A Changing Topography: Culture and Nature in New Zealand Landscape Photography

Emily Goldthorpe

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Abstract

In describing the New Zealand landscape we might point to our Southern Alps, our primordial rainforests, and our pristine glaciers. What often go unmentioned are our growing suburbia, extensively farmed countryside and hydro-electricity operations. This thesis examines how the work of photographers in New Zealand from 1865 to the present day reflects and responds to issues surrounding landscape, centring in particular on images of altered or manipulated spaces that reveal something about the relationship between our culture and our environment. Using a select group of photographers this thesis illustrates how the landscape has been photographed, and by doing so explores changing attitudes to landscape and photography, and how these attitudes have influenced the production of particular landscape photographs. In this narrative it is not only how the space is represented that changes, but our perception of the landscape as it is shaped by these photographs.

The 1975 exhibition New Topographics showcased the emergence of a new type of landscape photography, one that captured the contemporary landscape of the United States. The defining characteristic of this landscape was the level of interaction between the natural and the built environment, showing a space that was becoming increasingly developed and homogenous. New Zealand’s history of landscape photography displays an extensive level of interaction between people and the land. This thesis charts New Zealand’s landscape photography’s interaction with the altered landscape from its early history, in the 1860s, up until present day. The work of Joseph Perry and the Burton Brothers demonstrates that culture and nature have intersected in photography since early contact with the landscape.
Later, conservation of this landscape became a concern, with photographers such as John Johns and Lloyd Godman highlighting the importance of our landscape, not only for its natural resources, but for its spiritual value. Contemporary photographers Wayne Barrar and Haruhiko Sameshima take their cue from the *New Topographics* photographers, approaching the landscape as a medium through which to explore the ever-changing relationship between nature and culture. Informed by such writings as W. J. T. Mitchell’s “Imperial Landscape” (1994), this thesis aims to approach landscape in art as a medium through which much can be read about our evolving cultural values. While people may be absent from these photographs, they are by no means empty of the human.
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Introduction

The geographer D. W. Meinig suggests that any landscape “is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads.”¹ When confronted with a single view of a landscape, a group of people may agree on the basic elements, but no individual will see the exact same landscape as another. These different subjective perceptions of a landscape are particularly pronounced in the reception of an altered landscape. The focus of this thesis is the altered landscape, the controversial space where nature and our industrial culture intersect, and its representation through photographic means. Photographers have represented the signs of industry in the natural environment in diverse ways. Beyond being visually stunning, these photographs encompass wider issues of humankind’s attitudes toward the land and the uses to which we have put our environment. Recognizing the content of photographs of altered landscapes is not difficult, but interpreting and reading them is an entirely different matter. Focusing on scenes of mining, damming and other landscapes that have been altered by human intervention, this thesis examines how particular landscapes found in the South Island of New Zealand have been presented by means of photography. While nature may seem to dominate these photographs, they are by no means empty of the human. Rather, these images document the places where nature and humankind interact to create landscapes that have been reshaped in some way. People may not be present in these photographs, but their presence is made clear in what they have introduced, left behind, or in other ways manipulated the landscape to become something other to what it originally was. From an art-historical perspective, this thesis considers photographs of altered landscapes in terms of the complex beauty that they present while also considering them within the context of culture and how they might alter our understanding of landscape photography and of the

land in which we live. Overall, this thesis aims to examine the diversity of voices within the field of landscape photography, both historical and contemporary, and the different visions of landscape within New Zealand photography.

The New Zealand landscape is presented as synonymous with pure, natural beauty, an untouched wilderness, the representation of which is one of our principal commodities. This was a key coding of the landscape from the beginning of European settlement, when the country was presented as an Eden awaiting settlement and domestication. The most recent renewal of this stereotype in the global imagination is manifested in the film production of the Lord of the Rings trilogy (fig.1), a saga that showcased some of the most magnificent landscapes in New Zealand and which has led to a growing industry of tours and activities all aimed at recreating this landscape for eager tourists. The South Island has become the destination for many tourists after filming for the trilogy repackaged the island’s scenic beauty for a contemporary audience. This is landscape as a commodity for consumption by eager viewers.

Yet what is not present in these films or the resulting tours is the landscape that has been reshaped to perform in some way for humankind. This is perhaps, as W. J. T. Mitchell suggests, because the viewing of landscape “is spoiled by economic considerations.”¹ Labour and industry hardly ever make a landscape. The island has a long history of people travelling through it in search of ‘pure’ scenic views and iconic sights, dating from the country’s early pioneer history. Likewise, it has a history of people in the landscape, engaged in mining, damming and farming, that has left an indelible mark on the environment. As the transformation of the New Zealand landscape becomes increasingly rapid, the question of how to represent this changing landscape arises. This thesis will attempt to illustrate how

these altered landscapes have been photographed through the study of a selection of photographers, and by doing so explore attitudes to landscape and photography, and how these attitudes have influenced the production of particular landscape photographs.

Landscape is a popular theme in photography, commonly expressed through the presentation of scenes of beauty in the natural world. Exploration photographers used scenes of wild beauty to provide images that suited a number of purposes – including both commercial gain and political ends – to entice settlers to a new frontier, to show progress, to promote tourism, and to encourage the creation of national parks. More recently, such images have served environmental purposes, as natural beauty in its apparently unaltered state has become an important tool for the cause of environmental preservation. In an environment that is becoming increasingly altered, such scenes have become not less relevant (in fact they have become even more appreciated by those who have become estranged from this landscape) but less a part of our daily lives or evolving cultural identity. Altered landscape photography suggests a revision of beauty; it evokes a more complex, complicated beauty that challenges viewers to “rediscover the relationship between beauty and content.”

These images are not made solely for the sake of art; rather, they represent each photographer’s view of issues that affect our culture, altering our understanding of the landscape that we inhabit.

Photography and Landscape in New Zealand Literature

General texts that focus on New Zealand photography do not deal specifically with altered landscape photography, and tend to situate photographers who work in this style within the larger tradition of landscape photography without delving into issues surrounding altered landscape photography and its implications to our culture. References for photography

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in New Zealand are sparse, and for those that deal solely with landscape photography in New Zealand, non-existent. Three texts which deal with the country’s photography do so primarily through the construction of a narrative by means of identifying and discussing photographers that stand out in some way or typify photography at a particular moment in New Zealand’s history, thereby creating a sort of representative chronology of the medium in the country.

Hardwicke Knight’s *Photography in New Zealand* (1971) describes the photographic processes used by early photographers in the country and then provides a sort of chronology of the medium through the work of notable photographers. Knight describes this text as a first attempt at recording the progress of photography in New Zealand, and, as a record, is focused primarily on the recording of facts, interpreted and placed “in their contemporary social setting.” For the main part this holds true, with Knight offering few views on the nature of photography in New Zealand or on the work of specific photographers. Written before the term ‘altered landscape photography’ was in popular use in the field of art history, Knight’s text does not consider the work of photographers in terms of how they might have captured the changing landscape around them. His research, however, is particularly valuable for the contextual understanding and biographical detail that it provides.

William Main and John B. Turner, pioneers in writing a national history of photography, produced *New Zealand Photography: From the 1840s to the Present* (1993), which provides a survey of photography in the country from the mid-nineteenth century to the start of the 1990s. Main and Turner construct a history of photography by cataloguing noted photographers chronologically, choosing exemplary samples of historical photography, and the work of contemporary photographers from when they first made their mark. The text encompasses practising professionals, accomplished amateurs and those who had simply

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picked up a camera to record what was going on around them. Unfortunately, the biographical structure of this anthology means that there is little or no thematic comparisons made between the work of photographers. Instead, this text focuses on the photographers, not photography, lacking comparative study. This approach is reflected in Paul Thompson’s *New Zealand: A Century of Images* (1998).

A more recent publication to shed light on the history of photography in New Zealand is *Into the Light: A History of New Zealand Photography* (2006). *Into the Light* is the product of poet David Eggleton, and presents a personal response to New Zealand photography. The book offers a sort of “national photo-album” of New Zealand, tracking the history of photography from early daguerreotypes to the contemporary, and retracing many of the steps made by both Main and Turner and Knight in their research. Made up of eight essays written by Eggleton that interconnect, *Into the Light* is intended as a survey of key themes, images and photographers, not as an encyclopaedic text of photography in New Zealand. It is therefore not all inclusive or all purpose, but instead aims to tell a narrative. The progression of the essays shows how changing ideas about photography, combined with the development of technological advances has shaped the photography of successive generations. Not one of these texts focuses explicitly on landscape photography, instead dealing with photographers of all genres and experience.

Most recently published is *Early New Zealand Photography: Images and Essays* (2011), a collection of essays written by a wide range of academics encompassing an eclectic variety of subjects thematically linked by their focus on an aspect or area of early photography in New Zealand. These essays “seek to trace out a distinctive history of New Zealand photography.”

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Zealand photography and simultaneously to address questions of ‘reading the visual’.”

Notable in its inclusion is an essay written by Wayne Barrar, in which he describes the work of Daniel Louis Mundy and the appeal of Victorian landscape photography for him as a working photographer. *Early New Zealand Photography* diverges from the texts discussed above, as it is highly focused on “reading the visual,” treating photography not just as documents to the past but as objects that shape our understanding of historical events and culture.

**Landscape and Photography**

As this would suggest, New Zealand sources on landscape photography are scarce. Arguably, scholarship in related European settler cultures is more developed and can provide some possible models for conceptualizing this thesis topic. Estelle Jussim and Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock’s *Landscape as Photograph* (1985) focuses on the ideologies “which implicitly or explicitly shape the aesthetic, moral, and political outcomes of the practice of landscape photography.” Jussim and Lindquist-Cock do not attempt to determine what might be interpreted as ‘landscape.’ Rather they reiterate that ‘landscape,’ like ‘nature,’ is a multidimensional term, with the common usage – “to convey the notion of the natural world dominated by nonhuman phenomena though by no means empty of the human” – convenient to restrict their research. The authors explore the meanings that we give landscapes and how these are transmitted into photography. Their explorations of landscape photography are therefore divided into different ‘categories’ of landscape, or different ways in which landscape might be viewed and represented. Like Alan Trachtenberg’s *Reading American*

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7 Wanhalla and Wolf, 11.
9 Jussim and Lindquist-Cock, xiv.
Photographs (1989), in which the author examines how a country has been interpreted through photography, Jussim and Lindquist-Cock emphasise that a landscape can be interpreted in many different ways.

All the meanings that we invest in ideas of landscape and nature are relevant to any study of landscape photography in New Zealand as they inform and are implicitly either preserved or questioned by the way a photographer chooses to represent a certain landscape. While the Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘landscape’ as “a view or prospect of natural inland scenery, such as can be taken in at a glance from one point of view,” the term is in fact much more complex.10 As D. W. Meinig suggests, “Landscape is an attractive, important, and ambiguous term.”11 Meinig, like Jussim and Lindquist-Cock, suggests that landscape is a multi-dimensional term used in many different disciplines to represent very different concepts. The central problem, Meinig suggests, is that landscape is both space and concept, composed “not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads.”12 Meinig lists and describes a variety of ways in which people might view an ‘ordinary’ landscape, including many that will be relevant to the interpretation of the photographs in this thesis. Jussim and Lindquist-Cock organize their essays on landscape photography in a similar fashion to Meinig’s terms using their own rubrics, giving them such headings as “Landscape as Artistic Genre,” “Landscape as Pure Form,” “Landscape as Popular Culture” and “Landscape as Concept.”

