

iii iv

the red-
froked's
woman's constitution:

Phewa Tal's
under the incessantly
hay rick—shifts

buffalos & each
'carved' moment
air lacks

fishes content to
'bestill'
the lake past

egrets' future
feature only
crows suppose

within a lake

within a lake
a lake wished or granted
either side a weighty 'between'—
threes—lakes, trees, mountains:
'Choice is based on irritation.'
Within the water bodies
exhilarate, regale.
Each tiny pulse beneath
the flatbottomed boat, occupying it
a solitary shawl,
towards *Bagnas*, traversing the *Tal*, beckons
another boatman
to come collect
the pair
stranded on grass
abutting the leech-infested path.
Further on, hovering near the *ghat*, small grey
fishes
flatten themselves on the lowermost concrete step,
flash
&'re gone!
The lake is level under Annapurnas,
under Machapuchare,
flatness upends.
What one desires stimulates one
to regret, or remorse, or further desire;
the illusory *bardo* body (they say)

is hallucinatory, a discrimination—disrupted
here by
a deftly swiped *sarangi*
& the villageman's 'mountain song' (his chin a mountain),
& one slight, red-clad dancingwoman, who raises her hands
entreating—others—come gather
on the stone platform:
the contest is desire, letting it
catch amongst the tumbled chestnutleaves,
waver
& clamp on earth or skin—or water
from the hills carrying vegetation
into the hollowed, smoothed lakes:

From ruin and from change, and all the grief

The passing shows of being leave behind.

Or Rinpoche:

*We see something, yet at the same time we are not quite
certain whether it's the background or the scenery itself.*

z-bird

some eight or ten times
the bird I term 'zipper' repeats
the particular scale it intermittently climbs,
erstwhile companion,
watcher-over,
through the hours spent in meditation
—breakfast through noon.
In narrowest cascade,
up, down, up,
arrangement without colour:
Says the Buddha, 'Nothing—matches *dhamma*.'

bodh gaya, dhamma bodhi

i. moon up, lighthouse

Squared by the new hall entranceway
this 6:15am
the moon's upturned, its hollow filled with blue air
& tethered to it a small star—
reminding of the mother with its purple-tongued calf
outside Raju Ram Sharma's guesthouse,
left only a metre or two to 'roam,'
yet quiescent, most quiescent.

The urgency of the moment always missed its mark.

Overnight the moon, ducking behind clouds,
is rendered black, & the night sky, in contrast, white,
both moving, formed.

And, on the same steel pole it occupied a year earlier, the same black
drongo, with its longforked tail feathers,
calls intermittently & restlessly cocks
its head, as if the word
comprises an enemy: *For how*

*could one express those emotions
of the body? Express the emptiness there?*

And the dry sparsely leaved *seesams* on the far boundary, along the mis-
shapen brick wall,
the rasping of which—even at this distance—is
insistent, & the trifling
morning leaves,
& among them the bickering yellow-eyed babblers,

or the silent activity of the sky—how driven?—are each
communicated, not the words, & above me
the hanging brown pods on the *albizia lebbeck*,
swell
& darken,
& eventually fall to ground,
spilling seeds, the rest—spinning!

ii.

alongside the new brick pathway
leading to the servers' quarters
an open area has been planted out—
one side chin-high *dhal*, the other, forming
a kind of purple-flowered groundcover,
chana: an arrangement
which carries the signature
of *Babu-ji*, this day's Anathapindika.
Late in the afternoon a rising moon makes an appearance
near the sky's height,
while the sun melts in a steady but final burning,
shaping in the morning the east &
in the evening the west, modulating
the mood of the land, adjusting
the bearing & weight of things, as it does
the restlessness of the leaves
contemplating flight—for it

is this that ties them!
Sitting twelve hours a day
one thinks: the gong heard
is no longer anticipated.
To hear without purpose
is to hear the words of the Korean Master,
following months' sleepless consideration:
lake water lake water

iii. mucalinda lake

on the day Romaine recommends
postcards be sent to Gretchen
& Anthony, 'since-divided,'
I observe, while we 'sit'
on the rim of the square bank,
anfractuous trees & air
spread on the wrinkling surface.
Near my crossed legs, a carpet of leaves
from the *bodhi* & others:
green, brown, chipped, stained, scarred,
pulverised the colour of the earth,
through which a few stray blades of grass
continue to press, early February.
Prayer flags strung out
on makeshift lines between the trees
flare & pitch—
rendering earth an inscription!

iv. bodh gaya park

trees are not thoughts,
nor one tree (*ficus bengalensis*) another (*cassia fe-*),
the leaves of one are boatshaped & waxy,
those of the other narrow, coarse:
between the two of us thoughts remain discrete, still
a succession, given the different sources
of light, above the darkening paths,
that are more intense the more they dispel
the darkness that envelops the park.
Cloudless, rimless, yellow light,
like thoughts afloat in the air that, without colour,
represents what's dark or blank:
one dry leaf falls like a fish twisting through a medium
that resists it;
a mynah, among mynahs, their nightsounds, occupies
the place of a large leaf at the top of a large-leafed
tree, & departs, an unleaf-like non-leaf,
to another tree even more fully occupied with its kind,
in the manner of Woolf's *Old Joseph*,
sparsely feathered, who, out of care for them,
guided fellow rooks from tree to tree
seeking roost.
A cream-coloured bitch trots past,
swelled underside swinging, skinny,
indifferent to our attempts
to draw her to be petted

forpoetry

Owen Bullock invited this piece for Poetry NZ.¹ My design intention was to write in four numbered sections, four pages, four shifts forward. That exact format is surrendered here but one hopes the skipping momentum remains. It is in part a response to having been twice declined public funding towards preparation of prose and poetry anthologies representing our past quarter century of new writing (see 'Wholes'). In 'forpoetry' I want to throw out a wider net, suggesting approaches towards producing worth-having particular focus anthologies as well as ones that are broadly inclusive of our national literary endeavours.

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A zoo is a better window from which to look out of the human world than a monastery.
(Straw Dogs, John Gray)

Words are too dense, too dull, too blundering.
(‘Summer Daybreak’, Ursula Bethell)

The interest derives not from our being aware of disparity where likeness is firmly insisted on, but in an opposite activity of discerning the design which is latent in the multiform sensuous picture.
(‘The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery’, WK Wimsatt)

This timid life of evidence / Keeps pleading, ‘I don’t know’.
(Emily Dickinson)

Few great poets would be able to understand the reason for their fame in the following century.
(Fearful Symmetry, Northrop Frye)

One looks for image and tone networks, reverberations, echoes, deviances, dalliances, dispersals.
(Stunning debut review)

Poetry exists because no definition works. Words, signs, symbols are arbitrary, crumble in use, and only persist because we will them to do so, even when that’s beyond our control.

¹ ‘forpoetry’, *Poetry NZ* 45 (September 2012), ed. Owen Bullock, pp. 96-102. Texts referenced: Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984); and eds Andrew Johnson and Robyn Marsack, *Twenty Contemporary New Zealand Poets: An Anthology* (UK/NZ: Carcanet/VUP, 2009).

Having said that, let's try: to render experience using words, formally structured and presented to an audience in order to elicit (among many things) a special form of mental ease, presentiment.

+

one

I read *Twenty Contemporary New Zealand Poets* (2009) with a sense of things missing. This has little to do with either the skilfulness or good intentions of those involved, both of which are clear, rather it is to do with things that are ignored or else neglected. In recent decades there has been a growing complacency, or easy contentment, which has seeped into the country's poetry to the point of near-saturation. *Contemporaries* is presented as a balanced selection from a field of activity that is homogenous and full and entire (20 is a fair 'entire'); yet any such claim, especially when it remains essentially implicit, invites scrutiny. Curnow, the great predator poet active since the late 1920s, is represented (as is the contrastingly affable Tuwhare) posthumously alongside considerably younger 'contemporaries' (the term is given some license) who are, by comparison, poets of modern-day intimacies of relationship, fellowship and of a thoughtful domesticity. Of course, we concede that the joint Carcenet/VUP publication is designed to satisfy the appetite of a combined UK/NZ readership and this may be offered in part mitigation of what is otherwise an insufficiently accounted for gathering of species.

This is to touch on two related considerations. One is that the book (as I will argue) is hardly contemporary because it overlooks much of the best and most enterprising work produced over the past twenty odd years. The other – and this contributes to the fatigue-by-saturation feeling – is that the terms of reference used by the editors and individual notes provided by contributors lacks any sharp sense of timeliness or poetic self-reflection. Poetry cannot exist outside of time: there is something about timeliness that marks poems, their form and content, in a way that serves as a kind of marker (time *is* disturbance): poetry explores the difficulties involved in dealing with temporality and the events and objects that are present by means of it.

I quote de Man:

At times, romantic thought and romantic poetry seem to come so close to giving in completely to the nostalgia for the object that it becomes

difficult to distinguish between object and image, between imagination and perceptions, between an expressive or constitutive and a mimetic or literal language (7).

Romanticism from its beginnings obsessed about the relationship between the object in the world and the individual experiencing it. For two centuries that investigation has been driven by a realisation that mental process is constitutive of what is perceived: time and space lean on each other and the senses are a means of measurement. Romanticism continues to hold us in its grip and it is the grip of the primacy of the mind, the primacy of the individual consciousness underpinning form and performance in 'reality'. Today we are near the outer limit of this mode of understanding – the digitisation of communication and thus to some extent the virtualisation of experience will alter the current limits of thought and introduce new necessities in the workings of consciousness and the poetry of consciousness. As I will touch on shortly, romanticism's outer limit, its *fin de siècle*, may already have been suggested in a practice that *contemporaries* ignores but which has been ongoing for some half century among the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writers in North America, Auckland and elsewhere. This movement has deserved a closer examination locally than the piecemeal acknowledgement or even denigration it has been subjected to here and there, or the way in which *contemporaries* implies it doesn't exist.

two

Topical references and age differences aside, there is fundamentally little in *contemporaries* that distinguishes its individual contributors – or these with past poets. Dinah Hawken (whose work I much admire) is strangely contemporaneous with Ursula Bethell, our earliest superior poet whose output was largely completed in the decade 1924-34. Not only that, but we could say that the work of these two had already been anticipated by writers in Europe in the years around 1800. Both explore the situation of a highly sensitive individual consciousness ('searching quietly for something in my life': Hawken) confronted with change and mutability. Each intuits that the mind *forms* nature as it is simultaneously formed by it ('I lift my head sometimes': Bethell).

For the rest, emphasis in the poems ranges from direct interaction with nature (Turner) to a dealing in the most part with domesticity, commonplaces, and the

fact that even small events can be seen to have a significance that is captured in the figure of the poem in a way that enables it and them to achieve (beyond the specific event) a special and heightened significance (Stead, Tuwhare, O'Sullivan, Wedde, Smither, McQueen, O'Brien, Bornholdt, Farrell, Hall). The problem is that delicacy of statement and fine attention to detail are conflated in a protocol of delivery that sidesteps self-scrutiny. Such protocols are submerged because the reader is assumed to share the very same space and sentiment occupied by the poet and this facilitates a kind of sublimation, or seduction. Such seduction contrasts in the most obvious manner with the unguarded, rampant eroticism of Tusiata Avia, the last-included and only Samoan poet present. One can appreciate the contrast. The use of voice in Manhire, Brown and Kennedy (I continue to marvel at her *100 Traditional Smiles*) is more nuanced, albeit to me still caught up in a reticence lodged somewhere between confidence of expression and an underlying uncertainty in orientation – as if one remains bashful about claiming too great an importance. Sullivan and Colquhoun have the distinction of speaking in a public voice concerning matters of politics. The assumption in the poems as a whole is that they are provided a platform on which to speak and to do so with an individual authenticity and authority, justified in romanticism's originating legacy.

While the inner limit comes naturally built in, romanticism's outer limit (not touched on in *contemporaries*) can similarly be seen to have already been signalled in the same historical movement. A case in point is Shelley's extraordinary 'The Triumph of Life' (1822); again I quote de Man:

The structure of the text is not one of question and answer, but of a question whose meaning, as question, is effaced from the moment it is asked. The answer to the question is another question, asking what and why one asked, and thus receding ever further from the original query (98)

and

The Triumph of Life warns us that nothing, whether deed, word, thought, or text, ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything that precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence (122).

What de Man terms *disfiguration* concerns the way in which the individual human consciousness comes itself to be recognised as problematic and intractable:

harmony, wholeness, continuity are ultimately troubling and illusive notions. How does anything become ordered? Where is authority in experience? Where is whole? Shelley's answer (or *insight* – whether conscious or not!) was gained only near the end of a short life (de Man makes the point that the process of breakdown evident in 'Triumph' was enacted also in the biography: the poet's untimely drowning during a storm and the subsequent physical degradation of his body occurred while the poem lay still in pieces, forever unfinished). Disfiguration as the outer limit is where we now turn our attention.

three

Writing a review of Leigh Davis's *Stunning debut* (another writer who never saw the final formulation of the poem he was working on prior to his death), what caught my attention was the way in which something similar to Shelley's 'Triumph' was happening: both poems throw an odd light on the disconcerting proximity between appearance and disappearance, life and death. However, where Shelley's 'Triumph' splinters in fragments as it progresses, Davis's poem is intent on a retrieval of the process of fragmentation as it sets out to construct 'an analogue' to offset the ongoing menace:

At the end of my history
I have to take my voice,

...the analogue of something
familiar to me.