W. J. T. Mitchell takes this assessment of landscape and representation further by suggesting that the genre of landscape painting is best understood “as a representation of

11 Meinig, introduction to The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, 1.
something that is already a representation in its own right.”¹³ The subject matter of a landscape painting, the particular objects and spaces represented, are already representative of something else. Thus notions such as the sublime or picturesque are distinctions based on the kind of objects and visual spaces depicted and their encoded cultural meanings and values. Meaning is given through the eye of the beholder. This would suggest that landscape is not so much a genre but, as Mitchell states at the opening of his essay “Imperial Landscape,” a medium of cultural expression, used as means to social, economic, political and artistic ends.¹⁴ Mitchell explicitly references the New Zealand landscape in this essay as an example of landscape as a marketable commodity. Also recognizing the power of landscape as a medium, Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins put together an anthology entitled Landscape Theory (2008) that aims at articulating and assessing the state of landscape theory, an area that has become so all-encompassing in contemporary scholarship.¹⁵ The publication is the result of a series of seminars organized by Elkins on issues surrounding art and theory. The language of this text traverses disciplines by introducing the views of other fields to create new perspectives, suggesting that there is a need for a new language for landscape theory, one that can sustain all the meanings that have been invested in contemporary landscape.

The Altered Landscape

The altered landscape as photograph is the subject of an increasing number of texts, with the most concentrated studies occurring in the United States. In 1975, at George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film in Rochester, New York, the exhibition New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape was mounted. The

¹³ Mitchell, 14.
¹⁴ Mitchell, 5.
term “topographics” was a deliberate reference to the survey photography of such nineteenth
century practitioners as Timothy O’Sullivan and William Henry Jackson, documenters of the
decades that opened up the West to European settlement. The title of the
theme therefore suggested that the work of the photographers centred on the mapping of
the surface features of a landscape, either natural or imposed. The exhibition featured the
work of ten photographers that captured contemporary America: telephone wires, parking
lots, motels and motorways. Although William Jenkins, the organizer of New Topographics,
downplayed the socio-political implications behind the photographs in favour of the
contemporary artistic trend for conceptual formalism, the result of the exhibition was to link
these artists “with a significant shift in attitude toward the landscape as photographic subject
and cultural preoccupation.”

Britt Salvesen, in her essay “New Topographies” (in New Topographics, 2009), agrees that such photographers survey the “here and now,” connecting
art and life in a way that can be distinctly uncomfortable. Recording construction and
disruption, the photographer’s skill in this style is in the ease in which he or she makes
documents in which “actual, physical subject matter and conceptual or referential subject
matter” coincide.

Peter E. Pool suggests that altered landscape photography represents a
revision of beauty, landscape and pictorial representation in an age where our environment is
rapidly changing. Pool’s The Altered Landscape (1999), a publication that features
photographs from The Altered Landscape Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno,
defines and describes a number of individual photographers who have captured in their own
style America’s “evolving cultural identity” through their photographs of a changing

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the exhibition New Topographics, co-organized by the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, and George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film, 2009.
17 Salvesen, 11.
American landscape. What is made clear in both texts is that there is not a movement of photographers at work, drawing on the same threads or displaying any similar creative development. Rather what is suggested is that the work of certain photographers presents a shift in attitudes toward landscape as photograph and a reassessing of the codes of representation within the medium of landscape.

To limit the scope of this thesis, only photographs taken within the South Island by photographers based within New Zealand will be examined. The South Island has long been the less inhabited of the two large islands, and is often seen as the more rugged, more natural, more free of human settlement of the two. This thesis will therefore not be looking at photographs that are perhaps the most representative of the work of a certain photographer, but rather those that have been taken within the South Island, and more specifically, those that suggest something about the interface between humankind and the environment. This thesis is not intended to be a catalogue of photographers who practise or have practised altered landscape photography in the country. Indeed, only two contemporary photographers whose work explicitly draws upon the threads of this genre will be discussed. Rather, this thesis examines the history of photographers who have engaged in photographing altered or worked landscapes, encompassing the work of practitioners from the mid-nineteenth century through to present day. The work of the photographers discussed in this thesis points to a persisting interest in the worked landscape, and an evolving relationship between the land and its people.

The first chapter of this thesis will discuss the nature of altered landscape photography, looking at its history and identifying key threads and concerns. Pushing beyond conventional beauty the altered landscape photograph directly explores humankind’s attitude to its environment. This chapter will also involve an exploration of the language surrounding landscape today. Writings on landscape and the meanings that we invest them with suggest
that the content of any landscape – and therefore any landscape photograph – is multi-dimensional and may be determined by the viewer. What is agreed is that landscapes are created by humans, the result of the physical land given meaning through values and beliefs specific to a culture or society. As much has been written on altered landscape photography in the United States the bulk of this chapter will be based on altered landscape photography as it is practised and understood in North America.

The second chapter of this thesis will look at some early photographs of altered or engineered landscapes in the South Island. Joseph Perry’s albums of Otago are thought to be the first photographs taken of the interior of the Otago region and therefore show the 1860s gold rush in all its frantic industry. The work of the Burton Brothers will also be relevant for this period in the island’s history, for their scenic views taken from such tourist destinations as Milford Sound and Lake Manapouri. These photographs will not be examined solely for their indexical appeal as historic documents but as complex images that perhaps convey very different views of landscape and the environment to those held today. The work of these early New Zealand photographers will also show that photographers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are not the first to find interest in the structures imposed on nature.

The third chapter will examine the role of the photographer as conservationist, discussing the work of John Johns and Lloyd Godman in terms of how their photographs have been employed for the cause of environmental preservation or to bear witness to the changes that are occurring in our environment. The photographers bring two very different aesthetic approaches to their work. While Johns’s work displays a crisp, modernist eye, Godman’s work on the Clutha and Kawarau rivers displays a more emotive style, drawing on the kinetic energy of the water to convey a sublime power. However, the work of both photographers is described as containing a reverence for nature and a concern for the
preservation of the New Zealand wilderness. Their work points to a growing environmental sensitivity, and an increasing concern for the state of our landscape.

The final part of this thesis will discuss photographers whose work fits into contemporary altered landscape photography. Wayne Barrar – who captures spaces simultaneously natural and man-made – will present the industrial as a new type of beauty, representing places where nature and technology intersect as works of art. Haruhiko Sameshima’s photographs of Lake Manapouri as part of his “eco-Tourism” project will contrast with the original photographs by the Burton Brothers, as he examines the history of image-making that surrounds the lake. The work of these two photographers points to a growing awareness of the complexity of issues surrounding the landscape, and an appreciation of the contemporary landscape as an interface between the natural and the artificial.
1. Landscape, Photography, and the *New Topographies*

To think of a landscape is often to imagine a prospect of natural scenery, a landscape that has little to do with the contemporary, largely developed environment. More than simply a scenic view, landscape is a social construction and a medium of representation, containing layers of meanings, not all of them immediately apparent, and all filtered by cultural orientation, social position and personal understanding. “Landscape” in photography covers a diverse range of uses and practices. Beyond contemporary practices of art photography and their history, landscape pictures are central to the practice of various industries, such as tourism, urban planning, Google Maps and architectural planning. Landscape photographs pervade everyday culture, while at the same time mass media has radically expanded modes of imaging landscapes so that landscape photography now sits within “an expanded field of landscape imaging.”¹ All of these methods of visually mapping a space code the landscape in a particular way, encouraging us to see only a certain vision.

A particular landscape may be the same physical environment for everyone, but it carries multiple meanings that vary from person to person depending on their cultural background, social function and personal views. It has been invested with symbolic meanings, so that every aspect of the landscape is representative of something else. In art these colour any representation of landscape to the point that landscape is not a genre but a medium, an artist’s tool to represent the heroic, the sublime or the sombre, depending on, as W. J. T. Mitchell suggests, “the kinds of objects and visual spaces that may be represented.”² Mitchell states that landscape “is a medium in the fullest sense of the word. It is a material

“means” . . . like language or paint, embedded in a tradition of cultural signification and communication, a body of symbolic forms capable of being invoked and reshaped to express meanings and values.”³ This chapter examines the concept of landscape, the genre of landscape photography, and the evolution of altered landscape photography, from its defining 1975 exhibition *New Topographics*.

Landscape as a European concept, a way of seeing the external world, is described by Kenneth Clark in *Landscape into Art* (1949) as having its origins in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a visual term that emerged out of Renaissance linear perspective and its construction of space and mercantile capitalism. Clark describes ‘landscape’ as “the definition of nature that organizes material features of the land into a composite whole set into defined spatial relations.”⁴ Clark proposes a romantic reading of landscape’s emergence, stating that landscape painting’s “rise and development since the middle ages is part of a cycle in which the human spirit attempted once more to create a harmony with its environment.”⁵ Like Ruskin, Clark suggests that the representation of landscape by painting marked humankind’s acquisition of a new sense, the appreciation of natural scenery and its representation through paint as the focal point of an image. Likewise, Francis Pound, in his *Frames on the Land: Early Landscape Painting in New Zealand* (1983), suggests that in New Zealand “landscape, the pictorial attitude to the land, stopping still just to look at it, to see it as a picture, is purely an imported convention.”⁶ This theory has been largely questioned by Mitchell, who asks us in his essay “Imperial Landscape” (1994), “Are we really to believe, as Clark puts it, that “the appreciation of natural beauty” begins only with the invention of

³ Mitchell, 14.
landscape painting?” Mitchell points out the narrow, Western-ness of this claim by citing the landscape schools of Greek and Roman painters and the complex traditions of Chinese landscape painting, which dates back to well before Renaissance Europe. In addition to this, the idea that no one has stopped to admire a landscape from a certain viewpoint before the fifteenth century seems quite ludicrous.

The advent of landscape photography, with its ability to represent views of both the natural and built environment in immense detail, opened up new worlds to nineteenth century viewers, allowing them to visualize their physical surroundings and the wider world with unprecedented accuracy. Photography provided a means of picturing place, both literally and figuratively, as it offered a way of encoding our cultural values onto a landscape. As W. J. T. Mitchell argued, if all aspects of a landscape are representative of something else, then landscape in photography is a “secondary representation,” already a medium in which cultural meanings are encoded, well before it is captured through the lens. Where a photographer stands, both physically and in terms of approach, affect the outcome of a photograph. The vantage point of the photographer from where they frame the subject determines the composition of the resulting image. Equally critical to the photograph is how the photographer feels about their subject and how they approach it, which determines how it is presented and how viewers might respond to it. What is shown and what is not shown – and in what light – is the choice of the photographer, and therefore is hardly a case of nature copying “herself,” as was originally believed of the medium in the Victorian era. Our experience of landscapes through photographs are “filtered through the eyes and emotions

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7 Mitchell, 8.
8 Mitchell, 14.
and camera lenses of countless photographers whose names few of us know.”\(^9\) Images of the natural world are deceptively transparent, with their meanings being neither obvious nor fixed. Such facts as the presence of rocks, trees, houses and their form, number and dimensions will be common elements in the beholders’ eyes, but they take on meaning through association, which will differ according to separate bodies of ideas. We use these organizing ideas to make sense of what we see. Recognition of this makes the reading of landscape photographs a complex matter of cultural, social, and personal understanding rather than the simulacrum of nature that they are sometimes held to be.

While viewers have become increasingly adept at recognizing interpretive styles or overt goals in photographs that might be used for advertising or propaganda, the subjective messages of landscape photographs are less readily recognized. The deceptively realistic nature of much landscape photography makes pinpointing its power to persuade or influence particularly difficult. The photographer’s personal response or attitude is often unclear or uncertain. Yet even an un-manipulated “straight” photograph of a landscape presents a very specific, narrow vision. It is this very elusiveness that makes photography such a powerful tool to convey a message. Photography has long been a valuable method for documenting and recording information about nature. From its invention photography was praised as “the living revelation of nature itself,” frozen for prolonged inspection in all its precise detail.\(^{10}\) More than “a mere souvenir of the scene,”\(^{11}\) the photograph’s scientific nature and technical apparatus gave it an authority as scientific truth, as having been there, while its expressive


potential “assured its prestige in the symbolic realm.”

Landscape photography’s myth of verisimilitude, coupled with its expressive ability gave it a position of authority unheard of in the art world prior to its invention. The attraction of the photograph has always been in its “uncannily convincing realism that almost magically transports viewers to remote landscapes they might otherwise never experience.” This gives photography a “surrogate realism,” through which viewers can experience far off sights. This was particularly important in the early years of photography, when travel was limited and expensive, but it remains crucial in the medium’s attraction to the armchair tourist.

Deborah Bright suggests that this melding of optical fact and aesthetic enjoyment “made photographs supremely useful for communicating values about human relations with and in the natural world.” The medium of photography suggested an illusion of factuality, while at the same time offering numerous techniques that allowed the photographer to make a certain statement about their subject. In this respect, Steven Hoelscher suggests that “the medium is uniquely positioned to naturalize cultural constructions.” Ideas as complex as development and progress can be presented by this medium as incontrovertible fact, making photography a powerful tool of persuasion.

**Altered Landscape**

The altered landscape is one that has been changed in some way by humankind. It is the space where nature and culture intersect in some way, be it in the form of industry, agriculture, housing, power schemes or development. Signs of industry in the natural environment – documented, made picturesque, transformed into a work of art – have been

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12 Bright, 60.
13 Southall, 33.
14 Bright, 60.
represented by photographers in many different ways. Beyond being visually stunning, such photographs draw in wider issues of humankind’s attitude toward the land, the uses to which we have put our environment, national identity, and conservation and environmentalism.

Recognizing the content of these photographs is not difficult, but interpreting and reading them is an entirely different matter. While some landscape photographs of this genre may still appear to be largely dominated by nature, they are by no means empty of the human. Rather, these images document the places where nature and man interact to create landscapes that have been reshaped in some way. People may not be present in these photographs, but their presence is made clear in what they have introduced, left behind, or in other ways manipulated the landscape to become something other to what it originally was.

This altered landscape is not what we might usually think of as landscape. As Peirce F. Lewis points out, “to “landscape” means to “prettify.” Therefore, as he suggests, “it rarely occurs . . . to think of landscape as including everything from city skylines to farmers’ silos, from golf courses to garbage dumps, from ski slopes to manure piles . . . in fact, whole countrysides, and whole cities, whether ugly or beautiful, it makes no difference.”

Landscape is in fact everything that we can see when we step outside or glance out of a window. Lewis states:

> The basic principle is this: that all human landscape has cultural meaning, no matter how ordinary that landscape may be. . . . Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form.

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17 Lewis, 12 (emphasis in original).
Such landscapes are not always ‘pretty,’ but they tell us much about a country and culture. At a time when ‘natural landscapes’ are becoming increasingly rare, our inattention to ordinary, altered landscapes suggests that we are deliberately ignoring the signature that we are making on the landscape, one that tells us much about the state of our world.

The term altered landscape is a deliberately neutral one. In her essay “Paradise Altered,” Patricia Nelson Limerick examines the meaning of the term altered and its application to a certain type of landscape photography: “Alter (from Latin for other): 1: to change; make different; modify. 2: to resew parts (of a garment) for a better fit. 3: (Dial.) to castrate.” This term effectively encompasses the polarity that characterizes our responses to the alteration of landscape. A landscape is altered; made profitable, improved, settled or, on the other hand, degraded, damaged or castrated. Nelson Limerick suggests that the ambiguity of the term in its ability to suggest at once negative and positive connotations allows the user a “momentary release from the pressure of choosing between the usual paired statements: (a) American colonization has made the West better, or (b) American colonization has made the West worse.” This suggests an intentional distancing from considering the rapid transformation of the land in terms of positive or negative, improvement or degradation.

Photography is a medium in which a minimum of inflection is entirely possible. The act of photographing itself requires a steady, calm manner and a methodical approach, ruling out the passion that can be associated with brushwork and, with the option of black and white, a means of avoiding any passion that colour can invoke. Yet these photographs evoke incredibly varied responses. Photographing that controversial space where nature and industry intersect, even in a manner that is ostensibly objective or clinical, points to one inescapable fact. Nature no longer exists entirely outside of civilization. This is a rejection of

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the pastoral ideal of humankind living in balance with nature. Destroying the myth that nature exists outside of our built environment as a refuge from the corruptions of an industrial society, altered landscape photography, above all, points to the disappearing border between natural and not.

A New Outlook

In 1975 the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape* was organized by William Jenkins and mounted at George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film in Rochester, New York. The show was one of the museum’s intermittent presentations aimed at summarizing trends in contemporary photography. This exhibition, which received relatively little press at the time, has more recently been recognized as significantly altering ideas about landscape photography. In 2009, the exhibition was recreated and accompanied by a book entitled *New Topographies*, a text of more than 300 pages incorporating glossy reproductions of the original photographers’ works. As Britt Salvesen explains in the accompanying essay to this text, the 1975 exhibition was originally intended as a historical survey of architectural photography, leading from the medium’s early days to recent projects. This soon shifted focus to centre solely on contemporary artists. All of the photographers selected by Jenkins – Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, and Henry Wessel, Jr. – had gathered to some extent attention from the art world in the years leading up to the exhibition. The name of the exhibition, *New Topographies*, alluding to the aesthetic disinterest and clinical objectivity of the land surveyor, suggested that the photographs included in the exhibition replaced the romantic style of landscape photographers such as Ansel Adams with a more impersonal style.

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The exhibition marked a major departure from what viewers had come to expect from landscape photography in the twentieth century. The ten photographers presented photographs of mines, dams, subdivisions, parking lots and highways. Rather than the idealized views of pristine wilderness presented by the likes of Ansel Adams, these photographers presented in a crisp, clear style the way in which America was reshaping its physical environment. All of the images were executed with a sharp focus, minimal grain and full-frame printing. Salvesen suggests that there was also a uniformity of subject matter, “for all the photographs portray the built environment, without apparent distortion or intervention, and without imposing an obvious judgement or agenda.”

Through this subject matter, the artists engaged with culturally significant contemporary issues: environmentalism, national identity, and objectivity. It was in this way that the work of the ten photographers created a coherent, unified composition. Although the photographers offered a diverse range of subjects and approaches, their work is “united mainly by their departure from traditional romantic ideas of beauty, idealized wilderness, and the kinds of landscape that are worthy of consideration.”

As for points of disparity, Salvesen suggests that these are mainly technical. The ten photographers used four camera formats, only one chose to use colour, the others black-and-white. Some made contact prints while others chose to do enlargements. What do vary are the approaches of the photographers. The photographers present a range of sites, some identified and some left nameless. Compositional strategies and viewpoints vary considerably, as does the degree of artistic decision-making. Salvesen suggests, however, that these variations “distinguish the individual practitioners without undermining the impression of an overall style.”

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21 Salvesen, 51.
22 Southall, 37.
23 Salvesen, 52.
The title of the exhibition, *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*, suggested something at once contemporary and historical. “New” pointed to a contemporary landscape, recent, referencing progress and development. “Topographics” on the other hand suggests a reference to older photography. Topography describes the “detailed and accurate description of a particular place, city, town, district, state, parish or tract of land.”

This documenting of space recalls the practices of American frontier photographers, who visually mapped the unexplored territories and recorded some of the first “man-altered” landscapes. The term “man-altered” also has a period feel, mainly due to its gender specificity and its use in foundational texts on geography. It contains a feel of cause and effect, of man and nature as interdependent, something particularly poignant in the face of human-caused global environmental crises.

**The Origins of New Topographies**

While the modern experience of nature changed drastically, dramatic natural landscapes remained popular during the twentieth century and were central in the development of environmentally concerned photography. Ansel Adams, along with Edward Weston and others, played an “indispensable role as interpreters of a distinctively American natural, national landscape.” Adams’s photography demonstrated nostalgia for the pre-industrial sublime, a pristine wilderness that had little to do with contemporary experience (fig.2). Adams attempted to restore through his photographs “a lost experience of nature that had become corrupted by the post-war burgeoning of family tourism, with its car campers, parking lots, trail fees, paved highways, picnic areas, visitor’s centers, ranger stations, and trash dumps.” Deborah Bright suggests that Adams’s nostalgia for a lost organic society

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25 Bright, 62.
26 Bright, 64.
living in harmony with nature “found a new resonance among environmental activists.” The Sierra Club, which grew steadily in membership from the 1950s, relied on lushly coloured picture books and postcards, “in which photographs of wild scenic beauty speak for themselves.” These photographers employed a dramatic, highly subjective style to produce “operatic landscapes” of sharp contrasts of light and shadow that were emotionally evocative. This promotion of beauty as the central focus of environmental photography was not updated until the early 1970s, when the work of certain photographers began to reflect more complex ideas about nature and development.

The work of the New Topographics photographers suggested a more detached stance, a reserve that contrasts with the photography of the preceding generation. Joe Deal commented on the impact of the work of such photographers as Ansel Adams and Minor White: “When I actually went to Yosemite, it was like seeing everything in quotation marks.” The high-contrast photographs of the American sublime seemed, by the late 1960s, to be overly emotional: “overdetermined, overblown, and embarrassingly self-conscious.” Robert Adams was perhaps the most explicitly aligned with environmentalism out of the photographers included in the exhibition. Yet his work never gives in to the lure of sentimentality that nature offers, and that is felt so strongly in the work of earlier American photographers. While some of the New Topographics photographers – namely Baltz and Robert Adams – recognized the influence of Ansel Adams and White by retaining a preoccupation with formal technique, the approach of this new generation of photographers was radically different.