As we see, this statement does not sever its ties with romanticism: how to shore up against ruin, how to prevail. Such reaching after an *analogue* performs the same task of substituting one thing for the other, where an apparent (or wished for) similitude between different aspects of experience provides a means of coalescence: metaphor continues to serve as the means by which natural limits are displaced and ultimately superseded. Not quite there, to all appearances not quite certain as to where exactly *there* might be, Davis valiantly battles the loop de Man terms 'analogical thinking' – the subject-object impasse. Should we not be investigating, Shelley and de Man and Davis might well go on to ask, whether thought (formed language) is not already an analogical outcome of processes occurring at subtler levels within consciousness – and how might these be represented, if ever or at all?

This brings me back to my starting concern: in *contemporaries* we continue to be bound by a practice taken for granted, an aesthetic that has proven resilient but that today lacks enterprise and risks looking nowhere. The difference in Davis and his peers is that language is no longer, rightly organised, automatically a harmonising and unifying agency. Language is regarded as a conventional mechanism enabling expression and exchange – in poets like Coolidge it breaks down into component parts (words, syllables, letters) yet continues to jig us along; in Scalapino singularity of experience becomes multi-faceted and language makes possible, or produces, further surfaces that collect about an event that may or may not be concretely discerned as origination.

Just as in *Big Smoke* Leggott/Edmond/Brunton assembled work from the 1960s through mid-70s, we should now have the same done for language-based material from the 1980s and 90s. *Contemporaries* excludes this writing which, as well as involving the three *Big Smoke* editors, was on show starting with Loney's *Parallax* (1982) and on through a string of small magazines *And*, *Antic*, *Splash* and *brief*. It is well worth taking a closer look at the poems and poetics of Elizabeth Wilson, Anna Jackson, Roger Horrocks, Wystan Curnow, Michael Harlow, Ted Jenner, Tony Green, Peter Crisp, John Geraets, Leigh Davis, Richard von Sturmer, Alan Loney, Judi Stout, Simon Field, Will Joy Christie, and others.² What is especially interesting about this writing is that it questions poetry as sublimation, as a kind of self-actualisation or recovery against the threat of disintegration or inconsequentiality. It remains unclear whether such work can ever dispense with writing as *analogue*. Again, de Man points to this outer limit as a kind of uncertain culmination:

It is thus an act through which a memory threatened with its own loss succeeds in sustaining itself (64)... a possibility for consciousness to exist entirely by and for itself (16).

four

In a sense what has been marked out in this piece takes the shape of a square, opposing sides and all, and I should acknowledge that the value of such an approach if valid

² The case of Leggott is revealing: we are told that efforts to have her included in *contemporaries* proved unsuccessful. It is worth noting that her work exhibits language-focused characteristics as well as the more conventional romantic qualities alluded to above. I take the impasse as symptomatic of a gap of awkwardness that exists between the two tendencies.

is also limiting. Perhaps a better model – and here I end up with no stronger a claim to a breakthrough – is that of a nesting of interests. Of course, it can be said that the plethora of anthologies appearing in recent decades serves exactly this purpose, even as it simultaneously extends the same reaching a saturation point of which I complained at the outset. But the basis of this complaint has less to do with the number and more to do with an ongoing reluctance to sufficiently define the terms of each appearance, thus encouraging a too easily gained satisfaction. It is certainly hard to shake the (romantic) notion that poetry is that which vaults over the limits of time and place, uniting everything at its depthless depth.

Notwithstanding the allure of this notion, we do need to be bound to the specificity of poetry's each occasion. And so, there are two immediate tasks worth undertaking. As urged above, we need to add, to our 'worth having' collections, a selection of material from the language-based writers of the 1980s and 90s. Second, again as a part of our ongoing redefinition, there needs to be a fresh re-gathering of the absolutely 'worth keeping' poets of the past century: a kind of repeat operation of that which Curnow so decisively performed in 1945 – that is, the culling of a bare few from the several hundreds of poets who represent our literature's 'entire history'. Based on the essentially romantic terms of reference I have used in this short piece, we can see that the past century has played out entirely between the inner and outer limits of a poetic practice which remains intact. My personal preference is to have something like ten or twelve poets represent the work that all of us (nowadays to be a reader is pretty much to be also a writer of poetry) are involved in as best as we are able: among *musts* I number Bethell, Curnow, Brasch, Baxter, Smithyman, Loney, Hawken, Murray Edmond [?]. That's seven or eight, there's room maybe for three to five more – and several worthies to choose from.

What is to be achieved by this? National poetry anthologies produced since the 1980s have become increasingly loose-fitting in their terms of reference, ranging from the bulging half thousand pages of the Williams/Bornholdt/O'Brien *An Anthology of NZ Poetry in English* (1997) to the trimmer if ultimately equally amorphous *100 NZ Poems* (1993) edited by Manhire, along with several other volumes based on theme (love, homosexual love, spirituality, landscape &c),³ to the here-considered *contemporaries*. There is no reason why poetry should not continue to be presented in various out-takes to suit particular literary or social segments: one of the great pleasures

3 In the past there have been selections of Māori writing, and I must say I'm quite taken with the appearance of the Wendt/O'Sullivan/Whaitiri *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English* (2003): the delimitation of purpose and context is strong and clear, one can know what one likes. My own lack of familiarity and knowledge is a regret.

in writing poems is to be able to share them as a kind of conversation with others, whether that's oneself, a friend, or an audience of up to a few hundred. But there is also a complementary value in larger revaluations taking place from time to time, keeping the agreeably precious with us, and letting much else go. It is a good moment in our writing history to be once more giving this a try.

briefly, briefly: Retrospective

In 1998 I accepted an invitation from Alan Loney to follow him as editor of A Brief Description of the Whole World. This essay provides an opportunity to acknowledge the important contribution made by Alan in its founding, as well as my own endeavour as his successor. The novel attraction of the magazine is not only that it opens its pages to a preselected group of writers, but also that it allocates them space in advance and furthers their (supposed) interests through its protracted contestation with the – better resourced – literary ‘mainstream’ on behalf of this ‘other’ oppositional tradition. Please consider ‘briefly, briefly’ a personal tribute to Alan.¹

+

*It's true, as Duncan used to say,
We need permission for what we do
Next we must grab permission by the horns & hang on
It isn't just a grant, a gift, a boon, grab it and run
Before they change their minds*

‘Treading Water’, Philip Whalen

brief made its appearance some twenty years ago as *A Brief Description of the Whole World*. It cannot reasonably claim to have described the world in its entirety, nor has it proved short-lived. For me, as one of the made-to-feel-welcome longer term contributors, it is fair to say that I have enjoyed first hand some of the benefits of its considerable staying power. Yet here the chief interest is not to do with longevity: this retrospective instead takes as its focus less than half the span of the magazine's activity so far, that is the early years under Alan Loney (1995-98) followed by my own stint as editor (1999-2002).

One reason why I decided to move – in small steps – towards the foreshortened masthead *brief* was to bring greater attention to what the magazine was especially wanting to achieve: first of all the word indicates events of short duration, second it signals the act of informing or updating, and third it refers to a set of preparatory orders extending all the way up to the commissioning of a special undertaking or major assignment. Early *brief* is distinguished in all three ways, although the most telling is its taking on a major cultural realignment, whether tongue in cheek or not.² Set directly against the

1 ‘Retrospective: briefly, briefly...’, *Poetry NZ Yearbook* 2: 50 (November 2015), ed. Jack Ross, pp. 189-203.

2 Uncertain as to exact intended tone of the original title, I allowed it to evolve by way of a domino effect into something, well, *brief*. The original title derives, as Alan has explained, from a catalogue listing of books for sale in Pickering & Chatto, Haymarket, 1902, 434pp, price 6d: ‘A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE

contemporary literary mainstream, where the best compete, here is a select group of writers identified with the 'other tradition' given pre-allocated publishing space to do with as they might.

Alan's brief

And again, the question about who one writes for emerges. To my knowledge there isn't a single commentator on what I will call 'the other tradition' in New Zealand poetry since the early 1970s who documents it, either for that specific community or for the literary community at large. (1997)

I'd had occasional contact with Alan Loney since our first meeting in 1992 when he resided as Literary Fellow in Government House at the University of Auckland. Back from Nagoya on a brief return visit three years later, I was pleasantly surprised one evening to receive a phone call from him, outlining his plan to establish a new magazine. It was to be committed to local writers whose work he liked and who had been either explicitly or effectively snubbed by the literary mainstream (read *Landfall*, *Sport*, *New Zealand Books* and others).³ For at least a decade there had been no regular outlet for alternative writers, a gap which Alan wanted to fill.⁴ He wished this other

WHOLE WORLD, wherein is particularly described all the Monarchies, Empires and Kingdoms of the same, with their Academies, as also their several Titles and Situations thereunto adjoining, written by the Right Reverend Father in God, GEORGE ABBOTT, late Archbishop of Canterbury. 1634'.

3 Unsympathetic reviews of publications by Leggott, Edmond and Loney (representing postmodernism) which appeared in *New Zealand Books* in 1994 had resulted in squabbles between Alan and some of the reviewers (see Numbers 4 and 6). Interestingly, around the same time Alan withheld permission for inclusion of his work in a number of publications, most significantly the Williams-Bornholt-O'Brien *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (1997). Meantime, against what was perceived as an unreceptive local backdrop, his second book of poems *dear Mondrian* had earlier attracted the attention of visiting American postmodern poet Robert Creeley, applauding it as a strong, innovative book, acknowledging links to Olson and Zukofsky while also celebrating its local character (*Islands* 14, Summer 1975). Much of the invisibility then complained of continues today: 1162 pages comprising the Stafford-Williams *The Auckland University Press Anthology of New Zealand Literature* (2012) contains nothing by Alan, nothing by Richard von Sturmer, a single poem each by Davis and Curnow, and so on. Whether this can be read as a deliberate act of exclusion or not is open to discussion, less so is the consequence that any consideration of a distinctive 'otherness' is lost when the story told is one of assumed common denominators within a self-normalising practice. Compare to this the PennSound programme at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States, which includes in its innovative contemporary writing generous dollops of Loney, Curnow and Green.

4 According to Alan, no adequate platform existed from 1984 until 1995 when *A Brief Description* 'took on that necessary yet sadly neglected role' (*Reading/Saying/Making* p. 78). He further points out that major

tradition to be examined independently in terms of its own specific concerns rather than have it end up being indiscriminately tossed in with and so assimilated into more traditional criteria of judgement.

Just as this initiative saw the establishment of a specialised publishing venue available to a restricted set of writers, it also provided Alan a corner from which he could carry the fight as key advocate on behalf of those aligned with The Writers Group.⁵ Participation was by invitation only and assumed a broadly shared aesthetic. While this aesthetic was not to be articulated in full detail, nevertheless it proved welcoming and self-reinforcing from the outset. The magazine saw itself as culminating initiatives that dated back to the late 1960s small magazine *Freed* ('The over-turning proposed by *Freed* was never completed'),⁶ and in certain ways it extends the work undertaken already in Alan's Hawk and Black Light presses in the 1970s and 1980s,⁷ as well as his editorial initiatives in the 'postmodern' quarterly *Parallax* (1982-3). Indeed, he was much indebted to the American postmodernists, especially Olson, and their work serves as an important benchmark and stimulus in his own projects.⁸ *A Brief Description* includes writers involved in these earlier endeavours as well as some later come upon. To elaborate: writers appearing in *A Brief Description* who also appear in the three published issues of *Parallax* include Green, Stout, Curnow, Jenner, Horrocks, Joanna Paul, Lindsay and Barnett; others arrive via the early 1980s magazines *And*

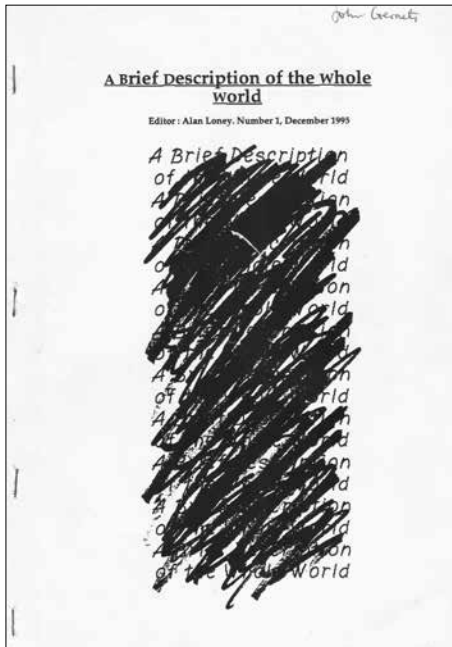
changes in print technology contributed significantly to an improved financial viability of small-distribution magazines: initially from letterpress to off-set printing, later to the relative cheapness and convenience of photocopied reproduction: *A Brief Description* is a child of the photocopier.

5 It is worth noting that the isolation of which Alan complains is also to some extent self-perpetuated. On the one hand he withholds permission to reprint his own work, and on the other he embraces the mantle of outsider on behalf of himself and of those even more on the outside than he was. Alan stands resolute, eventually moving physically – and likely emotionally – to Australia, where he reestablishes writing and publishing networks (see Electio Editions) locally and in North America.

6 Alan had been on the fringe of that group; Edmond and Brunton were editors and key players. The statement appears in the conversation with Davis included in *And/1* (October 1983). From *Freed* through to the mid-1980s a number of alternative magazines are mentioned: '*Frontiers*, a few NZUSA *Literary Yearbooks*, a few *Kiwi*, *New Argot*, *Morepork*, *Parallax*, *AND*, *Splash*, *Untold*, to some extent *Antic*' (Number 4 p. 6).

7 Those published in book form include Loney, Brunton, Wedde, Lindsay, Creeley, Haley, Joanna Paul, Edmond, Manhire, Jenner, Smither, Harlow, Curnow, Horrocks, a majority of whom appear in *A Brief Description*.

8 Much of Alan's long-term endeavour has been to improve the prospects of the other tradition: 'When I was first "influenced" by the American poet Charles Olson, the year was 1970, I was 30 years old, I had been writing since 1963 and publishing since 1969. The interest that proceeded from that event, thru Olson, Robert Creeley, Edward Dorn, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, Gertrude Stein and the English poets John Keats William Blake and Basil Bunting, was less a formative than a reformative influence on my work. That is, this event acted as a kind of second wave of connection with the wider tradition of contemporary poetry' (*Reading/Saying/Making*, pp. 52-3).



and *Splash* (Calder, Geraets); still others are more recent personal acquaintances (Radich, Wilson, Beard, Pillay, Paula Green, Nash, Kyle).

Some two dozen individual writers were guaranteed a minimum of four pages per quarterly issue to fill, no questions asked: a refreshing gesture of approbation. Contributors were expected to be also subscribers, thus enabling the magazine to pay its way. Copy-ready material, including the occasional art-insert,⁹ was to be received by due date, at which time the contents were placed between white (occasionally single colour) illustrated paper covers, photocopied to make 50 copies, stapled and despatched. It was a coterie operation for sure and yet as such – as Alan has pointed out

– it was not that great a departure in a contemporary reality which meant that even long-established journals perforce printed a very small number of writers addressing a not-much-larger group of readers, adding together to only a tiny fraction of the wider literate culture. *A Brief Description* was not looking (or likely) to attract a large number of readers. Alan's major innovation was to proudly champion the few of the few and to shift the editorial thrust away from quality control towards opportunity provision. For invited contributors this meant that they need not feel constrained by the predilections of an editor who might be out of sympathy with their work: typically well established and in mid-career but neglected, they were given a free hand and the confidence of inclusion.

The shared aesthetic proved an important underpinning although, as indicated above, there was a paucity of theoretical writing (outside of Alan's own regular forthright editorial pronouncements). Alan Brunton's 'Remarks on "The Future of Poetry"', the single distinctively aesthetics piece included, strikes one as typical of his earlier provocative statements in *Freed* rather than of signalling a significant poetic shift:

⁹ Billy Apple pageworks feature prominently. There are also some striking word-art pages from Kaiser/Barnett.

the poem shares with the interpretations that fact that it comes second; the ordinary event is always legendary; the urge to repeat the legendary event is what makes an 'avant garde'. (7 21)¹⁰

An anticipated close critical examination of each other's writing was in practice quite limited: Tony Green reviews Geraets (1) and Geraets in turn reviews books by Loney & Leggott (3) and Loney (6) – that's about it. Indeed, Alan was quite prepared to castigate even those whom he had set out to support over what he saw as their complacent acceptance of the status quo, thus exacerbating their current isolation. It was he said 'the denigration of our work' that needed to be outed and rectified:

It hurts me to say it, but in this country, and to my own continuing disappointment, the documentary record of the other tradition in poetry, from *Freed* to the present day, is generally left to the bewilderment and frequent spitefulness of mainstream critics and reviewers. Appallingly, that record goes almost completely unchallenged by the considerable number of talented, intelligent, and able participants in its life upon the page. We have, as members of the other tradition, colluded in the overall denigration of our work by our silence in the face of undue criticism. (1997)

Alan's editorials convey a sense of someone harnessing forces and keen to assert an historical divide. This is immediately clear in the personal tone he adopts in the opening page of the first issue: 'Dear Graham [Lindsay], these notes will probably come slow. I'm not sure what "clarity" can "mean". But perhaps I should go straight to the first trigger – Wystan Curnow's comment..."' – an approach that extends to a vigorous defence in Number 5 of his own earlier editorial endeavours in '*Parallax revisited*'; not to mention in the following issue the direct personal endorsement of Tara McLeod's production of Tony Green's *NO PLACE TO GO*. All such position-takings are thoughtfully delineated, essentially polemical. Another example is Number 4's 'Who do I write for?' (editorials were individually titled) in which Alan bemoans the unanswered 'need for the documentation of this other tradition [that] is felt both by the bewildered mainstream reader/reviewer as well as by those authors whose work is persistently over-determined and under-read in mainstream reviews' – the need *A Brief Description* had set out to satisfy. In keeping with such statements, let me take Alan's own ground breaking earlier review of Joanna Paul's

¹⁰ It should be said that Brunton the social and ecological activist is strongly present in the opening issue in 'AN OBJECTION TO A PROPOSAL being in part A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF MY WORLD' and always his texts are diversely referential.

Unwrapping the body (1981) as a reference point to help identify the essential tenets that distinguish this other tradition:

Mainstream	Other tradition
Texts rely on a naturalistic (believable) continuity of time, event, place, character (i.e. 'prior reality')	Disruptive of conventions of continuity and normal 'reality'
Parts merge into 'organic' wholeness, into representative word pictures	Discrete particulars, wholeness only ever provisional
Produced in fidelity to an agreed external shared world of experience	Self-determining patterns of 'representation', non-reductive use of language
Insightful of human and emotional depths, cathartic cleansing	Non-remedial, non-ameliorating, witness rather than cure
Integrative and resolving (of disparate range of experience and emotional feeling)	Engaging as process, non-resolving, enactive
Equivalence between word & thing (language as reliable representation)	Words and objects affect each other, determined by convention

Naturally, each of us will have our personal favourites among contributions. For me these must include Ted Jenner's translations from Ponge, clearly delineated, precise, without pretence. Tony Green is ever sprightly. Murray Edmond writes confidently with a knowing, deft touch, always satisfying to read. Michele Leggott is eloquent in everything she writes, an angel of the luminous, and I appreciate the poems that she and Edmond and Brunton produce – the three joint editors of *Big Smoke* (2000) who complement each other well. Yet Leggott's work is also nicely complemented (extended) by Paula Green and Judi Stout, each of whom achieves a similar emotional perspicuity albeit in a less decidedly literary manner. I immediately respond to the way Green presents commonplaces as commonplaces without enlarging her language to anything more decorous, in a lovely spreading use of space:

White bean soup with rosemary

leaves seem to infuse a union
 between the poet and her windmill surf
 tracing a memory of lost daughters
 how lean how freewheeling
 fictions that are brilliant enough to dissolve
 our moonlight walks giving ourselves an edge

The other writer whose emergence in the opening issue of *A Brief Description* is striking – for his contributor son Mark Wills as much as for Alan – and for me! – is the student of oriental languages and spiritual culture Michael Radich, self-deprecating always with an astute intellect:

b) 道 in translation

⁸⁵ Where, perhaps, we might not be so surprised to find such exotic forms of *dao* 道 as those found in the “道-Jones Index”, the “In-道-meant for the Humanities”, “proof beyond reasonable 道”, or the need to “get 道 and bogey” (where I come from, the *bogey* in *bogey-man* is a homophone for the *boogie* in the Jackson Five . . .); 甚至于‘道’都走得‘東道西why’ (東倒西歪) 了!

There are several other individuals or pieces of writing that could be happily noted. The main thing is that, while it is twenty years since the appearance of the first issue, returning and rereading *A Brief Description* carries for me, no doubt for others too, little sense of time’s passing detracting from what can be still much valued and enjoyed.

John’s brief

The Geraets *brief* contained fewer major innovations, wasn’t so brilliant, did not really get up a full head of steam, yet it was good to have because it continued Alan’s ground-breaking work and was there as an encouragement to talented writers who were willing to try their hand and who didn’t take writing over seriously. As Libby Wilson’s son said: The best things are the covers: *pure* Poetry.

There were to be several iterations in name and arguably contents. I was living in Nagoya working at Aichi-Gakuin University and newly married to Karen, when

Alan invited me to become editor at his impending retirement.¹¹ It was co-incidentally a time when I had also arrived at a kind of impasse in my own writing and attitudes, having reached a number of intellectual limits working alongside my friends, the potter Wali Hawes and the American poet Bruce Malcolm,¹² hanging out of all places in the tiny all-nighter *KuKu*, drinking a lot and watching videos of John Cage and a world spinning by. Several conjunctions occurred at this time and the one that matters here is that I returned to New Zealand to start teaching at St Peter's College in Auckland and to edit *A Brief Description*.

The first year was going to be a busy one in all respects so a good place to start, prompted by an earlier enquiry from Leigh Davis, endorsed by Alan, was to reissue on behalf of the magazine the award-winning *Willy's Gazette* (1983). Leigh did the bulk of the work in preparing the text and Christine Hansen came up with the striking design. This exercise likely spawned the idea to publish books by individuals within The Writers Group.¹³ Meantime I was getting in touch with some past and some prospective contributors and decided on a general format that could be used: white & black on the light glossed board cover, simple lines, suitable visual-conceptual items included whenever possible, the editorial lead to be unobtrusive yet keen (in retrospect rather much so?); in terms of material contents inclined to the experimental and not averse to these constituting a *mélange* of different effects while hopefully fitting well enough together. A bit much to hope for? I liked those writers Alan liked but wanted as well to attract younger ones trying new things.

Twelve issues and a couple of book publications was the result. The having come to a kind of impasse in my own writing and thinking proved (as they say) a kind of blessing, because it freed my hand and allowed me to enjoy more what was happening in front of me, realising the writing didn't matter beyond all else and literature was not actually about things going right rather than going wrong – often enough the reverse – that it was essentially a specialised activity that had its own terms of reference and engaged readers to this degree or that, depending on so many factors.

It was great to have Leigh's work start to reappear, even if following the reissue

11 I had circa 1995 sent to Alan a copy of the *Back to Front* Nagoya Writers Group magazine which I had edited and my hunch is that Alan, who would around this time have been considering his own future (as editor and New Zealand resident/protagonist), may have remembered the Japanese magazine when he invited me in the following year to take on the editorship.

12 See 'Helix', a joint submission in *A Brief Description* 1 (December 1995).

13 *Willy's Gazette* proved to be the first of The Writers Group's book publications, this one under the magazine's banner. Subsequent publications appear under their own titles, Loney's *Reading/Saying/Making* (2001) and Sugu Pillay's wonderful *The Chandrasekhar Limit and Other Stories* (2002). It was good to see the initiative consolidate later with the establishment of Brett Cross's Titus Press (2005), which continues to publish other tradition writing associated with the magazine and its contributors.

we would see only one further poem of his and 'The Bicycle', an appraisal of the contemporary poetry marketplace's reception of Leggott's *As Far As I Can See*.¹⁴ It was good to continue to receive personal support and a number of poems from Alan, along with his contemporaries dating back at least to the days of *Parallax*: Jenner, Green, Kaiser & Barnett, Lindsay, Brunton, Harlow, Curnow, Judi Stout; along with newer associates including Peter Crisp and others. It was always refreshing to work with people like Michael Radich, who commented at some point that the magazine's quarterly appearance was sufficient reason for him to get something done each time; and I remember bumping into Richard von Sturmer and his wife Amala one winter evening at the Chinese Dragon Festival in Albert Park soon after their return following several years at the Rochester Zen Centre, to hear that Richard was sitting on a carton box or more full of manuscripts and was excited at the prospect of getting back into print locally. Then there were the newer faces that appeared, earlier on Jack Ross, later on Simon Field and Will Joy Christie,¹⁵ and in between the young student friends who had worked with the spirited student small magazine *Salt*—Hamish Dewe, Michael Arnold and Scott Hamilton especially. Later again, it was lovely to receive regular poems and critical writing from Anna Jackson, a quirky writer who is able to write dazzlingly: she and Simon Field seem to my mind to occupy contrary points on the same spectrum. Jack Ross was definitely a stayer, a bridging and sympathetic figure with a broad writing range, and it would be he who would become my successor as editor of *brief*. I had approached Paula Green as an initial choice but, to my disappointment, she was not well situated just then to take on the job. Jack accepted, and from *brief*#24 onward the story belongs to him and subsequent editors.

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To my happy surprise the magazine paid its way and a little more. I am grateful to St Peter's College for providing photocopy and assembly resources at very modest cost. A small number of New Zealand libraries had standing subscriptions as did one or two overseas institutions. Approaching 80 copies per issue, the magazine

¹⁴ Coincidentally I had recently received a photograph from Tony Green showing a bicycle lane ending at an obstruction, which was placed immediately after Leigh's review piece, all in good humour. But I do realise I likely tried Leigh's good patience, unfairly, when in the editor's slot in the same issue I took the liberty of including an email exchange between contributor Scott Hamilton and me concerning Leigh's 'reemergence' as a poet – and in the same issue (14) included Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul's somewhat testy review of the Davis/Curnow innovative book package *Te Tangi a te Matuhi*.