__27 Bright, 64.  28 Bright, 65.  29 Bright, 62.  30 Joe Deal, quoted in Salvesen, 17.  31 Salvesen, 17.\_
The *New Topographics* photographers took up in their work, to varying extents, a documentary style reminiscent of the images of Walker Evans, a photographer known for his work for the Farm Security Administration in the mid-1930s and his exhibition and publication *American Photographs* (1938). Salvesen suggests that Evans “demonstrated how a photographer could engage with present-day life and define it for the future.” Evans employed an authorial point of view in his photography to produce “what felt like a comprehensive record of an era.” While the purpose of the Farm Security Administration photographs was ostensibly political, these images came across as a poetic vision of America and an insightful commentary on what many saw as evidence of societal decay. More than this, John Szarkowski, organizer of the 1971 retrospective exhibition and catalogue of Evans’s work, suggests that “Evans’s pictures have enlarged our sense of the usable visual tradition, and have affected the way that we now see not only other photographs, but billboards, junkyards, postcards, gas stations, colloquial architecture, Main Streets, and the walls of rooms.” Szarkowski makes a distinction between “document” and “documentary style,” stating that a documentary style presents “precise descriptions of very personal perceptions,” as opposed to a literal document. Jenkins proposed that the ten photographers in *New Topographics* presented the American landscape in a new way, with clinical objectivity rather than in a romantic or symbolist style, thus avoiding any political agenda or content-based readings. Their documentary style gives their photographs a neutral tone. The message of their work is unclear, dependant on the viewer’s response rather than offering up a packaged answer. The question of whether these photographs present crimes committed against nature or the beneficence of industrial civilization goes unanswered and is in fact not

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32 Salvesen, 15.
33 Salvesen, 15.
even the primary issue. While this claim of complete objectivity now comes across to some critics as a means for a late-modernist photographer to “cordon off these photographs from associations that were clear to most viewers at the time,” the supposed objectivity of *New Topographics* does not result in the images being merely documentary. Instead they are precise, crisp, and highly ambiguous.

John Rohrbach suggests that the work of the ten photographers garnered attention due to it mirroring “a broad new outlook that had been sweeping fine art circles since the rise of Pop art, an approach that replaced a belief in art’s uplifting role with a focus on exploring the look and feel of contemporary culture.” Photographers had come to realize that an idealized image of nature no longer reflected or engaged with the contemporary experience. This realization marked an end to the romantic notion of nature as a refuge, separate from humankind, and a blurring of the boundaries between the human and the natural. The *New Topographics* artists blurred the distinctions between art and life, employing a medium that is defined by its close relationship to reality. When the notion of limited global supply of natural resources was fast becoming instilled, these photographers were capturing American suburban development, tourist hotels, industrial complexes and warehouses, water towers and parking lots. Rohrbach suggests that the reason behind the exhibition’s enduring resonance lies in the “jolt of uneasy recognition that it delivered.” The exhibition presented a new reflection of the condition of America, one that counterpointed popularly held conceptions of contemporary American life and was recognized to be “insightfully, if disturbingly, more true.” The photographs exhibited spawned a new outlook, which continues today to have resonance in landscape photography practice in America and internationally, and is reflected in the work of photographers like Paul Graham (United Kingdom, born 1956), Andreas

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37 Rohrbach, xiii, xiv.
Gursky (Germany, born 1955), and Candida Hofer (Germany, born 1944). Britt Salvesen, who recreated the 1975 exhibition for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2009, stated of the reprised *New Topographics* that it “isn’t presented as a time capsule or in the spirit of nostalgia.” Rather it exemplifies a particular photographic vision, “one that links the history of photography with its contemporary articulations.” The stripped-down, deadpan aesthetic of *New Topographics* permeates the work of contemporary photographers, for whom crossover into the general art world is now a given.

Rohrbach suggests that this outlook at the time of the 1975 exhibition can be understood through examining context – the social, cultural and political currents of the 1960s and early 1970s – and how these factors influenced the artists who exhibited. The author lists a number of events that influenced the outcome of the exhibition: the civil rights movement, America’s involvement in Vietnam and the women’s rights movement, the Cold War, the gas crisis and a breakdown of trust in authority caused by such events as Watergate, alongside a number of shifts that were occurring in the art world at the time these photographers were working, in particular the emergence of a more self-conscious mode of art making and a growing acknowledgement of art’s power to assess and respond to contemporary issues. Salvesen points to a shift in attitude from the passionate engagement of the 1960s to a cool detachment in the 1970s, for which a documentary style photography seemed the perfect medium:

> Fundamentally positive attitudes about the human condition, laboriously sustained through the 1950s, broke down in the ‘60s and seemed beyond repair in the ‘70s. . . . Investment – of attention, if not emotion – in the everyday was a critical outlet for those who had lost faith in the grand plan but who still believed

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39 Rohrbach, xiv-xv.
that individuals bore responsibility for social equity and environmental sustainability.\textsuperscript{40}

This suggests an investment of interest in issues that manifested in everyday American life. The photographers used the vernacular of a rapidly expanding suburbia – housing projects, parking lots and gas stations – to comment on environmental and economic factors that were the wider issues. Beyond the events listed above, the United States’ post-World War II affluence and massive material growth also played a part. From the late 1960s, both America and Western Europe experienced an increase in multinational corporations, offshore labour, globalized markets and mass consumption. America saw a shift from industrial production to a more consumer-oriented post-industrial society.\textsuperscript{41}

The exhibition reflected a broad shift that had been occurring in artistic practices since the late 1960s. During this period, there was a shift in art away from the studio in an attempt to respond more effectively to the world. This more socially responsive art, termed loosely “systems art,” covered a wide range of artistic practices in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including “Minimalists, post-Minimalists, serial artists, earthworks artists, and conceptualists.”\textsuperscript{42} Greg Foster-Rice describes “systems theory,” which was first proposed by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the first half of the twentieth century, using these terms: “complex phenomena cannot be reduced to the discrete properties of their various parts, but must be understood according to the arrangements of and relations between the parts that create a whole.”\textsuperscript{43} It is this particular organization of parts that defines the system rather than the properties of the separate parts. In the case of the photographers of New Topographics, Foster-Rice suggests that their work “emerged from and responded to this cultural trend

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Salvesen21} Salvesen, 21.
\bibitem{FosterRice46} Foster-Rice, 46.
\bibitem{FosterRice46} Foster-Rice, 46.
\end{thebibliography}
towards systems theory.” By adopting systems theory, a scientific method, as a foundation for their work artists were able to “appropriate and comment upon the increasingly complex, system-like interpretation of contemporary life that dominated public discourse.” Human-altered landscape was one of the systems that artists began to explore during this period. The pervasive human-made cultural experience compelled artists to respond to their experience in this environment.

The *New Topographics* photographers pictured the built environment as a manifestation of social and political events. Issues of consumer culture, new suburban areas, human sprawl and the ecological threat that they pose are addressed in photographs that appear in ways bland and detached. In his 1975 review of Robert Adams’s exhibition *The New West: Landscapes Along the Colorado Front Range*, Lewis Baltz pointed out the tract houses photographed more closely resembled “the test structures built at ground zero,” rather than “homes or even shelters.” This exhibition, when viewed in the context of late capitalist America – its consumer culture, industrial production and massive waste – takes on the issues that would affect its future. Robert Adams’s photographs show the encroachment of tract homes on to the plains of the Colorado Rockies (fig.3), while Lewis Baltz’s images of newly constructed houses in the Nevada desert question the sustainability of living in arid environments. These images pointed to a growing detachment from the land, of unmindful land use and the massive waste that America was creating.

**Interdependence and Culpability**

Rohrbach suggests that, by drawing attention to the contemporary landscape, the photographers of the *New Topographics* exhibition broke substantially with the type of vision

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44 Foster-Rice, 46.
45 Foster-Rice, 47.
46 Lewis Baltz, “The New West” (1975), quoted in Foster-Rice, 48.
that had dominated landscape photography practice over the decades. This earlier vision typified in the work of such celebrated American photographers as Ansel Adams and Eliot Porter presented the landscape and humanity as separate entities. Adams was known to physically remove the evidence of human intervention in the land from his photographs. For example, in Winter Sunrise, Sierra Nevada, from Lone Pine, California (1944) Adams removed from the negative the initials LP (for Lone Pine) made in white rock on the mountainside (fig.4). Adams tampered with this image to present the American West as relatively untouched by humankind. Adams’s work in the mid-twentieth century demonstrated the power of photography to promote and preserve a wilderness ideal, in a style that predominated until the late 1960s. The photography of New Topographics, on the other hand, eschewed idealized treatments of nature and directly examined the way in which nature and humanity are interconnected, in ways that were not always aesthetically pleasing.

The New Topographics photographers captured America’s new landscape, one that was composed, not of wild rivers and ancient forests, but dams and concrete car parks. Southall suggests that these photographers came to realize that an idealized image of nature no longer reflected contemporary experience or needs, and in fact could often produce an effect of “sadness and loss, not pleasure.” Robert Adams, in response to the natural landscape, wrote that “scenic grandeur is today sometimes painful. The beautiful places to which we journey for inspiration surprise us by the melancholy they can induce . . . Our discouragement in the presence of beauty results, surely, from the way we have damaged the country.” Many of the photographers appear to highlight the fact that America was becoming increasingly homogenous and boring, evident in such images as Robert Adams’s

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47 Pool, xvii.
48 Rohrbach, xvii.
49 Southall, 37.
Colorado Springs, Colorado (1968, fig.5), in which uniform houses stretch out into the distance. Rohrbach suggests that many of the New Topographics photographers “recognized that broad economic shifts were changing the face of the land, and they were interested in drawing visual attention to the bland, repetitive appearance of the results.”\textsuperscript{51} The altered landscape was and is an issue of our time; the artists of New Topographics were confronted with it daily and felt compelled to respond to the manner in which humankind was constantly tampering with the land.

This suggests some sort of environmental or social concern that surpasses the cool detachment that Jenkins suggests in his essay. As Rohrbach points out, Jenkins, in his description of the project, downplayed the socio-political underpinnings of the photographs, instead “preferring to follow the current artistic vogue for conceptual formalism.”\textsuperscript{52} Jenkins suggested that these photographs represented a “minimum of inflection,” a form of documentary in which interpretation has been replaced by pure observation.\textsuperscript{53} There are several problems with this. Firstly, as Jenkins himself admitted, the photographers who showed in this exhibition did not identify themselves as members of a group or movement, nor did their works necessarily cohere in style or approach. The second issue is that by representing the world supposedly without inflection or personal engagement these photographers “were taking up a problem that had preoccupied artists working in other media since at least the early 1950s.”\textsuperscript{54}

When the maker’s point of view is removed from art, its meaning becomes uncertain and open-ended, requiring the viewer’s own perspective to create a conclusion. We are seeing in these works, not what the artist saw, but our own perceptions projected onto the

\textsuperscript{51} Rohrbach, xvii.
\textsuperscript{52} Rohrbach, xvii.
\textsuperscript{53} Jenkins, introduction to New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape (1975), quoted in Rohrbach, xvii.
\textsuperscript{54} Rohrbach, xviii.
photograph. This is illustrated by a conversation included in the prologue of Salvesen’s *New Topographics*. The conversation, recorded in 1975 at George Eastman House, captures the reception of two viewers to the original exhibition. When questioned on their response to the photographs, the viewers’ opinions were divided. One answered that he found them interesting, stating: “You know I think there’s a lot of people, I really do, there’s people, it’s a way of life, it’s how it is. It’s interesting,” while the other was discomforted by the images, saying; “I don’t like them – they’re dull and flat. There’s no people, no involvement, nothing.”  