¹⁵ It was great to see her first book published by Titus: *Luce Cannon*, 2007.

was self-sustaining and had consolidated Alan's earlier modest but vital readership. Overseas contributions were not sought. It went without self-publicity, sent no copies out for review, and printed little in the way of reviews of individual books with few book notices. While there was some drop off and intermittency that I regretted, a majority of the earlier set of writers continued to contribute. The invitation that Alan had extended to them remained open, providing a centre round which I hoped to introduce newer, younger writers. Maybe it's possible to delineate a shift in emphasis in the magazine's terms of reference from those mentioned earlier in regard to Alan's tenure:

Innovative writing...
is based on the mechanics of delight, mental stimulation and
occupies a circumscribed, contested space,
which exercises a non-normalised relationship with language
& a non-normalised relationship with any assumed commonplace reality.
Language is literature's source by which aspects of human experience are represented, rather than a tool of transport
& is neither autonomous nor reducible to its representational function: it exists in an unsettled state.

Of course each of these statements proves endlessly contestable. I cannot say with any particular confidence that the magazine achieved a desired 'impact' on mainstream activities or greater recognition of itself in terms of what constitutes timely quality writing.

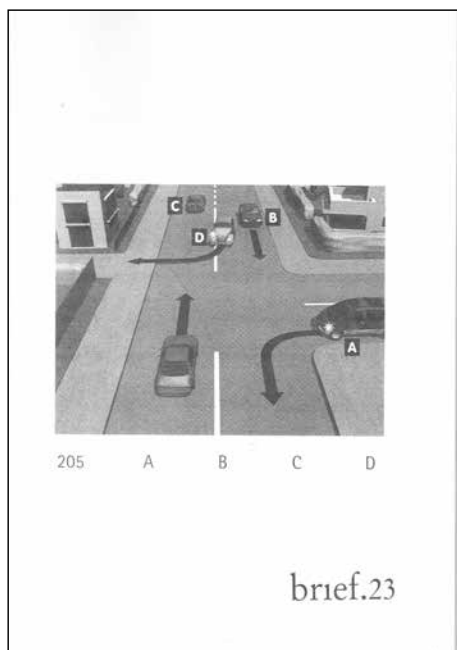
Highlights, disappointments? The pageworks (visual concept pages) that were contributed throughout by Kaiser & Barnett, and those I was fortunate enough to

receive from Simon Ingram and Mary-Louise Brown were particularly pleasing and sharpened the look of the magazine. As the issues progressed I became more aware that *brief* represented quite a diverse set of mature established individual writers, not – or at least no longer in that way – radical insurgents. Writers like Judi Stout and Michael Harlow, who seemed to be less productive than formerly, continued to be very welcome; others who appeared to have reasonable access to more mainstream publication (Paula Green, Lindsay, von Sturmer, Brunton, Jackson) seemed content to still offer work to *brief*; while for several others *brief* seemed to offer perhaps the best opportunity to appear regularly in print (Jenner, Green, Wilson, Geraets, Crisp, Pillay, Pardington, Radich, Kyle, Harnett, Ross, Hamilton, Dewe, Field, Christie &c). I was very pleased to receive a contribution from Dinah Hawken ('Where We Say We Are' 16), whose work I admire and who seems to me innovative through and through, even when from the start she has had consistent mainstream recognition and associations. I was pleased to get at least some work from Leggott (as in other cases, I asked for it, in some cases more than once) and disappointed not to get anything from Murray Edmond, notwithstanding earnest solicitations. The innovative writers who most excite me I would have liked to see more of in *brief*: Leggott, Loney, Edmond, Davis, Hawken, Harlow (who I liken to Hawken in more than like-sounding name), certainly Judi Stout had she been still producing. It was good to start to receive work from the younger *Salt* writers, and I hoped that they might prove to be a reinvigorating point, but that did not really materialise. On the plus side, I was excited to get a run of outstanding pieces from under-rated Simon Field and Will Joy Christie's emergence late in my time was a special pleasure. It was a particular thrill to receive regular contributions from a friend and contemporary based in Japan, the *enfant terrible* linguistic anthropologist Ian Harnett. Ian presented a stream of (consciousness?) pieces which explore space and placement, locution and the allocations (and delusions) of language. His 'Strata Jumping in the Silky Vade Mecum' in *brief* 23 is an example of the uncanny that continues to be marvellously suggestive:

It is possible that Linguistics is the inconceivable middle page with no reverse? thought the cripple boy. He pondered the question. What would it mean to have no reverse? It would mean having a heart on one side of the body. It would mean life before death, youth before old age, mothers before babies, hens before eggs. It would mean that it would be impossible to escape if a magic circle was drawn around one. It would mean syntax before speech, syllable before word, word before phrase, phrase before sentence, sentence before story, story before genre. The crippled

boy wondered if it was possible that a volume of Antilinguistics also existed and if in that world a girl crippled too like him sat winnowing fragments and pondering as enigmatic phantoms drunk from the chalice of melancholia in the library of AntiBabel. While the crippled girl thought as she sat winnowing and weaving the fragments which fell like tears from the melancholia of the enigmatic chalices of the phantoms, 'What would it mean to have no reverse in Antilinguistics?' (69)

Sensing a lack of newer writers I tried a couple of things. The first was to carry out



a kind of playful reversal of the lure of the mainstream: rather than have the marginalised writer appear to be the one struggling to appear in more popular mainstream outlets, I thought to invite some of those established mainstream practitioners over to our 'shore'. On this basis I received work from Ian Wedde (no poems but a challenging critique of Leigh Davis's literary return entitled 'Beauty, Sex, Heroism' 22), which shows an irrepressible Ian back in the game. Bill Manhire (one piece, not of his best I considered) and Greg O'Brien (once more one piece, and again not his best). In an editorial note I had mentioned the idea of contest in literature – that the magazine (indeed literature more broadly) provided a kind of contentious space in which works and writers could face off or show off or choose sides in a way that keeps shifting

how we view both the contest and the contestants, literature's refiguration. That fire did not catch—though the prospect remains: positions adopted are always open to negotiation, yesterday's and tomorrow's choices as to what's best read or read best is always being arrived at.

I mention a second initiative, and this was to explore aesthetic positions adopted by our innovative writers. The idea had its germ in the issue dedicated to Alan's work, something he had himself suggested. *brief* 17 includes 'endless beginnings', a piece I had invited from him as a kind of updated form of the 'Beginnings' (biographical)

articles that Brasch had instigated in *Landfall* in the early 1960s.¹⁶ The sustained focus on Alan's work allowed a number of interests to converge. One favourite of mine was Elizabeth Wilson's anticipatory review of *The Falling*, pert and prescient.¹⁷ Another was the interview form; here Alan answering questions posed by Graham Lindsay – in a later issue (19) Alan Brunton answers a number of questions that I had put to him. The fruition of the second initiative was a number of individual contributions on aesthetics. What was especially interesting was to see that no single aesthetic predominated, rather a string of committed personal statements: Jenner's classical postmodernism 'Aisthesis' (23), Dewe's 'On Aesthetics' (22), Lindsay's 'Dear John' (21), and in issue 20 O'Brien's 'On Aesthetics', Martin Edmond's 'an.aesthetic', Radich's 'Writing²':

There is a sense in which I know nothing about my writing at all: what any reader might make of it, especially some of it. If I have written a piece as a joke I want to be certain only I can get, then that fact sits like an implacable hermeneutic wall between me and the bewildering fact that, once it's out there, people 'read' it. 'Read', here, is for me a cipher, empty of content, and undeciphered script. So I tried some limits with that, too – with putting out stuff that I was uneasy putting my name to. Except for the stuff I believe in; I've only dared to put *that* out in dribs and drabs, set like gemstones in curlicues of canniness. (43) I like the idea of crumbling, fissuring subject, but I think it's only a half-truth, or a limit case, like a quantum property of subjectivity that doesn't apply at ordinary scales of being. I get a laugh out of trying to stage a brave deconstructive flourish and watching the ego evaporate only to creep back in through a side door, or rise undead from its dismembered remains like a computer-game zombie. (45)

and von Sturmer's 'Mysterious Beauty':

Someday I may submit an article on Zen practice and writing. But for now, taking a broad perspective, it seems obvious that we will be facing major challenges as a species in the course of this century. A demanding practice like Zen helps to simplify matters and establish priorities. To be a good writer is not enough; you have to liberate your innate wisdom and compassion as well. That's the real work. (35)

16 According to Alan, this piece provided inspiration for him to write more personal reminiscence. A hoped for 'beginnings' series did not eventuate, though I remember suggesting the idea to Wystan and to one or two others.

17 I remember hassling Elizabeth through the later versions of her review right up to deadline – in the end publishing a version that I thought was terrific but which she considered still premature. It remains a personal favourite.

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And so, to close, what kind of intersection can we say we are left to negotiate after the *briefs*? Each cover of *brief* 23 uses one of three variant images: Karen had come across these when studying the Road Code to prepare for her drivers licence test, in particular the answer options to multi-choice questions about turns and rights-of-way at intersections. At least one among several cars was taking a turn and the question was which car had to give way to which cars. It seemed a pertinent (half-concealed) way to point to possible future turnings and directions that were likely to be taken in the magazine, doubtless not a single right one.

from *Quite little ones*, 2012-

Tuateawa

*Slide suggests hapless. Words do so from the tongue that threshes in the mouth, insuperable. Slip of the tongue!*¹

Moving is not morning. Both are a thrush and on each branch, on several branches, between the silences that separate them. Sunup—sundown—ensue.²

Stony Bay: insofar as it causes any real kind of awkwardness, despite the approach—feet on grass! A mallard pair, she limping, avidly gobble corn chips we flick before them. On shore stones pile in heaps, as if the sea had wished to flex an exculpatory muscle, plunging in places as deeply as any particular blue will allow. Pōhutukawas rest easy, providing footholds where one can climb until one feels overlord of all creation. And, leading away from us, the grass has a comb taken to it: the hills beyond are trimmed so that the sheep track forms a parting.

The leaves on the pururi spin green before they spin white. They turn white when the breeze swings them on their stems. Stemlike spins.

All based on Keats's *disinterestedness*. Find Keats, I say kind Keats.³

1 Pejorative—*blips*.

2 Near 6:30, advancelight, brightening orange, over the sea. We notice that the changes it brings are not limited to the vigorous calls of thrushes, blackbirds, others. Something interrupts: lordship 'furnishing all'.

3 'Being a musician and being great is the same as living and being a real person, an honest person, a real person' (*Straight Life: The Story of Art Pepper*).

—countermanding—

1. There is ample water around our islands. I look out from the coastland at Tuataewa and am confronted with these expansive surfaces: closely related yet were it not for that surrounding water which unmistakably they are not they would not be our patient islands.¹
2. Can (any)place be designated *haphazard*?
3. Like fruit in a bowl that suggests it has always been there.
4. When a cobweb shivers it is understood that the air about it tilts or has been displaced, something vibrates. The way a spider moves across it designates countervailing and a law.²
5. A spider casts its web. Perhaps to wait, patiently, a countermeasure. *All three?*³

1 The sun seems to hang above the eastern sea, like fruit. Patched islands are surrounded by and rise from a single body of water. It seems natural yet it is strange that the sea should be considered singular, whereas islands usually comprise either/ors, depending on water as base. Even islands in lakes.

2 Cobwebs snare light, sometimes unfelt, sometimes shimmering so that the light and the physical vibration combine, like the sea. Like spider islands.

3 *Home Ground*. Ahh!

that benediction is where you are – krishnamurti

sixteen

At Taurarua swallows flick their wings, separate & recombine, art of hunting. Meanwhile rocks stain, wavy trails form on the improvised sand, and amidst pōhutukawa tangled roots consolation's left wanting: *spendthrift?*

Or swimming in the estuary one wonders whether one is in the water or the scene is itself watery and a solution. *Can the body be formalised without all else being so too?*

Or when one remembers that in seasons these sharp-pointed leaves stayed a steady green before turning gradually, unevenly brown: *hoisted seasonal?*

Or some twenty sparrows jostling over exposed roots of the Moreton Bay Fig in the Domain¹—*homecoming—jitters?*

Or one notices that the moon is the light it shines on things whether it inhabits the east or west side of the sky, or hovers at a height, nurturing romance. At Jaipur the unseen moon's radiance inheres in all—on firm earth I take careful steps bathed in it, eyes half-closed. *Seeing down?*

1 The one down from the museum in the Auckland Domain, where Mark and his children had their photos taken, rather than the even more venerable tree that occupies the shoreline space at Kororāreka between the Duke of Marlborough and the historical Custom House, now the residence of the local policeman. Established some 150 years ago, both hotel and house outdate most of Auckland.