Salvesen suggests that these works offer a “cool resistance,” lacking the hooks of personal expression, narrative or conventional beauty. This tension between interest and boredom, Salvesen suggests, is “the best evidence of stylelessness.” While the work was presented in a gallery setting, its close alignment with the everyday world caused it to occupy an uncertain position in the world of conventional aesthetics. These photographs created a link between art and life that was unmistakable. As Jenkins points out, these photographs were documents in which “actual, physical subject matter and conceptual or referential subject matter” collide. This was a strand of theoretically driven photography that reflected, unconsciously or otherwise, the growing unease about how the natural landscape was being eroded by industrial development and the spread of cities.

These photographs punctured the myth of a wild, untouched American landscape by presenting viewers with a landscape covered in parking lots, subdivisions and other symbols of human development. Replacing the untamed sublime of the American vistas, these photographers illustrated the way in which the American past was being literally paved over.

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56 Salvesen, 11.
57 Salvesen, 54.
58 Jenkins, introduction to *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape* (1975), quoted in Salvesen, 12.
Robert Adams presents the new American West, one that has been stripped of its wilderness mythology and instead given the full suburban treatment, with housing developments that are so bland they could be anywhere (fig.6). There is a loss of place in such photographs. Although these photographers were working within a distinctly American context, the rapid homogenization of the country is clear in their images. Salvesen suggests that by putting together this exhibition Jenkins “put his finger on something of genuine cultural significance.”

The photographers turned their lenses on the ugly and the ordinary, capturing vernacular architecture in an appreciation of its “potential to represent ways of life.”

### Conclusion

Foster-Rice states that what *New Topographics* offers “is an experience of the human-altered landscape as a system determined by issues of construction, habitation, and abandonment within the natural landscape.” While the natural landscape may not be visually in the forefront of these images, it comes across as an unspoken focus. In some cases, the natural landscape appears incongruous, as is the case with Henry Wessel Jr.’s *Hollywood* (1972, fig.7), in which tall palms rise from the concrete in a bizarre parody of a tropical paradise. In other photographs, the natural environment is not so easily ignored. Joe Deal’s photograph of an Albuquerque home, taken from a steep incline, shows a mass of rough boulders poised on the bank above the house. Below, the backyard contains a concrete pad shaped to mimic the natural forms of the boulders, which one can easily imagine shaking loose from their beds to crush the building (fig.8). These photographs of subdivisions, roadsides and parking lots contain trees, mountains, deserts and waterways, placing the natural world in conversation with the built environment. There is a matter-of-factness to these representations, an understated irony in the way in which nature is presented as a

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59 Salvesen, 12.
60 Salvesen, 22.
61 Foster-Rice, 51 (emphasis in original).
constitutive part of the built environment. These photographers all use familiar elements of
the landscape tradition – mountains, rivers, rocks – but place them in an entirely different
context to the landscape photographers of the previous generation. Primarily, these
photographers reveal the tensions within the landscape tradition which had not previously
been the overt focus of such work. The New Topographics photographers offered a deadpan
vision in contrast to the romantic traditions of Ansel Adams and Minor White, one that did
not shy away from the realities of the contemporary American landscape.

New Topographics represented a “point of departure” for photography. Salvesen
suggests that, looking back, this exhibition was a bridge between the worlds of fine-art
photography – a narrow field in 1975 – and the rapidly expanding field of post-conceptual
contemporary art. Viewers of the New Topographics were not guided by any obvious
message or attitude. The ten artists involved in the exhibition downplayed personal style in
favour of a more clinical, “non-judgemental” approach. By minimizing overtly personal
styles the photographers centred our attention on the landscapes that they had chosen to
present. These landscapes, in their seeming banality, changed viewers’ ideas about what
landscape photography was and what it could accomplish. Unlike the idealized landscapes of
pristine wilderness these photographs suggested a need for viewers to reconceptualise their
vision of contemporary America, and, in particular, the American West. New Topographics
revealed that the frontier landscape of America’s westward trails, originally characterized by
desert interspersed by dense settlement, is now a space of dispersed gas stations, roadside
constructions, diners, and the undistinguished non-places of urban and suburban
development. The ten photographers of New Topographics presented an unsettling vision of
the here and now, adjusting the genre of landscape photography to the circumstances. As

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62 Salvesen, 12.
63 Salvesen, 12.
Thomas Southall suggests these photographs “help us become aware of where we stand at this particular point in time, where we have been and what our options might be for the future.”

Likewise, the New Zealand photographers discussed in this thesis all offer a particular frame through which to view our constantly changing environment. Their work provides a sort of chronotope of the landscape of the South Island, from the early days of colonial expansion, to contemporary scenes of hydroelectric schemes and developing subdivisions. All of the images discussed speak of the way in which we affect the land. The chronology of photographers in some way maps the refinement of a developing environmental sensitivity and how this is represented through the lens. Like Carlton Watkins and Timothy O’Sullivan in America, Joseph Perry and the Burton Brothers firm were photographing the South Island landscape during an early period of its colonial history. Photographed largely in a straight style, these photographers represented the landscape as a limitless resource and potential tourist destination. John Johns photographed during a period of growing awareness of the finite nature of our natural resources and the importance of their careful management. His images for the New Zealand Forest Service present our forests as a threatened resource, not only of timber but leisure and scenic value. His photography displays the crisp modernist style of the f/64 group that drew the attention of John Szarkowski in 1978, then Director of the Department of Photography at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. Lloyd Godman’s work on the Clutha and Kawarau rivers, on the other hand, captures the sublime wilderness that can be linked back to such painters as Petrus van der Velden and Colin McCahon. This photographer’s work reflected the increased environmental activism of the 1980s, which was spurred by the New Zealand government’s development schemes of this period. These

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64 Southall, 49 (emphasis in original).
photographers document our cultural landscape. Their work illustrates that time, place and events demand a new approach in image making that responds to the moment.

Today there are more artists than ever before centring their work on issues surrounding the environment. The Nevada Museum of Art now features a Center for Art + Environment, an internationally recognized research centre that supports the practice, study and awareness of creative interactions between people and their natural, built, and virtual environments. The *New Topographics* exhibition, and the re-thinking of the landscape idea as demonstrated by such scholars as J. B. Jackson, combined with a growing international concern over the state of our environment and finite resources, has encouraged a new type of landscape photography. This photography represents a way of viewing landscape as encompassing more than the snow-capped mountains and lush forests of Ansel Adams’s generation. This new topography spans more than the American mid-West, and is pictured in New Zealand by such photographers as Wayne Barrar and Haruhiko Sameshima. While claims of objectivity have been abandoned, the work of these New Zealand photographers displays a similar sensitivity to the built environment. The work of Barrar and Sameshima respond to the changing vision of landscape illustrated by the *New Topographics* photographers. Their images represent the complex cultural landscape of everyday New Zealand. Like Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz, these photographers picture a landscape that is sometimes banal, and sometimes even beautiful. Above all, their work investigates how our physical environment reflects our cultural landscape.
2. Early New Zealand Landscape Photography: Joseph Perry and the Burton Brothers

Nineteenth century European settlers had mixed responses to this new landscape. Inspiring both awe and greed, the landscape of the South Island was undeniably magnificent and provided an abundance of picturesque views for colonial and visiting photographers. Yet the conservation of these landscapes was not a concern to most of these photographers. Scenic views, like native timber, minerals and land for cultivation, were a commodity widely available for exploitation during this period, with such photographs enjoying a burgeoning market as the century progressed. Conservation laws, when they were introduced, were predictably utilitarian. The creation of national parks from 1887 to preserve certain landscapes was not initially done for their own sakes but for the tourist opportunities that they represented. These preserved landscapes represented as much an economic investment as an environmental one.

This chapter examines the work of Joseph Perry and the Burton Brothers firm. Already in the nineteenth century there is no sign of what can really be deemed a “pristine” landscape. Perry’s *Illustrations of the Scenery of Otago* (1865), an early comprehensive photographic series on the Otago landscape, is full of evidence of the industrial exploitation of the landscape via extractive mining. Likewise, the picturesque views taken by the Burton Brothers firm in 1889 of Lake Manapouri are very much the product of intervention in the landscape through a radical editing process. The work of both represents clear challenges to the myth of untouched nature that was propagated at the time as a means of enticing both settlers and tourists to New Zealand.
Giselle Byrnes states, “Pākehā have always held rather ambivalent attitudes towards the land. On the one hand, they have taken great interest in preserving the natural environment, putting down roots and making their own claims to indigenous status. On the other hand, Pākehā society has expressed a strong urge to transform the land.”¹ In the eyes of most settlers, the landscape of the southern region of the South Island – then known entirely as Otago – was new, untouched, and ready to be surveyed, mapped, named, and exploited. While belief in the infinite utility of the land is being seriously questioned today, this was far from the case in nineteenth century New Zealand. The work of Perry and the Burton Brothers reflects this original ambivalence towards the land. On the one hand Perry’s photographs of transformation and alteration represent the progress European settlers were making on the landscape to bend it to their will. Perry’s views depict the New Zealand landscape as a recently accessed resource, to be exploited for the benefit of the people of Otago. On the other hand, the Burton Brothers’ scenic landscapes of untouched beauty reached a wondering audience in both colonial New Zealand and abroad. The firm’s photographs present the country as Edenic, a largely untouched garden for the European tourist to explore. These romanticised images encouraged tourism while saying little about the radical changes that were occurring in the landscape. This chapter will examine early landscape photography in New Zealand, looking first at an album that captured the radical transformation of the Otagan landscape during the gold rush of the 1860s, and then considering a photographic studio’s scenic shots of the South Island landscape that engendered mass tourism in the area.

**Changing Landscapes in Early New Zealand Photography**

The physical transformation of New Zealand by European settlers has been thoroughly documented, from the clearing of bush, the construction of roads, bridges and

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buildings, to prospecting for gold and the beginnings of agriculture. It could be said then, that photography in New Zealand has a long association with the transformation of the landscape to suit colonial purposes. Photography, when it first emerged, was science in action, epitomising progress and modernity, particularly in a raw, frontier territory. David Eggleton suggests that the act of photographing, the gathering and recording of visual data, was “an ultimate emblem of power.” Like land cleared of scrub and newly marked roads, photography represented the imposition of order. Functioning as surveyors, early photographers visually extended the boundaries of the empire, in some areas operating at the front of colonisation. In New Zealand, photography at once documented the physical imposition of order on the landscape and was simultaneously reliant upon it, as photographers made use of newly constructed roads and bridges to transport their photographic wagons and equipment into the interiors of the islands. The transformation of the land allowed ways of entering and experiencing landscapes that were previously closed to all but the most adventurous of explorers. Photography is thus associated with the “opening up” of the New Zealand landscape, something reinforced by the relationships between colonial photographers and the engineers, surveyors and politicians responsible for colonisation of the land.