26 (two-directions)¹

'A Real poetry lover is one who is peculiarly qualified to appreciate a poet whom very few people are able to enjoy.' *Who is it calls this a twosome?*

Evil contains nothing. It is known and felt, never abstract. It occurs and is felt in the body and in the mind. *Who is it calls this a twosome?*

Driving back over the bridge towards town I do not notice the sparkling cityscape but instead the moon that's huge and bright and seems to trail us. So weighty, it appears barely able to hold itself above the serried Takapuna rooftops or the mimicking trees near the water. On the water (on the water?) it assumes the shape of a candle, although plainly I confuse the spreading light of a candle with its waxen centre, as I do the moon, which is not a source of light, despite the solid object it is. *Who is it calls this a twosome?*

Yesterday near the top of the tree perches a very singular blackbird; today there is at full stretch a tui, alone at the very peak of the park's only *gingko*. Down through the leaves the song moves? Or is it that the tree among its neighbourhood of leaves is their song? *Who is it calls this a twosome?*

Ajhan Sucitto speaks. Strangely the measured is not the necessary entrance to the unmeasured, which in some sense remains intact. Measurement retains little, excludes much. Whether I hear the tui or the blackbird, the prize is not the song. *Who is it calls this a twosome?*

¹ 'Both *Directions at Once* came from a compositional tip Coltrane gave "about starting a sentence in the middle, and then going to the beginning and the end of it at the same time."' (Wayne Shorter, saxophonist, quoted in *The Guardian*, 8 June 2018).

Fowlds Park: twenty7

Not hiding, yet hidden among the freshening spring leaves, mister thrush enters refurbishment mode.

And in early September in the park nearly everything: rewarewa young and supple and long-leaved, crooked; and poplars, upright. The puddle for the blackbird is a sea of selves that watches the bird flick open its wings to deliver water between its spread feathers. Yesterday, walking with Nika, we notice a wreath of jasmines tangling over the tall hedge. Today a *gingko*'s myriad turns.

Believe any image you like.

This is to make up for a piece missed. How many people today have I pleased even a little? What can I say? I call Matthew and had to give him unwelcome news and yet he stood firm. We register small things and feel more respect. Patience is our common tree.

Not wanting—needing—never minding—

something falling doesn't know where it's falling

thirty2 (own)

Sometimes it seems worth ditching everything that poetry and its history has meant—to savour only the poem before me as the whole of poetry. Sometimes I want it to be *my* poem. Of course, in my case and in the case of others like me—requiring such consideration in order to be thought of at all—this can be quite unnerving. When I consider the five books of poems I've put together, pretty much in isolation, isolated and self-isolating instances, and I try to make sense of them and the processes involved in their production and distribution (to personal and literary friends), let alone their 'inner value,' I want to separate poems from poetry.¹

I've continued over the years to write poems that when I look back on them seem not to conform to a single poetic. Swinging from branch to branch, swishing the leaves. Poetics, as I understand, seeks to articulate what poems are up to, doing or saying. My continued regard for language writing unfortunately doesn't well explain my recent *Stationmaster* which, while cherishing the openness of poetic possibility, has its own conviction of a place to be headed: the word 'life' means something beyond likelihood, a measure contained at each step. Favouring pointing, it nonetheless points to an ending. Perhaps language lies beyond its own terms?

I find poetry beautiful. Though the need we have to insist on its appearance the moment it appears is strange enough and I think not wholly apposite.

¹ One comes here.

Such an announcement of poetry [reverts] to a need of clamour.² It is true that I have not—in either sense—enjoyed the particular gratification of *that* effect; although like others I often enough covet it; and my own self-reserve and lapses in confidence—like yours—have prevented us from saying or even knowing whether it matters. The ego tends to confound what one admires with what doesn't much deserve it.

That gap might almost be considered a death. But how many deaths does it take? They're everywhere. Indeed, it seems that 'life' becomes a kind of generalisation that's easily construed when analysing poems or individual people. *What has poetry to do with it?*

What wit I had formerly I happily forego.³

2 Oppen introduces a largely unknown William Bronk thus: 'In spite of the few exceptional moments... poetry in general has been fairly well protected against whatever may be the hazards of publicity. I myself think the protection is real, that it is a protection, that one can be disturbed by the neglect, sometimes approaching total neglect, of individual poets, and disturbed that it does still seem to be precisely the most valuable, because the most individual poets, who tend to be least recognized. Still, though I waver, still I do think the protection is real and invaluable'. And continues, 'I find that I value more and more a poetry personal enough and profound enough to be heard only as itself rather than as a part of the world of high fashion. To be well outside the world of high fashion is I think quite simply the honor, the honorableness, of the poet' (Reading at the Academy of American Poets, Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1966). 250 years back Samuel Johnson warned, more simply, against 'the itch of literary praise'.

3 Milton's 'Apology for Smectymnuus': 'The good writer 'ought him selfe to bee a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroick men, or famous Cities, unless he have in himselfe the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy'.

thirty7

Once more at Taurarua. Wetsuited we stand and survey the small round of reconstructed bay. Still sky, still water, stilllife: as if the immobility of one should apply to all. Still, to break the surface of the water—that clings—is to pierce into another world.

When a train rumbles past it doesn't disturb the stillness. Once we're in water, another train comes, freight this time, a line of MAERSKs with letters writ large on the side. It pauses on the tracks, while from the opposite direction a new passenger train approaches, two or three carriages, occasional faces peering. At the waterline the mind remains unperturbed.

I think my words, like the train, might head somewhere, waiting at this or that junction before continuing. At the same time the water, salt or fresh, is like thought. I take it and pour it somewhere or let it pour over the body or back into itself. It returns and invariably proves hospitable, though there is little to gain.

Alternatively, we dig into the mind as if something foreign or exotic is buried deep within. How can we say a treasure's 'unearthed'?¹ Most of what's

¹ We take meaning to harbour depths not assimilable to a surface. In the East (see 'circumstantial set,' *Station master*) surface and depth interweave. Criticism, in terms of the former, renders a discovery a creation—up for grabs. Even Milton disabuses the notion that simply by digging are riches to be gained:

Rifl'd the bowels of thir mother Earth
For treasures better hid. Soon had his crew
Op'nd into the Hil a spacious wound

dug up we discard. Why not use the analogy of a homely coloured bucket containing some sought after things that are scooped out or returned without fuss, like water or a train returning to a station? Everything's something in place.

And dig'd out ribs of Gold. Let none admire
That riches grow in Hell; that soyle may best
Deserve the precious bane. (*Paradise Lost*, Book 1 687-92)

Pindar fragments¹

[41] whether taking a single line, like this law,
 so constituted, or
 a bright constellation remaining
 unshakeable to another, two trees
 entwine: envisage
 only one standing

*O child, you whose spirit most hangs / On the skin of the wild, crag-loving
beasts / Of Pontus, may you befriend every town, / Praising the present /
Goodly, / And think otherwise in another age.*²

1 The worlds of God and man are separate. Late in a truncated writing career, Hölderlin explores the idea of law (Gesetz) as a 'third' where aspiration (a transcendent) and actual experience (an immanent) might achieve a mutual accommodation, a place of purchase: 'More strictly than art, [the law of church and state] hold fast the living affairs in which, in time, a people has encountered itself and continues to' (*The Highest*). This he attempts in translations from Pindar fragments along with his accompanying commentaries (1800-1805).

In this rendition I use a triadic structure: in each section Hölderlin's translation and excerpted prose commentary (footnoted) follow an oblique poetic response of my own: a curious inversion. Section 50 serves as a summary argument of the preceding sections 41-49. Quotations are taken from *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters*, ed. and trans. Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth (London: Penguin, 2009).

2 'Capacity of the solitary school for the world. The innocence of pure knowing as the soul of intelligence. For intelligence is that art of remaining faithful under various circumstances; and knowing, of being certain in reason, notwithstanding positive errors' (*Unfaithfulness of Wisdom*).

[42] nonentity's depiction—
 abstruse—now disambiguate:
 what number is on the horizon—what function seeing
 into the trapping/s of mind, Centaur's gait—at the point
 at which the horizon marks
 a gap?—receding
 on approach (*never there!*)

*I believe that I possess / Chiron's teaching. From the grotto, namely, I come, /
From Cariclo and Philyra, where the / Centaur's daughters nurtured me, / The
sacred ones; twenty years, indeed, / I dwelt, and never a foul deed / Nor such
a word did I address / To them, and have now come home / To restore the
rule of my father.¹*

¹ 'Thus Jason, a pupil of the Centaur, steps before Pelias...' (see: *Pindar, Pythians, 4, 180-89*).

[43] nature's blessing: reaching
there no longer—such—that—
whatsoever's confined's sufficient—or
for the prescient
their own culpability: what's returned
in the moment
consider attainment

*Beginning of great virtue, Queen Truth, / May you not trip up / My thinking
on harsh falsehood.¹*

¹ 'Fear of truth from taking pleasure in it. For the first living understanding of truth in a living sense is, like all pure feeling, exposed to confusion; so that one does not err through one's own fault... but because of the higher object, for which, relatively, the mind is too weak' (*Of Truth*).

[44] *this uproar* disturbs available breath—
 utility's threat—the people—
 that lack (being elbowed)
 self-occupation or states of
 calm:
 suits one in the presence of children

—*this uproar*
a public shield's lowered
when encountered—surge from
the bottleneck—not sought—
containment represents
the children—knowing this
protects them: the law opens
one path (to another)

*The public realm, once a citizen / In quiet weather has grasped it, / He should
explore / Of great-manly rest the sacred light, / And the uproar in his breast, /
From the depths, fight off, with its gales; for it brings poverty, / And is inimical
to teachers of children.¹*

1 'Then, the laws become the means to hold fast to that fate [of a fatherland] in its untouched state. What holds for a prince originally, holds good as imitation for the more essential citizen' (*Of Rest*).

[45] a regular repose—nestled—
 in this rest there
 is something different—easily imperilled
 when voiced—outside of dispute
 where violence blessedly
 hangs aside / hangs aside

*He who in the waveless depths of the sea by flutes / Was moved, so lovingly,
by the song.¹*

¹ 'At this time every creature gives its own note, its loyalty, the way it hangs together in itself'
(*Of the Dolphin*).

[46] in divergence law
 prevails—seemingly—housing a very
 naysaying, so saying's
 no longer arrival (built to stay)
 beyond deliberation's
 steadfastness:
 reproaching each name's
 mediacy, confounds
 'speaking out'—

*The Law, / Of everyone the King, mortals and / Immortals; which is just why /
It mightily maintains / The highest right with the very highest hand.*¹

1 'The immediate, strictly speaking, is impossible... heavenly goodness, for its own sake, must be sacred, unalloyed. Man, as a knowing creature, must also distinguish different worlds, because knowledge is only possible through opposition. For this reason the immediate is, strictly speaking, impossible for mortals, as for immortals. Strict mediacy, however, is the law. And for this reason it mightily maintains the rightest right with the very highest hand' (*The Highest*).

[47]

step

non-traverse—this

necessity that sits under a tree

or shields a flower—wants but still acknowledges

set need—food remains in the mouth

unchewed

term Zayd: term ball: term Opa

—against which (traverse)

ponders the imponderable sign

& begins

movement:

Opa—‘start!’

*Whoever rightly and sacredly / Passes his life, / Sweetly nourishing his heart, /
Long life making, / Him Hope shall accompany, who / Most of all for mortals
/ Their flexible opinion rules.¹*

1 ‘One of the most beautiful images of life, the way in which guiltless custom preserves the living heart, from which hope comes; that then gives simplicity a floescence, with its manifold trials, making sense flexible and so life long, with it hastening leisure’ (*Age*).

[48] sheer—
 possibility
 gainsaid—a kite anchors on
 a finger: in
 the end one
 declines whatsoever's
 thought
 sheer

*Whether I of Right the wall, / The high one, or of crooked deception / Will
ascend, and so me myself / Circumscribing, will live / Myself out; about this /
Have I equivocal a / Mind, exactly to say.¹*

¹ 'That I may then find out the connection between right and intelligence, which must not be ascribed to them themselves but to a third, through which they hand together infinitely (exactly) – that's why I have an equivocal mind' (*The Infinite*).

[49] again resting
 ends—
 or is the end of origin
 pursues rest

*At first did / They the well-advising Themis, / The heavenly ones, on golden
steeds, beside / The ocean salt, / The Times, to the ladder, / To the holy one,
lead, Of Olympus, to / The shining return, / The rescuer's ancient daughter,
/ Of Zeus, to be, / But she / To the golden-bound, the goodly one, / To the
shining-fructified places of rest gave birth.¹*

1 'How man posits himself, a son of Themis, when, out of a sense for the perfect, his spirit, on earth and in heaven, found no rest, until meeting in fate, on the tracks of ancient cultivation, God and man recognize one another again, and in the remembrance of original need man is happy *where he can hold himself*. Themis, the order-loving one, did to the *sanctuaries of mankind*, the still places of rest, give birth' (*The Sanctuaries*).

[50] **Hölderlin:** 'Thus the centaurs *learnt the power of the honey-sweet wine*, they took their motion and direction from the firmly formed banks, so rich in trees, and hurled *the white milk and the table away with their hands*, the fashioned wave drove away the calm of the pond, the way of life on the banks also changed' (*The Life-Giver*).

Whitehead: '... in a society, the members can only exist by reason of the laws which dominate the society, and the laws only come into being by reason of the analogous characters of the members of the society.'

[41] Why term one prior? Thought's consolidated by means of language and immediately inadequacies appear. Seeing either as a place, an inhabitation, misleads because of the restlessness that's in all abode.

[42] We decorate ourselves with ideas. We render ourselves vanishing because we live only according to our own contrivances. The horizon is sheer ('rule of my father') yet we approach it as if it were an extended egress.

[43] The mind's supposed sufficiency betrays uncertainty: for us arrival constitutes an attainment, thinking this is our place, *my destination*, whereas movement in the mind doesn't necessitate getting anywhere.

[44] Insufficiency: law is attendant on events that in our response to them alters the very function and operation of all three. Necessary in law is temporality; it has no actual venue but only *ad infinitum* notional ones. Knowing this can be peaceful and peace, this writer considers, lies elsewhere.

[45] *Interlude:* rest be sounded.

[46] Law as artifice within 'natural limits.' Artifice suggests a significant reference point whose value makes available seeing around. No vantage point, nothing underfoot?

[47] Is there sufficiency in custom? Individual utterance can be viewed as a break with or out of custom: history gets appropriated at each turn—true in the sense of its unavoidable incompleteness. Hard to know at which juncture we might wish it to get stuck. Cause means something hasn't ended.

[48] The kite's flight is tethered, like the entwined trees [41]: neither leaves the other, neither cause nor effect, nor the law and its outcomes. Yet the kite string, the tree pair: the act of restraint and connection, forms a link not reducible to either end.

[49] Beware needless obfuscation: 'where you are is where you are not' (Eliot).

there is nothing which floats into the world from nowhere

five beauties¹

[51] For Whitehead knowledge occurs dependent on events: it exists in a conjectured state, arises from its own flow. Events undergird, they buttress, albeit not much mattering.

[52] It's like the thought of flight in the bird, which occurs almost unconsciously, and is something else before it's done—it is flight, and flight is knowledge, to places unknown from places known. Beauty is how one feels about such things.

[53] Like a sparrow, the effects on us are endless; the poor bird does not know what arrives in its mind or in its body; much less do we, who make knowledge into our nest and habitat. The sparrow uses its wings to flick dust under its feathers. And both wings are needed to synchronise in flight. These things are taken to constitute existence: yet dust feathers wings thought, to what do they amount?

[54] Occasions beget events beget individuals. Quite a linguistic and cognitive turn: the bird and the body of John, which satisfy the notion, would not wish to be thus defined. Although we allow ourselves to be always wrapped about, thinking ourselves entire, even when we are individuals begot by events begot by occasions. No single occasion comes near being me or a sparrow. Like a ratchet, the occasion prevents any slipping back.

¹ See Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009).

[55] Funny the way we celebrate change, again please, considering that it ensures our existence, whereas, even linguistically, change entails something's becoming something else. I feel for the sparrow and the sparrow feels for something else. But the feeling must await the sparrow, which has not the patience to explore the feeling. Whitehead says that the assumed correspondence between subject and—predicate?—is misplaced because there's no centre to hold them together. Better say that the sparrow is—nothing brings us closer, despite the sorrow that each must register.

Wholes in part: late century forays¹



Swan song. One remains inclined to speak on behalf of that in which one has become invested. In the process of offering and having 'briefly, briefly' declined by JNZL, I noticed on its website an invitation for applications to edit the annual Special Issue. 'New Writing: 1975-2000' is the result. Both the issue and my introduction to it owe much to Charles Ferrall and Anna Jackson, the journal's Editors, superior guides. 'Wholes in part' starts with the acknowledgement that no literary 'movement' outlives itself – it will be replaced by other movements, as suits those who are interested in writing, or due to extraneous shifts in the reading community. 'Wholes' is written in a retrospective voice, as was 'briefly, briefly', so clearly at some level there is a realisation that the moment / the movement has to some significant degree passed. Yet retrospect is a part of our forming understanding, and 'Wholes' captures something of the 'other' tradition's push back against normalising, unilinear, homogenous, humanist, chauvinistic aesthetic practice. The motif 'north is south' I take from Anne Kennedy to represent the resistance of an

*upside-down aesthetic, one which, at least for this writer, ushers in fresh possibilities of an integration of the mind and the literary that sees north and south as mere quiverings of the compass needle within the range that constitutes what direction might mean. What makes the continued moving in this or that direction precious, sometimes perilous, is evidenced in our early 21st century with the appearance of fresh, less combative, value-orientated books: Davis's *Stunning* debut (2009) and *NAMELESS/REDUX* (2009/13), my own *Station master* (2011), and Horrocks' *The Ghost in the Machine* (2015). *Swan Song* indeed.*

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North is south (Anne Kennedy, 1988)

Are we really capable of expecting the unexpected? (Mervyn King, 2015)

1 'Wholes in Part: Late Century Forays', in 'New Writing: 1975-2000', JNZL 32:2 (2016), ed. John Geraets, pp. 8-32.

Nearly a century ago, in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', T.S. Eliot declared a new paradigm of literary history:

The historical sense [not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence] compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.²

Seductive as this viewpoint is, as time rolls on we have come to realise that the very lure of Eliot's argument disguises a rhetorical sleight of hand: the unbroken wholeness it advocates is idealising and inherently prescriptive; it is applied retrospectively; and the relationship between its 'historical sense' and the particulars of production that it subordinates will be forever tenuous. In short, the hermetic view of culture that is promoted simply steps over the difficult work of connecting the disparate spaces involved in the written representation of human experience: in what sense are past and present actually 'simultaneous'? In what sense is an 'historical sense' timeless? In what sense is a writer's 'time and place' at once contemporaneous and traditional?

The focus of this Special Issue is New Writing in New Zealand in the period 1975-2000. That is its time and place, its chosen viewing platform. And it is immediately worth noting (*vis-à-vis* Eliot) that the essay contributed by Roger Horrocks presents a rather more complex, contested view of history: in this view the entire last century is encompassed within the modernist paradigm, with Eliot at its head, and the latest of the five successive 'modes' identified (realignments within an overarching paradigm) belongs specifically to our period and is inspired by the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writers out of America. What Horrocks also reveals is that such paradigms-within-a-paradigm can often enough behave quite antagonistically towards one another, as evidenced when in his Turnbull Winter Lecture of 1981 modernist Allen Curnow summarily dismisses Charles Olson's postmodernism as already outdated. In our age of chaos and complexity sciences and other disconcertingly abrupt upheavals in various systems of thought, the very way in which we understand continuity and causality falls more and more into question. Unified theories such as Eliot advocates are difficult to sustain without running into considerable resistance. Indeed the quarter

2 T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), p. 44.

century explored in this issue is one in which the received view of historical continuity and cultural homogeneity in New Zealand is reconsidered as a period of prolonged fracturing and multi-levelled change. In contrast to Eliot's settled 'ideal order', the contributors in this issue reveal a heterogeneity of activity and values within which order, while it may still be tentatively grasped at, comes under constant revision and is subject to fundamental realignment. Bewildering as this process is it is also the new reality, the new paradigm – for now at least.

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This introduction approaches its task from two distinct angles. From one it seeks to establish a broad historical perspective by which the individual essays are seen to share a common background. From the other it wants to establish a foreground based on the material provided by the essays themselves. Of course it is recognised that to approach our topic from these two contrasting directions is itself a simplification: such a select group of essays cannot aim at a comprehensive coverage of the literary production, or even of literary innovation, during the period; nor can it claim a superior vantage point from which to identify the truly outstanding achievements. Most usefully it can be taken as an effort to identify some of the under-acknowledged 'hot spots' of literary innovation, as well as to suggest some fresh responses to already-acknowledged works of writers who were themselves responding to the tumultuous changes they were encountering. The issue doesn't look specifically into gender politics, or postcolonialism (unless Robert Sullivan's *Moanan* account of Hone Tuwhare and Keri Hulme is considered such), or gay and lesbian or other minorities' writings; our discussion of the important field of fiction is limited to an emergent speculative genre and leaves aside consideration of reputable novelists including Frame, Gee, Stead, Wendt, Wedde, and Hulme, as well as several younger writers who were at the time establishing reputations locally and internationally; nor does it have the space in which to explore broader social-issue writing in such areas as the work-place, immigration, health, educational and welfare policy – areas of neoliberal transformation that taken together served to radicalise the architecture of citizens' lives.

More pressingly, the essays signal a bottom-up approach. Makyla Curtis discusses some of the idiosyncrasies and initiatives that new print technologies (specifically the photocopier) brought to contemporary magazine and book production, traceable down to the aspects of design in her sampling of individual pieces of visual-writing texts. The same interest is shown to occur to an even more radical extent in Wystan Curnow's analysis of Billy Apple's language-based art work dating from his *Art for Sale* exhibition

of 1981: Apple recontextualises ordinary objects found in the commercial world, such as receipts yet to be signed, in effect realigning their assumed borders of operation. Owen Bullock explores poetic individuation in the work of Alan Loney, specifically the process of identity-making whose recourse is to retrieved fragments of memories that must be further filtered through the fragmentary nature of language. On another scale, some of the profound shifts in the assertion of individual identity and social relations are insightfully revealed in Murray Edmond's survey of contemporary dramaturgy and dramatic performance. The relevant irony here is that, while there was increased sponsorship and public support for the dramatic arts, the actual late-century drama produced was one preoccupied with a feeling of individual entrapment, an urge to flight and escape, disaffiliation. And the content of the plays, unlike earlier periods, hardly pointed to itself as a solution. Flight was in all directions at once to nowhere very special.

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Measurement only measures that which is specifically looked for – the rest, they say, is *accident*. In a recent book from which one of my epigraphs is taken, the former Governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, makes exactly this point when he addresses the turmoil of the 2008 financial crisis: ‘The lesson is that no amount of sophisticated statistical analysis is a match for the historical experience that “stuff happens”’.³ Several contributors to this issue were participants in the ‘stuff happens’ of the last quarter century. Several have participated in more than one of the genres considered; a number have had important academic careers and have made contributions in areas well beyond their own professional expertise. Horrocks (MNZM; former Deputy Chair of the Broadcasting Commission) and Curnow were innovative teachers in the first course on contemporary American Poetry in New Zealand, a course that provided the kind of impetus that led to the later flourishing of such ventures – Creative Writing undergraduate and later postgraduate courses were established from the mid-1970s onward – and a culmination occurs in Bill Manhire's International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University, inaugurated in 2001. Curnow is a significant figure in the art world over nearly 50 years.⁴ Over the same period Edmond has had a formidable presence in poetry, the dramatic arts, teaching, editorship and literary criticism. Jack Ross is an established editor, academic, creative writing teacher and anthologist who is widely published as a poet, prose writer and critic. At the other

³ Mervyn King, *The End of Alchemy* (UK: Little, Brown, 2016), location 1809.

⁴ Curnow's *Essays on New Zealand Literature* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1973) marks what might be considered a first substantial impetus towards a new, non-insular perspective of the country's literary activity.

end of our short spectrum is Owen Bullock, a current PhD student preparing a thesis on contemporary innovative New Zealand poets, and Curtis, a postgraduate student at the University of Auckland and our single woman contributor.

Two notions that King explores in relation to the financial crash that can be applied to our materials are those of 'heuristics' and 'radical complexity'. Heuristics suggests a hands-on involvement. Radical complexity points to the way that new writing began to explore aspects of non-inclusionism and diversity, discontinuity and the unpredictable, related both to techniques used and understandings applied and results obtained: it embraces trial-and-error as a working method. This is why the mainstream proved to a large extent to be unsympathetic to or ill-equipped to deal with some of the new initiatives. As seen in the essays by Horrocks, Curtis and Bullock, several participants in the literary arts were considered non-publishable or too obscure or wayward to be presented to wider audiences. Major long-running magazines like *Landfall* and *Sport* have been criticised by such writers of radical complexity as non-receptive to historical initiatives that the new writers, responsive to overseas influence and stimuli, regarded themselves as embracing. The same concept can be stretched further: Horrocks's idea of paradigms-within-paradigms is one, and the proliferation of recognised new genres or interest groups in literature – women's writing, indigenous or ethnic writing, gay and lesbian writing, as well as proliferating subsets within the genres of poetry and fiction and performance art, or within the visual arts and film and computer-generated work, comics, street art – were indications of a surge in diversification together with a greater specialisation that saw traditional genre forms and their audiences sub-divide and further sub-divide: heuristics and radical complexity.⁵ Consequently, on the one hand there was a new indeterminacy

5 The late 1970s through the 1990s saw an unprecedented proliferation of papers introduced into university courses, leading in some cases to the creation of entirely new programmes and departments. These were years of profound transformation in universities, structurally and professionally. To take only the English Department at the University of Auckland, a Film Studies paper was first introduced by Roger Horrocks in 1981. This evolved into Film and Television Studies by 1989 and, in 1996, into the full-fledged Film, Television and Media Studies Programme (all under Horrocks' guiding hand). Approaching the 1980s, contemporary Special Topic papers began to be offered at either senior undergraduate or postgraduate levels: 'Women Writers of the 20th Century' (from 1979); 'Australian [later also Canadian] Literature' (from 1982); 'Novels from the Post-Colonial World 1950-1980' (from 1983); 'Creative Writing' (from 1983); 'Literature from the Old and New Commonwealths' (from 1985); 'The Sublime' (from 1990); 'Shakespeare on Screen'; 'Women and the Medieval Devotional Tradition'; 'Feminist Literary Criticism' (from 1991). By the end of the latter decade boutique offerings included 'Subjectivity, Sexuality and Transgression in 17th Century Literature'; 'Medieval Narrative: Gender and Violence'; 'Two Poets: Robyn Hyde and H.D.'; 'Alternative Sensibilities, Homophile Inscriptions and Interpretations' (all 1998). Meanwhile new programmes or even departments were established: Pacific Studies in 1987; Theatre Studies in 1992; Women's Studies in 1993; Comparative Literature in 1995. These were exciting academic advances, but they arrived hand

by which literature was an enabler of creative response, rather than a mere repository of the best that should be retained; and on the other hand there was a new heuristics, a provisional self-construction via means of the literary act. Heuristics is to do with making-do, making make-do, and these artists were intent on doing just that.