Photography has been central to the construction and promotion of New Zealand landscapes from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Nevertheless, tension is evident in early photographic representations of the landscape. On the one hand, early photographers presented a landscape that was timeless and largely untouched, a natural earthly paradise and a genteel tourist space for the Victorian traveller. On the other hand, progress and the alteration of these landscapes by humans was also the subject of the photographer’s lens. Picturing the working landscape was part of a broader Victorian search

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for order during the early years of British sovereignty in New Zealand. Deborah Bright observes in relation to the American landscape that “the mid-nineteenth century camera represented both the triumph of scientific progress and a key productive agent in the generation of images of nature and culture.” With the overlay of nature and science in Victorian culture, William Henry Fox Talbot’s description of photography as the “pencil of nature” defines photography as nature writing itself. Photography is then an ordered natural science that combined the best of technology and nature, with scientific realism tempered by romanticism.

Landscape photographs of a historic nature in New Zealand are more often treated as documents, a record or illustration of things past important for the facts or evidence that they provide rather than as primary sources in their own right or as social texts. This is the case with Erik Olssen’s *A History of Otago* (1984), which includes unaccredited photographs by Joseph Perry. Perhaps this is the result of the nature of the medium itself. Photographs of landscape, of the natural world, seem objective, more truthful when compared with other media. Erika Wolf and Angela Wanfalla note in an introduction to a newly compiled volume on early New Zealand photography that “other types of sources are routinely subjected to extensive analysis in considering what their strengths and limitations may be in historical interpretation, but photographs are often assumed to be transparent windows to the past, truthful visual records of how things were.” Photographs subtly shape our experience of the past in ways that often go unnoticed. Steven Hoelscher, in his essay “The Photographic Construction of Tourist Space in Victorian America,” describes the medium as follows:

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Born in the Victorian era from the seemingly perfect marriage of science and art, photography appeared to be the ideal medium for nature to copy herself with utter accuracy and exactitude; indeed the notion that a photograph repeats its original, that it is less a copy than a simulacrum, remains with us.\(^6\)

The truth-value of photography in Victorian New Zealand allowed complex ideas of development, progress and regional transformation to be presented as natural and incontrovertible. It allowed photographers to construct two potentially opposing visions of the New Zealand landscape as being simultaneously Edenic and firmly under the control of the settlers. The notion that historic photographs present us with pure fact remains in popular culture to an extent. Yet photographs, even those of the natural world, are as much a construct as they are a “slice of life,” for they conceal as much as they reveal.

**Joseph Perry and the Early Otagan Landscape**

The tension between the celebration of nature and the imposition of order on the landscape is felt strongly in Joseph Perry’s *Illustrations of the Scenery of Otago* (1865), an early example of scenic photography in this region. The album consists of one hundred views of Otago, including five panoramas of Dunedin. Rather than the great scenic wonders of Milford Sound, the Fiordland Lakes or, venturing north, the Pink and White Terraces, Perry focuses largely on the frontier landscape of the interior of the region of Otago. Much of the Central Otago section of the album centres on scenes of mining, with images taken of fluming, diggings and tailings making up the majority of the photographs. The photographs document Perry’s foray into the interior of the region, travelling through Trotter’s Gorge to the diggings at Hyde, Lawrence, Alexandra, Clyde, Cromwell, the Kawarau Gorge, and Wanaka. Perry also took time to travel around Lake Wanaka, visiting the Matukituki and

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Cardrona valleys. While the photographer captured many scenic views of the natural landscape, such as the dramatically cascading waters of a Central Otago stream (fig.9), so too did he shoot sites where industry had interrupted or diverted the natural processes that occur in an environment. Responding to both the natural and the engineered view, Perry juxtaposed images of the early gold rushes in Otago with scenes of untamed rivers and jagged ridgelines to create an album that is simultaneously compelling and vernacular.

Little is known about Perry. Dr. Thomas M. Hocken refers to the Perry brothers in his notes on the Otago albums, and Hardwicke Knight, in his history of photography in New Zealand, describes the Perry brothers as following in the footsteps of early national photographers such as William Meluish.\(^7\) Besides Knight’s brief reference to them, there has been little enquiry into the work of the Perry brothers and no identification of the other brother. Anna Peterson mentions Perry’s album in her chapter on photography in *Treasures from the Hocken Collection* (2007). However, she limits her discussion to a brief mention of *Illustrations of the Scenery of Otago* as one of Hocken’s earliest acquisitions as a collector.\(^8\) More notably, Christine Whybrew presented on the Perry albums in 2011 at the “Otago: The Making of a Colonial Culture Symposium,” in Dunedin. Whybrew focused her discussion on “Otagan scenery” as a commonly used term in studio advertisements during the 1860s.\(^9\)

With few primary sources to draw upon it is difficult to provide a consideration of these photographs in terms of some sort of broader photographic practise. Knight suggests that Joseph Perry was an amateur photographer without a portrait business, but he did bill

\(^7\) Hardwicke Knight, *Photography in New Zealand* (Dunedin: John McIndoe Limited, 1971), 42.
Hocken for a “considerable sum” for a set of 100 photographs of the region of Otago, including a number of panoramas of the rapidly expanding town of Dunedin. Two documents provide some insight into Perry’s life. One is a letter from Perry addressed to Dr. Arthur Eccles from the suburb of Roslyn in Dunedin, November 13, 1865, which provides details about a selection of the photographer’s images to which Eccles subscribed. The second is a note written by Hocken, which gives a brief description of the Perry brothers, inscribed on a letter addressed to the doctor from the photographer, dated December 1865. This note was likely written some time after the letter, perhaps when Hocken was organising his collection for donation. Hocken wrote: “The Perry’s were brothers, both Cambridge men and were amateur photographers, and rather fond of a roaming speculative life. For many years they were engaged in gold-mining ventures chiefly in Otago and the West Coast.” This description, alongside Perry’s account of his travels given to Eccles, suggests that Perry was an adventurer.

Knight values Perry’s views of Otago for the “orthodox” manner in which they were taken, resulting in crisp, clear images that document “the structure of buildings, the utilization of land, bush cover, fencing practice, and other features which have become the subject of enquiry and research.” While Knight celebrates Perry’s images for their technical quality and as records for past events, he does not discuss them in terms of what they suggest about Victorian image making and the representation of a newly accessed Central Otago landscape. These photographs are unique as an early attempt to provide a comprehensive series of photographs of this region. Hocken claims that Perry’s images were “the first ever taken of

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10 Knight, *Photography in New Zealand*, 64.
11 Papers relating to Joseph Perry, photographer, ca. 1865 (Misc-MS-1464), Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.
12 Dr. Thomas M. Hocken, Papers relating to Joseph Perry, photographer, ca. 1865 (Misc-MS-1464), Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.
13 Knight, *Photography in New Zealand*, 64.
the interior of the province of Otago.” Yet despite their early date, they already show a highly altered landscape. This section will examine Perry in terms of topographical representation, considering how Perry chose to represent the Otagan landscape and what this suggests about Victorian views on landscape and the natural world.

Perry, an enterprising photographer looking to market his views to a wealthy Dunedin audience during the gold rush of the 1860s, presents a landscape undergoing the process of industrialization. Perry’s letter to Hocken, the only known subscriber to the complete Illustrations of the Scenery of Otago, suggests that the photographer sought out wealthy patrons to purchase the products of his endeavour. He writes:

Sir, I beg to forward you herewith the Photographs of Otago Scenery for which you favoured me with your name as Subscriber. On the other side I beg to hand you a Catalogue of the whole of the Pictures, and as I perceive that your selection does not include some of the finest, which I have marked, I beg to intimate that I shall esteem your further commissions a favour.

Perry’s foray to the interior of the province of Otago was costly, transporting numerous glass plates, chemicals and delicate equipment over rough terrain. These photographs, which documented the mining of the interior of the province, were designed to be marketed to the wealthy society of Dunedin who themselves profited through the gold rush. Dr. Hocken claims in his notes that he was the “only person who subscribed for the entire set of these photographs.” However, these photographs were also available to purchase separately, and an Otago Daily Times article states that the photographic series may be enjoyed via “the

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14 Dr. Thomas M. Hocken, Papers relating to Joseph Perry, photographer, ca. 1865 (Misc-MS-1464), Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.
15 Joseph Perry to Dr. Thomas Morland Hocken, December 1865, papers relating to Joseph Perry, photographer, ca. 1865 (Misc-MS-1464), Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.
selection of the ten views to which each subscriber of three guineas is to be entitled.” An exhibition of Perry’s photographs in 1865 and the inclusion of a selection of his images in the Industrial Exhibition in Dunedin of the same year suggest that his endeavour was not entirely a failure. Hocken claim that these were the first photographs of the interior of Otago would explain their inclusion in the Industrial Exhibition, being the first visual documents of the gold rush that brought so much wealth to Dunedin.

The album is remarkably well preserved, the images remaining clear and crisp. The upper corners of most of the photographs are cropped. Rounded upper corners are sometimes found in prints made from collodion wet plate negatives. The process of pouring liquid collodion over the glass plates led to one corner, where it was grasped by the photographer or their assistant, remaining uncoated by the solution. In each image the sky appears strangely clear, an effect due to the limited range of sensitivity of the collodion. Collodion wet plate was the dominant process worldwide during the 1860s. It produced the sharpest result with the least expense. The process was capable of recording microscopically fine detail, and the long exposure times, although a drawback in portraiture, did not hinder landscape photography. The real drawback of the collodion process was the need to expose the plate while still wet, meaning that the photographer had to transport a darkroom with them if working away from the studio. Portable dark rooms were available for purchase. These usually came in the form of a tent, which could be collapsed into a box roughly the size of a large suitcase. As well as the dark room, photographers also required the chemicals for coating, sensitizing, developing and fixing, cleaned glass plates, and dishes and tanks for water used in the developing process. The water needed to be without any serious impurities. Fortunately, with the advent of wet collodion, the bulky sliding body camera of the

Daguerreotype period could be done away with in favour of a folding bellows type of camera that could be made to collapse into a relatively lightweight package.  

In July 1865, the *Otago Daily Times* announced that the “photographic artist,” Joseph Perry, after much arduous travel had succeeded in his task of obtaining 100 “views of scenery” in the province of Otago. This planned tour had guaranteed to capture the “characteristic features of our great ranges, plains, rivers, &c” found in the region of Otago. At this time in Otago’s history, the search for gold had become an immense undertaking, a search that had altered the Central Otago landscape radically. Beginning in 1861, discoveries of gold in multiple locations around the province brought a flood of men in search of wealth. By 1865, 542 miles of water races existed at Tuapeka and 510 miles of water races had been constructed in the Dunstan diggings. The miners also improvised Californian pumps, constructed or brought in water wheels and an effort was even made to divert the Clutha River in order to expose the riverbed and its gold.