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So we see that 1975-2000 proved an unsettling of the norms of intellectual, social, political and economic organisation and behaviour. In terms of what we now understand about the imposed nature of tradition and the historical sense, it must be acknowledged that things actually do get quite messy and, even in writing this introduction, I have come to appreciate the problems faced in building a case that this particular quarter century can indeed be said to comprise a distinctive period of 'our' literature. Some essays are found to venture outside the given period in order just to better distinguish it; one invited essay – on writing by women – has not been included because, among other circumstances, its contents belonged almost entirely outside the given years. Perversely, something I have not been looking for and yet am faced with is that there is a degree of presumption in selecting this (or any) period of literature for special attention. And yet, again maybe perversely, to my mind that is precisely what can be considered this last quarter century's real 'discovery'. In terms of the importance of coming at things from chosen directions, as mentioned above, it is the resistance to the imposition of set forms and meanings (through identity fractures, the fraught dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and non-alignment in expectations) that lies at the heart of the new writing. The critical realisation is that all identity-creation is profoundly provisional, imposed, makeshift, thought-based. In this key regard the years that have since passed continue to largely function as a footnote to the last quarter century. The literature of the period is thus *not* distinctive in the traditional sense of demonstrating an underlying unity and cohesion in intractable materials, or some kind of thesis-antithesis critique that makes reconciliation in human experience possible. The case made is that the actual distinction of the period lies in its recognition that meaning and identity are a function more of assignment than of recognition: 'New Zealand Literature' surrenders or loses its assumed cohesive quality. It's not

in hand with a requirement that university departments and teachers be materially self-justifying and accountable for teaching outcomes, in measurable, financially relevant, terms. Alongside mundane professional monitoring there arose a plethora of papers and courses that reflected a new urgency of dissatisfaction towards traditional ideology-based and broad-spectrum studies, hierarchical inclusionism, and a turn towards studies that represented more individualised, minority-acknowledging viewpoints.

that it has died or was deliberately killed off, or simply disappeared; rather, much like its surrounding society, under scrutiny it has revealed itself to be fractious, atomised, a spiralling of constituencies within constituencies. Therefore, by way of another curious turn in the direction I have set out upon in introducing this issue, and without in any way wishing to appear merely clever or overly selective, I want next to kill two birds with one stone. I will take *100 Traditional Smiles* by Anne Kennedy, her first book publication of 1988, in order to explore some of its strange distinctiveness as a quint-essential text of the period and at the same time have it serve as a kind of proxy for the above-mentioned missing essay on women's writing. Kennedy's book falls pretty neatly into the middle of our period and is an irresistible example of a good-natured suspending of earlier assumptions of unity, direction and progress.⁶

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A day went on a holiday; how it entranced everything there or the other way around; how it was entranced by everything apart from it, wearing an entranced jersey, adopting entranced mannerisms and bringing entranced children into this world.

(100 Traditional Smiles)

From the 1930s through 1960s Charles Brasch, Allen Curnow and Frank Sargeson were key protagonists set on identifying a distinctively New Zealand Literature. *Landfall* under Brasch (1947-66) is the place where anyone wanting to be anyone as a writer sought to appear.⁷ This is borne out in the statistics. Interestingly, in proportion to an individual writer's total work published, Ruth Dallas is the journal's single most represented poet, while women writers as a whole are substantially underrepresented (a small fraction of total contributions, though the ratio improved over time). This was less a fault of Brasch's editing than a reflection of contemporary educational and gender expectations and opportunities. But what is of as much interest is that a number of prominent women contributors to *Landfall* presented themselves in a manner that underplays issues of gender or strong individuality. Dallas was the maiden name of

⁶ A sidebar reflection: cross-relations. Kennedy writes across a range of genres, script writing, art writing, language-art-text, children's writing, general criticism, fiction and poetry (the latter two often in unison). She is the wife of Robert Sullivan, a contributor to this issue and a prominent Māori writer and anthologist of Polynesian writing. Sally Rodwell, friend to Kennedy and Red Mole collaborator with her partner Alan Brunton (who died in 2002 and who figures in essays on poetry by Horrocks and on drama by Edmond), illustrates Kennedy's text. Indeed one can easily imagine *100 Traditional Smiles* performed by Red Mole.

⁷ See Geraets 'Landfall under Brasch: the Humanizing Journey' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Auckland University, 1982).

Ruth Mumford's mother. Janet Frame's first contribution appears under the pseudonym (again her mother's maiden name) Jan Godfrey. Paul Henderson is in fact Ruth France. Even the 1958 essay 'Men and Women in New Zealand', celebrating the emergence of women as a distinctive social identity, written by Phoebe Meikle, is signed off by a Leslie M. Hall.

Then 1975 arrived. Of course the shifts in the period's social and literary fabric are various and interrelated, yet there are distinctive features: Riemke Ensing, an immigrant from Holland, provided one when she decided to put together a collection of women's poetry to coincide with International Women's Year. The anthology waited almost three years to appear and its title highlights a movement away from the received gender stereotype: *Private Gardens*.

Towards the end of 1974, sparked off with enthusiasm for the concept of INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR, and deciding to contribute my share to that event, I began this anthology.⁸

The first cutting of the cloth was awkward: Frame (querying whether 'a companion volume of New Zealand male poets was envisaged') and Dallas ('poetry should stand or fall on its own merits') declined their invitations to appear. Deceased women poets were generally excluded, as by intention were living writers whose work was already readily accessible – although ironically the publication delay meant that several women poets who had in the interim produced well-received new volumes did in the end have their work featured. If the editorial rationale and ingredients are somewhat at odds,⁹ *Private Gardens* nonetheless brings focus to a difference in temper – by turn tender, strident, domestic, resourceful, tentative.

The next substantial women's anthology, *Yellow Pencils* (1988) edited by Lydia Wevers, appears the same year as Kennedy's book. *Private Gardens'* blend of excited possibility combined with reflective diffidence is displaced with an outspoken assurance of quality and 'the move from private to public':

8 *Private Gardens: An Anthology of New Zealand Women Poets* (Dunedin: Caveman Press, 1977), ed. Riemke Ensing, p. 10. The responses of Frame and Dallas are disclosed on the same page.

9 Vincent O'Sullivan, in a practice not uncommon at the time, provides the reputable outsider's Afterword that, if not wrapt, is at least encouraging of these emboldened beginnings. The inclusion of O'Sullivan was also a useful antidote to the poisonous dismissal of women's poetry as 'too often clichéd and overly sentimental' by Arthur Baysting in his Introduction to *Young New Zealand Poets* (1974), itself afterworded by Kendrick Smithyman, another male writer who expresses skepticism concerning 'the advances which women poets have made' (both are referenced in Ensing's Introduction, p.13). Lydia Wevers was prepared to be kinder, if no less candid, in her assessment of *Private Gardens*: 'It is an unadventurous poetic' (Introduction, p. xx).

An observable change in the way women writers see the function of poetry: a move from the celebration of feeling to an investigation of what it is to be a woman poet; a reconsideration of role and stereotype; an exploration of the various kinds of activity poetry can engage in.¹⁰

Fast-forward to more recent collections and it is clear that women's writing is not only no longer contentious but resides comfortably within multiple possible identities: independently distinctive it also appears on equal terms in the national discourse in various of its guises.¹¹ In *Twenty Contemporary New Zealand Poets* (2009) eight of the 20 contributors are women (a strong showing considering that the first six of the chronologically listed poets are male) and in *99 Ways into New Zealand Poetry* (2010) there is a tell-tale gender balance in terms of contents.¹² Both anthologies have a male-female editorial pairing. And featuring in both is Anne Kennedy, a writer who straddles any number of possible divergences, gentle yet quirky, effusive yet enigmatic, experimental yet headed for cover: '*A day went on a holiday; how it entranced everything there or the other way around*'.¹³ How does this book challenge conventional expectations? To begin with the tone is everywhere: the narrative voice shifts about, gratuitous, naïve, linguistically cheeky, sometimes heedless, sometimes intimate, sometimes carelessly repetitive: the noun-verb 'entrance' indicates a place one enters through as well as one's getting carried away to somewhere else.

10 *Yellow Pencils: Contemporary Poetry by New Zealand Women*, ed. Lydia Wevers, Introduction (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. xxi. On the same page she notes: 'Research for this collection revealed a surge in publication by women in 1974-1975, which has since increased'.

11 Somewhat surprisingly, as late as 1992, the respected mainstream critic and academic Mark Williams, in an evaluation of the previous decade (see 'Main Currents in Recent New Zealand Literature', *Sport* 9 (1992), 144-57) expressed his uneasiness at the increasing differentiation in ways of responding to local literature. He concluded that he did not expect 'greatness is any more likely to issue from Wellington or from Victoria University's creative writing course than from the welter of Polynesian, Maori, Pakeha, feminist, postmodern, post-structuralist, post-whatever voices that we find in Auckland', p. 152. Against such an abundance of hard-to-assimilate identities, Williams aligns himself with Eliot's position whereby New Zealand literature is thought best approached as a single homogenous body: 'Poetry by Maori and women does not need protectionism; it is no frail flower to be nurtured behind closed walls', p. 155. His call for 'an anthology that sets out to see the poetry scene whole' (p. 155) was answered some five years later by Williams himself, along with fellow editors Gregory O'Brien and Jenny Bornholdt, in *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1997). Subsequent events have not well supported Williams's position.

12 *Twenty Contemporary New Zealand Poets: An Anthology*, eds Andrew Johnson and Robyn Marsack (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2009); *99 Ways into New Zealand Poetry*, eds Paula Green and Harry Ricketts (Auckland: Vintage Book/Random House, 2010). Interestingly, the latter's Poetic Identities chapter includes a section entitled 'Women's Poetry'.

13 Anne Kennedy, *100 Traditional Smiles* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1988), Section 1. Subsequent references to section numbers are given in parentheses.

100 *Traditional Smiles* (the blurb calls it a 'novella', whereas *Landfall* reviewer Anna Neill refers to 'short fragments [...] patched together',¹⁴ and 99 *Ways* co-editor Paula Green mentions 'prose poems') comprises a loosely structured 'travelogue' recounting an unnamed young woman's ('the woman') visit to New York City where she stays with expatriate friends ('the Hoboken couple') in a building of the same name, across the hall from the 26-year resident 'Italian couple'. The 133 numbered sections are of variable lengths and rather than form a sequential narrative they comprise a counterpointing of various of the traveller's relationships and encounters and perhaps imaginings, past and present. It takes repeated readings just to start to organise the material and the elusive relationships, although that order is never finally settled. What does become ever more obvious is that our initial expectations, of continuities, progressions, the building up of meaningful character relationships within a context of personal self-discovery, are turned on their collective heads: 'north is south'.¹⁵ The key motif is travel, and as well as focusing on the woman's visit to New York (the Metropolitan Museum is 'transplanted from Europe to Upper Manhattan'), comings and goings are literal as well as figurative: on arrival at the apartment she must travel back to the Bayonne Bus Terminal 'at the end of the line' in order to collect her 'lost property'; her stay is with one immigrant couple across the hall from another immigrant couple; back in Auckland she had shared a flat with Irene, daughter of Eileen from Nottingham, who married a Kiwi soldier after the war and emigrated to New Zealand... and so it goes. It is a story of misfits, persons in transit, on edge, distracted, prone to say things like 'Now I must disappear' (variations occur among different characters in sections: 31, 41, 71, 77, 99, 101, 117, 118). It is also funny and appreciative: 'New Jersey' is the place adjacent to New York City as well as the new jersey being knitted (by 'the woman?') 'for someone not yet thought of' – which in order to complete (she realises the pattern's prescribed 18 balls of 'Flushed Apricot Caressa with 10 per cent mohair' falls short at '10 rows to go' and so it will require '18-and-a-bit' balls) she 'has tried every wool shop in Auckland' (86). PATH is the New York Trans Hudson transport system used by a number of characters, but it also finds its way (in

14 Neill seems to be at a loss with what she encounters. Unconvinced, she asks 'whether the lack of cohesion and the collapse into wordplay lead this novel to say less than it might do' and the review closes with her misgivings about 'confusion' in the portrayal of a 'problematic of "home"' (*Landfall* 172 (1989), 516-18).

15 In her ongoing career, even as her work has become less overtly adventurous, Kennedy remains ensconced within an upturned world. In her most recent novel *The Last Days of the National Costume* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013), the same phrase recurs: 'South was up, north was down', p. 280. Perhaps this has become an interesting national predicament: in his discussion of a Keri Hulme poem set in Greymouth, Robert Sullivan notes that 'By the end of the poem, the narrator has decided to relocate to this coast from the north "and go south to the top of the world"'.

upper case) into other sentences, such as those of the 'young reporter' Leslie in his private game of 'Russian roulette' stepping 'without looking, into the PATH of cars' (13) in what becomes later his 'psychoPATHic obsession' – even after he switches to 'one-way streets' where, crazily and death-defyingly, 'On crossing he looks the other way' (117);¹⁶ and, if a couple or more of the characters appear to contemplate personal dissolution (suicide?), sharing the 'disappear into thin air' phrase, other characters share the capitalised phrases 'GOOD MORNING' and 'GOOD LUCK' (36, 51, 98; either in caps or in reverse in mirrored caps). One character will literally transpose into the utterance or behaviour of another. At stake is the very prospect of orderliness: 'The daily life goes along like this from day to day, generally very general, sometimes specific' (52).