While some twenty-one million pounds of gold enriched Otago in the 1860s, the thousands of immigrants who rushed to the diggings caused the elite of Otago some apprehension. Reverend Thomas Burns “bemoaned the transformation of his pious and peaceful village into a rowdy and riotous city.” Erik Olssen states that even less fervent Presbyterians “decried the rushes and the *Otago Daily Times* declared that ‘We do not desire to see another rush to Otago’.” Perhaps this is why Perry rarely chose to include in the album photographs of the miners in detail, preferring instead to capture the great industry of the gold-mining companies that brought much wealth to the well-to-do families of the settlement. However it is much more likely that Perry largely excluded the human form from

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18 “PHOTOGRAPHIC PICTURES OF OTAGAN SCENERY,” 4.
19 Olssen, 65.
20 Olssen 66.
his studies of the Otagan landscape due to the limitations of early photography in its extended exposure times. There was also a lack of precedent for any type of album focusing on the working class in the 1860s.\textsuperscript{21} The rivers and planes of Central Otago would have proved much more picturesque than the rough camps set up by the miners consisting of crude buildings and canvas tents. When figures do appear, they give scale to the landscapes captured in Perry’s album. The man photographed in an image of Trotter’s Gorge, for example, highlights the deep gut walled by rough boulders through which the van is travelling.

Olssen states that “Scottish and Victorian capital flowed into Otago.”\textsuperscript{22} Branches of Australian and British banks were established in Otago, and in 1863 a group of Dunedin businessmen founded the Bank of Otago. Companies made a sizable profit from importing goods and, of course, breweries flourished in the influx of men from the Californian and Australian goldfields. William Gregg began importing luxury goods such as coffee, spices, cordials and aerated waters. The metal and engineering trades also prospered, with a number of companies “manufacturing water wheels, farm implements, small ships and primitive dredges.”\textsuperscript{23} The Industrial Exhibition of 1865 celebrated the material progress of Otago, and “attested to the commercial and industrial pre-eminence of the province.”\textsuperscript{24} Amongst Perry’s photographs exhibited were “views of Hawkesbury, Blueskin Bay, Oamaru, and gold mining townships.”\textsuperscript{25} Gold had made Otago the richest and most populous region in the country. From being one of the least industrialized provinces, by 1871 Otago boasted more factory

\textsuperscript{21} It was not until the late nineteenth century that photographers such as Jacob Riis (Danish-born American, 1849-1914) started to document the lives of the working class. Such photography was enabled by the development of the first widely used flashpowder in 1887, which allowed photographers to illuminate dark interiors.

\textsuperscript{22} Olssen, 66.

\textsuperscript{23} Olssen, 66-67.

\textsuperscript{24} Olssen, 67.

workers than Auckland, and the Provincial Council “collected one-third of the ordinary and one-quarter of the territorial revenues of the colony and built roads, bridges, railways and fine public buildings.” These images engage visually with the extractive mining industry that brought so much wealth to the southern province, capturing the backbone of its economic success and industrial advancements.

These photographs were intended as a collection to which people would subscribe in order to form their very own album of views: “The whole series of photographs is of public interest, as being the first collection of “Illustrations of the Scenery of Otago;” and we think it will not be questioned that there is almost unlimited scope for the gratification of varied tastes.” These photographs were aimed to be aesthetically pleasing, with the title stressing the scenery of Otago rather than its people or culture. Perry provides a comprehensive record of his travels throughout the region, methodically photographing along the way. The photographs show his slow, deliberate progress into the interior of Otago, with each image presenting a new view or area while at the same time serving as a marker for the journey. In four prints, the van that Perry used to transport his equipment is shown, in another both his van and tent are visible, while in a further photograph the tracks of the van may be seen in the sand at Moeraki, along with the prints of two horses. The route was not easy. The Otago Daily Times article makes mention of this, stating that Perry frequently had a “tryingly hard time,” while “endeavouring to get his “dark room” and other apparatus along tracks which had never before been pressed by any four wheeled vehicle, and probably will not be pressed again for years, unless some other equally ardent photographer goes over the same ground.” The methodical photographing of the route suggests a celebration of the settlers’ achievement

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26 Olssen, 69.
27 “PHOTOGRAPHIC PICTURES OF OTAGAN SCENERY,” 4.
28 Knight, New Zealand Photographers: A Selection, n.p.
29 “PHOTOGRAPHIC PICTURES OF OTAGAN SCENERY,” 4.
in opening up access into the interior of Otago. In Perry’s images the road stretches on into
the distance and newly constructed bridges traverse wide, fast flowing rivers. The
descriptions of the photographs in the catalogue that accompanies the album draws attention
to the physical infrastructure of the road, bridges and gold mining.

Yet the land that Perry photographed remained accessible only to those prepared to
“rough it.” This was illustrated by his photographs and described by the *Otago Daily Times* in
relation to the “natural bridge” at Kawarau (fig.10) using Perry’s own words:

> A great tongue of rock protrudes towards another tongue; between them, the river
goes at a pace that makes any mill race contemptible; close at hand is a great
pool, whirling, but smooth, and terribly deep. Step or leap from one tongue to the
other; land safely; and you have crossed the “natural bridge” on the Kawarau.\(^3\)

There is an element of adventure to Perry’s expedition, but also of danger. The account of the
journey is heavily romanticized, made into an expedition of great daring and perseverance
against a still raw and little accessed landscape. In this image three men stand near the tongue
of rock that allows them to cross the fast flowing Kawarau. They are tiny next to their rugged
backdrop. The vertical composition of the photograph causes the landscape to feel very
enclosing and claustrophobic, emphasising the steepness of the country. Deeper into the
composition, behind the three men, is a rudimentary bridge constructed from two poles, to be
used when the river level is high. Perry describes the bridge in his letter to Dr. Eccles as
being about twenty-five feet above the usual level.\(^3\) The sublime is definitely at play in both
this photograph and the description of the journey. The sense of threat in response to the

\[^3\] “PHOTOGRAPHIC PICTURES OF OTAGAN SCENERY,” 4. Originally described by
Joseph Perry in a letter to Dr. Eccles, November 13, 1865, papers relating to Joseph Perry,
photographer, ca. 1865.

\[^3\] Joseph Perry to Dr. Eccles, November 13, 1865, papers relating to Joseph Perry,
photographer, ca. 1865.
landscape is a key aspect of the sublime. According to Edmund Burke, the sublime is characterized by that which excites “emotions of self preservation.” Terror, solitude, darkness and vastness all work to make up the sublime, a quality that brings delight as well as horror.

From this, Francis Pound surmises:

We might easily guess at the favourite objects of the Sublime: mountains; the ‘boundless ocean’, sky, or plain; storm; avalanche; fire; torrents; volcanic eruption; etc. Such natural spectacles were used to symbolise man’s aspirations to the infinite, or a related feeling of man’s smallness in the vast face of nature, a kind of pleasurable vertigo.  

An adrenalin fuelled leap over the Kawarau River would have produced the feeling of an encounter with the sublime. We as the viewers can clearly see this quality in Perry’s image. The aesthetic pleasure induced by the looming ridges of jagged rock is not restful but excites a terrified awe. Light fails to penetrate the gut below the bridge, causing the water to appear dark and menacing. Scale, space, light, figure and format combine to picture the frailty of man in the context of the superior power of nature.

In these images Central Otago has a rough, frontier character, with towns consisting of a crude assemblage of houses and shops, the miners inhabiting roughly built huts or canvas tents. These towns appeared largely temporary, inhabited only until the next gold strike drew the miners away to a new area. What is highlighted in these albums, however, is the more permanent progress made by the miners on the landscape, such as the elegantly constructed bridges and the fluming used by the greater mining companies. The _Otago Daily Times_ report of the tour made by Perry states:

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What our miners can do, by association, is shown in the gigantic—it really is so—fluming across the Manorburn, constructed by the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle Sluicing Company; the work being 800 ft. long, and at one point 90ft. high, a considerable portion of it being built in two heights, and the whole looking like an attenuated railway viaduct on a large scale.33

The Manorburn fluming (fig.11) bisects Perry’s photograph horizontally. The artificial water channel stretches across the landscape, traversing rocky terrain, at times supported by locally sourced rock, at other times by timber framework. The water race, started in January 1864, extended twelve miles, from the Manuherikia River gorge to Dry Gully, just south of the Manorburn. The viaduct shown in the photograph crossed the Manorburn and was the “most elaborate engineering structure of the Otago goldfields.” The viaduct was constructed from timber cut at Lake Hawea and floated down the Clutha River. The structure cost £2370.34 A reporter from the Otago Daily Times commented in 1864 that the Manuherikia River district was transformed through the use of ditches, races and water-courses: “no such a place for water was ever seen, but here it is all under perfect control, and is made subservient to the uses of those requiring it, whether for mining or agriculture.”35 This diverting of water gave the inhabitants of the area control over their environment, allowing them to settle, and construct “substantially built residences— not mean calico erections, such as are generally met with elsewhere, but constructed of materials that will bid defiance to the hard frosts and storms of winter to penetrate.”36 The construction of the fluming represented the successful and skilful overcoming of both environmental and engineering difficulties and lends an air of permanence to the miners’ operation. While the image is devoid of any human figures, the

33 “PHOTOGRAPHIC PICTURES OF OTAGAN SCENERY,” 4.
35 “Dunstan.”
36 “Dunstan.”
landscape strongly registers a human presence. This is also evident in Perry’s photograph of Blue Spur at Gabriel’s Gully, which clearly conveys the extent of the miners’ stamp on the landscape (fig.12). David Kennedy, an itinerant entertainer who travelled during this era through Otago commented; “The whole floor of the gully seemed to have been torn up.”

While the fluming may have since vanished, the legacy of heavy mining in Gabriel’s Gully remains visible to this day.

Scattered amongst photographs of the mining industry are images that are more familiar to the scenic tourist, of which the *Otago Daily Times* commented, “one may almost be said to make a very pleasant tour through some of the best known and the most romantic parts of the Province.” The streams Roaring Meg (fig.9) and Gentle Annie cascade towards the viewer in two separate vertical compositions and Lake Wanaka is presented in dramatic light as a storm moves down the lake. The photographs register the water of the streams as a flowing white ribbon, demonstrating the difficulty of capturing moving subjects with the collodion process. A succeeding view is of the Matukituki River, which flows into Wanaka (fig.13). The *Otago Daily Times* report states: “The reflection of the hills in the water is beautifully reproduced: indeed all the views of this lake possess this charming peculiarity, which makes them richly worthy of study by an artist.”

Half scenic views, half survey photography of a new topography, this album appears today a strange melding of the raw industrial and the natural picturesque. It is difficult to tell whether Perry’s landscape is constructed as an opportunity for progress as much as for pleasing scenery.

Perry presents Central Otago on the cusp of industrial expansion, still raw, but beginning to take on an established human presence with the construction of permanent bridges and roads. Like the camera itself, this industry represented the triumph of technical

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37 David Kennedy, *Kennedy’s Colonial Travel* (1876), quoted in Olssen, 77.
38 “PHOTOGRAPHIC PICTURES OF OTAGAN SCENERY,” 4.
progress. As in the context of American industrialization the camera in nineteenth century New Zealand similarly “embodied the laws of nature in human technology; nature and mechanism appeared to spring naturally and autonomously from the same divine principle.”

Progress, and photography, at that time represented control of nature. Perry’s photographs picture a New Zealand that is not Edenic, but awkward, caught between its pre-European history and its colonial future.