For all this Steinian over-turning,¹⁷ the story is sympathetic to and replete with what was traditionally termed womanly virtue (responsiveness, openness, tolerance, emotional warmth and spontaneity, a feeling of protection towards the vulnerable). Yet wrapped deep within this fabric of feeling and a deceptive inconsequentiality of detail is a set of entrenched emotional disturbances. The end of the book spins towards disintegration: the protagonist is headed to the doctor to seek a 'prescription for everything' (125); the Hoboken couple is announced to be 'married, though not to each other' (116); Leslie has evidently taken his own life; Eileen has returned home

16 PATH appears also in *Last Days* when the narrator accompanies her student husband to New York and they reside in the same area: in this story Hoboken provides the opportunity for the narrator to learn her garment repairing skills at 'Rip Burn Snag' – right through 'retniW, nmutuA, remmuS, gnirpS', p. 106. Two points to note: familiar material recurs in quite different forms of narrative and meaning; and it provides a microcosmic world of the changes besetting Auckland and New Zealand in the 1990s. Among the changes that the novel identifies as spelling 'complete disaster': 'Tomorrow's Schools was all part of the gigantic divesting of responsibility which had begun with selling off the state assets', p. 122.

17 The narrative strategy in this book is vintage Stein and, while publications subsequent to *Musica Ficta* are progressively more conventional in treatment, Stein remains a presiding spirit. *Musica Ficta* is Kennedy's most audacious and I consider her most exhilarating novel to date with again the preoccupation: '(Gertrude Stein wrote, *What is the answer? In that case, what is the question?*)(And a soul in a church makes the sound of a soul in a church, said John Cage)' (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1993), p. 63. In *A Boy & His Uncle* the anti-modernist mother and artistic-wannabe Honour, nemesis to the Kennedy-like daughter Heeney, honours Stein in rejecting her: 'Gertrude Stein was a hoax' (Sydney: Picador, 1998), p. 195. Even in *Sing-Song*, Kennedy's first auto-biographical book of poems, the naming of the daughter has its poetic forbears: 'Hadn't they even called her, sort of / after a poet? / (No, only for the sound of the name. / They would never have called her Gertrude / or Djuna or H.D.), 'Prayer Replacing Sleep', (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003), p. 51. Stein pops up again in *Last Days*, which can be read simultaneously as a satire on the intellectual 1990s in New Zealand, with its abundant references to 'in' words and names, including Derrida, Kristeva, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, 'po-mo', 'They must have been crazy back in 1985', p. 90. The battle waged is between 'thinking' and 'doing': doing wins (kind of). The book in its entirety might serve as a useful footnote to this special issue. As too might *Musica Ficta*: 'the society of sameness where difference flourishes', p. 128.

with her husband to Nottingham where she continues to feel displaced, as does her daughter Irene who remains in New Zealand surrounded by her dyes and materials; the 'unworldly couple' is preoccupied with thoughts of their wayward son. Even the jersey knitting is abandoned by the woman, 'not bothering to finish the last ten rows' (131). Sentences themselves threaten collapse (see 125, 127, 130):

If the words being discussed had been uttered in the original New Zealand house with its grace [a pun on the name of her pet cat] before meals, something crystalline, a brittle mortar holding all matter together, would have shattered. (132)

Just as the Italian couple and the expatriate Hoboken couple are together described as 'closer to the American way than Americans', the singularity of this text of Kennedy's renders it less local than the local 'norm'.¹⁸

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International Women's Year was celebrated in 1975. The same year witnessed the historic Whina Cooper led Māori Land March from Te Hāpua in the far north to Parliament buildings in Wellington and, under the Treaty of Waitangi Act, the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal. Ngā Tama Toa, a radical group starting out of the University of Auckland, had helped organise the Land March and represented an engaged activist and articulate Māori response, especially in matters of land confiscation and access to Māori language. The next decade saw the Māori Language Act passed (1987), giving Te Reo official language status (making three in 2006 when Sign Language was also recognised), and the Māori Language Commission was established. In his essay Sullivan, participating editor in two recent ground-breaking anthologies of Polynesian poetry as well as the Māori writing anthology *Puna Wai Kōrero* that trace indigenous ethnic adaptation and self-realisation,¹⁹ takes Māori poets

18 I am also aware that a ready case exists for Kennedy's inclusion in the tradition of New Zealand women's writing, in particular that associated with emotional daring and poetic vision, spanning earlier writers such as Bethell, Hyde, Dallas and Frame, as it does newer writers such as Michele Leggott, Judi Stout, Anna Jackson, Stephanie Christie and others: women especially conducting an examination into how singular personal identity is to be represented in terms of voices. When Eileen in *100 Traditional Smiles* constructs her post-war wedding gown out of the various scraps she can find, the narrator remembers 'the things women do in secret under their outer clothing' (57).

19 *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English*, ed. by Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003); *Mauri Ola: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English*, ed. by Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan (Auckland: Auckland University Press,

Tuwhare (who made his first and only appearance in Brasch's *Landfall*, with 'Lament', in 1958) and the newer Hulme as bellwethers in these changing times.²⁰ In the field of drama also, as evidenced in Edmond's essay, including the ubiquitous Tuwhare there develops during this time a distinguishable Māori dramatic voice and themes, albeit more likely associated with a kind of proud coming home in contrast to the predominant Pākehā society theme of escape to elsewhere.²¹ In 1986 the Homosexual Law Reform Act decriminalising consensual sex between men was passed, another case where New Zealand was an early mover.²² Also in economics and politics, under Robert Muldoon in the early 1980s the government moved resolutely, if unevenly, to initiate large scale industrial projects under the Think Big policy.²³ Nowadays Think Big is generally considered to have been either an economic failure or else to have had no lasting benefit – in any case it may to some degree have galvanised opposition to Muldoon and National and resulted in 1984 to a landslide victory for a Labour government led by the relative newcomer David Lange. In the years of Thatcher and

2010); *Puna Wai Kōrero: An Anthology of Māori Poetry in English*, ed. by Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2014). The keynote is expressed in the Introduction to *Whetu Moana*: 'Being Polynesians who love poetry, we wanted to look at the poetry that has developed in our region over the last two decades, and through that poetry to look at what has happened and is happening to ourselves and our cultures', p. 2.

20 In an interesting reflection from the vantage point of 2015, Sullivan indicates a firming of the view that minorities should – at least hypothetically – be the ones voicing the experience of minorities, whatever form these minorities might take (something akin to Horrocks' multiple paradigms idea, along with the attendant predicament that the very notion of such minoritisation stretches potentially to infinity): 'So if the editors aren't Māori they won't be focusing on Māori poetry, I'm afraid. And if they're not Pasifika or they're not Asian New Zealanders, or they're not women, they'll tend to see what they want to see. And I think that's what's happened in the past with our big anthologies' (Jack Ross, 'An Interview with Robert Sullivan', *Poetry NZ Yearbook 2*: 50, (November 2015), 23-38, (p. 33)). That Sullivan takes the notion 'habitus' from the French social philosopher Bourdieu is another tricky indication of thought's thirst for inspiration – and its proliferation – from disparate cultural sources, from wherever.

21 Curiously, and significantly, in contrast to writing by non-Māori during the period which is marked by fragmentation, disharmony, disintegration, Edmond shows the advent of a Māori dramatic writing that, though couched within a sense of grievance, is distinguished also by a feeling of shared identity, collectivity, affiliation.

22 I recall the day in 1977 when then Prime Minister Muldoon 'outed' Labour's Colin Moyle in what came to be known as the 'Moyle Affair'. Muldoon accused Moyle in Parliament of having been questioned by the police on suspicion of homosexual activities, which were then illegal in New Zealand. In a 1990 interview, Moyle said that the scandal had made him a 'sadder and wiser person' <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Muldoon#Moyle_Affair> [accessed 7 June 2016]. A further sad irony is that it was considerably later when in 1999 the first substantial anthology of gay writing *Eat These Sweet Words: The New Zealand Anthology of Lesbian and Gay Poetry* appeared.

23 The term was first coined in 1977 and referred to major industrial initiatives like steel and LPG production which the government believed would bring major national economic and employment benefits <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_Big> [accessed 6 June 2016]

before Tony Blair's New Labour, financial management under new Finance Minister Roger Douglas set about deregulating financial markets, selling state assets, dismantling subsidies and tariffs, reconstructing education, social welfare and health policy and almost everything else, in a radical transformation that reached deeply into all aspects of social life. Under Lange and Douglas Think Big flipped into User Pays. The end-user provided the new locus and was expected to be properly informed and self-resourced, activist and obligated to carry personal responsibility for how services were to be delivered to him or her. Social process became pressingly individualised in its focus and expectations: individuals demanded that their 'society' provide suitably targeted services, and in return society demanded that its individuals be responsible for themselves: 'north is south'. This is the neo-liberal legacy to which we are still in thrall. Everything was professionalised, not least the All Blacks in 1995.

As Ross demonstrates in his review of the nascent speculative fiction, the radical transformation of social life is sharply reflected in the response of local fiction – dystopian rather than utopian, revelling in dysfunction rather than seeking reconciliation, day-dreaming rather than calculating. Taking M.K. Joseph's *The Time of Achamoth* (1977) as an archetype in this fictional response, Ross looks back on the political mythos in fictional responses dating from C.K. Stead's anti-Muldoonism in his dystopian-realist *Smith's Dream* (1971) and forward to the fiction of social fantasy that attracts younger (and some older) fiction writers like Harrison, Johnson and Mann. As Ross indicates of this new fictional genre, *away* was apparently the better place to be. We are back in Anne Kennedy space.²⁴

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Looking back at the previous quarter century, our 21st century selves can in some ways be seen as emptied out: disturbingly the human element in our affairs has come to verge on the intrusive, something needing to be further regulated. As indicated by Curtis in her essay exploring reproduction and literary design, advances in technical capability anticipate our current embrace of and requirement for technology to provide an instant faultless finish, only to be immediately superseded: early literary

²⁴ Art, husband of GoGo in *Last Days*, has been years working on his PhD dissertation 'Settler Literary Ephemera', p. 106. A stretch at Columbia University in New York is considered a part of the research package. Kennedy's irony concerning the commodification of history (as all else) is palpable: 'Life is strange, and unfair', p. 271. I'm not sure to what extent Art's dissertation title is a pun that ribs at studies such as Alex Calder's *The Settler's Plot: How Stories Take Place in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2011).

adopters of the new reproductive technologies seem to have sensed this in advance and, as Curtis in her chosen examples demonstrates, it is the element of the unintended (or interference or indiscretion) that tilts the axis of technology back towards the human. It is as if magnification and miniaturisation occur in the same moment or can be thrown momentarily into each other's territories. In a telling way it is the return from New York to New Zealand that marks the transformational re-launch of the career of Billy Apple the creative artist. And, as Curtis intimates, the very reaction against received systems of power can readily assume the same authoritative air they oppose, and this is true of the rebellious magazines of the early 1980s: '*And* is set apart from other self-published photocopier publications by its sense of authority. It achieves this through "existing as an institution"'.

Just as 'habitus' becomes, for Sullivan, a continental concept that can be reasonably applied across histories and cultures to the Pacific's indigenous peoples, literature has become enmeshed in a dizzying range of alternatives both in terms of production of content and its dissemination. 'The historical sense' has lost the backing of tradition as a source of justification and wellbeing: its role as arbiter is threatened in face of a system of recalculable exchanges, so that each historical or aesthetic claim comes tagged with a batch number, place of production, and 'use by' date. It used to be that literature was regarded as a humanising ideal, something uniting individuals and benefiting society as a whole. But of revelation we have had enough and are inclined almost by reflex to recoil from, in an age when the very possibility feels like a further imposition. The compass needle upends: *north is south*.

tail piece

Now for me everything revolves round Karen my life's companion. This book reverts to her and the children I love.

But of course many past and current things continue to matter. In the writing, the first inspiration comes from my friend David Charteris when we are at the Diocesan Seminary together in Riccarton – I remember his 'Fat boy Thin boy' protagonist sitting lonely and biting into his third ice-cream of the day. Then university, and the stimulus of smart and gracious individuals, teachers Roger Horrocks and Wystan Curnow, and classmates especially Leigh Davis and Alex Calder who started *And*, and Alan Loney and various and allsorts following on from those early days.

I thought I'd grown serious (read: 'up') and had left behind the foolhardiness (where *discourse#5* starts) of the writing mind; but since then I've come across and come more to appreciate the kind of attitude expressed by that wonderful adventurer of the word and of the last century and a bit John Ashbery:

I actually went through a period after *The Tennis Court Oath* [his groundbreaking 1962 volume] wondering whether I was really going to go on writing poetry, since nobody seemed interested in it. And then I must have said to myself, 'Well, this is what I enjoy. I might as well go on doing it, since I'm not going to get the same pleasure anywhere else'.