**The Burton Brothers: A Hunger for the Scenic**

When Alfred Burton photographed Lake Manapouri in 1889, he would have set up his tripod and camera and, with the aid of a team of assistants, composed a shot that not only documented the reality of the lake, but also effectively conveyed his own picturesque vision that reflected the romantic Victorian image of Manapouri (fig.14). Like Milford Sound, Mitre Peak and the Pink and White Terraces, Manapouri was to become one of New Zealand’s “Wonders,” and part of the new colonial leisure landscape. Its representation through the lens, therefore, would confirm its marketed image as a genteel tourist space in a settled, colonized New Zealand.

Alfred Henry Burton (1834-1914) trained as a photographer in the family business of John Burton & Sons, Photographers, Leicester, England. Burton immigrated to Dunedin in 1868, where his brother Walter was already living. Together they founded Burton Brothers, Photographers. Unlike the itinerant photographer Joseph Perry, whose exploration of Otago was a private venture, the Burton Brothers firm acted as a commercial business, marketing a range of items from scenic albums and ‘ethnographic’ photographs, to portraiture and collectable cartes-de-visite. The firm’s first topographical photographs were taken of the Otago goldfields in 1870 by the two brothers working together, but the majority of the firm’s

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40 Bright, 60.
expeditions around New Zealand and abroad appear to have been undertaken by Alfred, described as the more adventurous of the two, or by other photographers working for the studio. By 1889, Burton was able to use dry-plates. The new plates quickly supplanted collodion, which had to be carefully poured over the glass plates immediately before exposure. Coated with a gelatin and silver bromide compound, dry plates remained sensitive as long as they were kept inside light-proof boxes, were usable for months and made work in remote locations much more viable. Now the photographer could travel with only a camera, tripod and a few loaded plateholders. The introduction of the gelatin dry plate also brought about a reduction in exposure times, allowing a photographer to take a more instantaneous image and capture moving subjects.

The Burton Brothers compiled a large stock of photographic images of topographical scenes from throughout New Zealand and abroad, resulting in the firm gaining an international reputation for scenic views of both New Zealand and Pacific landscapes. Many, but not all, of these photographs were taken by the firm’s leading view photographers: Alfred Burton and Thomas Muir. As Copyright was not introduced until 1877 the firm’s massive inventory of views was supplemented by stock from photographic businesses that had ceased trading, their images rebranded with the Burton Brothers’ name and redistributed. The firm’s negatives “shaped perceptions of New Zealand among both the settler community and international audiences.” Yet the “truth value” of these images as documents to the past is dubious due to the commercial motivations of the firm, with their photographs guiding a particular interpretation of the New Zealand landscape as a tourist destination.

41 Knight, *Photography in New Zealand*, 46.
42 Eggleton, 21.
The Burton Brothers often gained assistance for their work outside of Dunedin by accompanying government survey parties, which enabled them to access remote locations without massive financial expenditure. This strategy was similar to that of their American and Canadian counterparts, who were often employed to photograph for the greater railroad companies, either for surveying purposes or to showcase the scenic attractions the railroad routes had to offer. Photographers had accompanied survey teams in North America from the 1850s, when the advent of collodion wet plate enabled the production of multiple crisp high-quality prints on paper. Christine Whybrew states that the ability to produce multiple prints “made photography a useful tool for surveyors and their commissioners, who included images in printed documents that recorded and promoted exploration, particularly of the western territories of the United States.” While these images were utilised primarily in published reports and the illustrated press, many studios also added the negatives to their commercial portfolio for the popular audience. This brought the appeal of frontier imagery to a wider audience, promoting the results of exploration and an expansionist ideology. Survey photography “by its nature prioritised topographical features, dramatic landscape and the insertion of man-made features within those spaces.” Whybrew states in her thesis on the Burton Brothers firm that survey projects and priorities were often reflected in the work undertaken by the studio, listing the interior of the province of Otago, the Hokitika-Christchurch Road and the North Island Main Trunk Railway as “significant survey projects photographed and promoted by the studio.”

Alfred Burton’s journal as a travelling photographer was a fixture in the *Otago Daily Times*, in particular during his period spent wintering on the southern lakes of Te Anau and Manapouri in 1889. The self-image that Burton promoted in this journal – like that developed

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44 Whybrew, 283.
45 Whybrew, 284.
46 Whybrew, 277.
around other landscape photographers – “was that of the selfless artist who risked life and limb, travelling alone and sleeping where he could, so that his fellow colonists could discover ‘the romantic and the picturesque’, which nature had scattered ‘so lavishly’ around them.”

David Eggleton describes Burton as “jocular and gregarious,” a man who went “prospecting for ‘views’ with a bullish determination that saw him traversing New Zealand for over a quarter of a century before he finally retired in 1898.” The photographer is described similarly by Main and Turner as a roving photographer happy to tell of his photographic “exploits.”

Burton casts himself as a romantic explorer rather than a commercial photographer in search of capital, although Whybrew’s account demonstrates the strong business nature to his practice. Travel photography was a lucrative commodity during this period, and Burton enhanced the popularity of the firm’s images through his journal, which acted, like images, as a substitute for experience. As Whybrew comments, “photography, with travel literature, informed popular knowledge about a place and established a presumed understanding through which these locations were encountered.” Locations were packaged for tourist interest, and were known and understood often only through these secondary representations, existing as “cultural manifestations.” Landscape photographs embodied a shared cultural response to a place rather than serving as an objective documentation. In this they satisfied the popular expectations of the depicted subject and the function of photography by carrying viewers beyond their everyday reality.

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48 Eggleton, 20.
49 Whybrew, 105.
50 Whybrew, 105.
51 Whybrew, 106.
of the lake through his journals and photographs that was romantic, mysterious, and full of natural splendour.

The Burton Brothers firm played an extensive role in promoting the New Zealand landscape, providing visual access to the more wild and remote areas of the country, in particular the southern lakes and sounds that today make up a large part of Fiordland National Park. After the destruction of the Pink and White Terraces in the Tarawera eruption in 1886, the Milford Sound region “attracted new interest as government representatives and tourist operators looked southward for a new scenic attraction.”\textsuperscript{52} The strategic importance of its attractions became increasingly evident to the Government during this period, with the Chief Surveyor for the Otago Province, C. W. Adams stating: “Seeing that for the magnificence of scenery they surpass anything else of the kind in the known world, I do not see why the stream of tourists visiting our shores could not be considerably augmented.”\textsuperscript{53} Improving knowledge of and access to the Sounds and surrounding areas not only “opened the area for minerals prospecting, mining and other private enterprises,” but also to tourism, which has continued to be a primary source of wealth for the area. In photographing the southern lakes and fiords the firm effectively commodified this landscape for a popular audience, while at the same time reinforcing the ideological and political agendas that drove the opening up of this landscape to a colonial and international audience.

\textbf{Photography and Tourism: Creating a “View”}

The Burton Brothers’ \textit{Catalogue of Views}, a register of their entire collection of topographical negatives, was composed of whole plate, stereograph and 12 x 10 inch

\textsuperscript{52} Whybrew, 277.
formats.\textsuperscript{54} These “views” encompassed both urban locations and natural scenery, with the Burton Brothers catalogue distinguished from other bodies of work “as being made speculatively rather than on commission.” Whybrew describes photographic views of the natural world as reflecting an “anthropocentric response to nature, objectifying natural scenes according to the photographer’s subjective experience.”\textsuperscript{55} Thus, the landscape photographs of the Burton Brothers conformed to pre-conceived notions of “landscape” “established in earlier photographic responses as well as in painting and literature.” Natural scenery could be divided into such categories such as the sublime, the ideal or beautiful, or the picturesque. The landscape was mediated by culture to produce a particular understanding of it: “Packaging the natural world according to cultural precepts laid a location bare for reinterpretation by the values of the perceiving culture.” Therefore, “photography’s process of taking and classifying the landscape mirrored the process of colonisation and made remote locations familiar and conceptually accessible.”\textsuperscript{56}

Inspired by what constitutes an ideal landscape, tourists and artists have gone in search of the picturesque for several centuries. Malcolm Andrews suggests that a set of paradoxes lies at the heart of picturesque tourism. Firstly, “the tourist wants to discover Nature untouched by man; and yet, when he finds it, he cannot resist the impulse . . . to ‘improve’ it. Secondly, [here concerning the British landscape, but applicable also to Victorian travellers in New Zealand] the tourist travelling through the Lakes or North Wales will loudly acclaim the native beauties of British landscape by invoking idealised foreign models.”\textsuperscript{57} This attitude is evident in the very naming of landscape features of New Zealand:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Burton Brothers, \textit{Catalogue of one thousand photographs of New Zealand scenery} (Dunedin: Burton Brothers).
\item \textsuperscript{55} Whybrew, 103.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Whybrew, 104.
\end{itemize}
The Southern Alps (a comparison to the range of mountains in Central Europe), or Fiordland, a reference to the coast of Norway. Comparison and association – poetry, paintings, mythology – are a strong part of humankind’s appreciation for nature. Both of these paradoxes are present in the work of the Burton Brothers, and merit further discussion in this chapter.

Lake Manapouri: View-making

Today it is assumed that respect is integral to the celebration of nature. Yet in the nineteenth century the tool kit of the adventuring photographer contained not only the chemicals and equipment necessary to produce an image but also an axe. As important a piece of equipment as the camera, the axe provided the means for the photographer to sculpt, literally, a picturesque view. Photographers moved bushes and branches to provide detail in the foreground and felled trees to clear the view beyond and expand the horizon. While, as Tim Bonyhady points out, the trees felled for the purpose of scenic photography are insignificant when set against the massive scale clearing for grazing and cultivation, the destruction of these trees should be noted “because it undermines the assumption that nature is immovable.”  

Photographers literally cut and pasted their location to appear more picturesque, uprooting, transplanting and felling trees as it suited their work. This undermines the image of the romantic artist in awe of nature, violating “the assumption that celebration of nature involves respect for it,” and raises questions about the limitations of conservation and environmental concern in the nineteenth century, “particularly because most of the documented examples of such axework were by artists and patrons otherwise identified with environmental protection.”

58 Bonyhady, 193.  
59 Bonyhady, 193.
While Burton’s photographs present Manapouri as an untamed landscape, its picturesque scenes appealing to the tourist vision, the reality of how the photographer composed his shots was quite different. As Bonyhady points out, the “quest for the romantic and picturesque did not always involve a corresponding respect for nature, at least of the type we know today.”

Burton, in his journal, describes a day’s work photographing the lake: “He spots a scene; tries it from this point; tries it from that; finally decides; pitches his camera; summons his staff; sets one with axe to fell a tree, and another with billhook to clear away scrub, and so ‘composes’ the picture.”

It is easy to imagine that the image Bush, Manapouri (1870s-1880s; fig.14) was composed using such a method, allowing the photographer to open up the composition and expose a wider view of the lake on a dramatically brooding, cloudy day. This method of getting the shot was common practice in colonial landscape photography. Undermining the respect and awe for the land that the resulting photograph would suggest, this axe-wielding revealed “an ideology of preservation through intervention that structured European land use through this period.”

Bonyhady suggests that “this restructuring of nature was in line with the widespread use of tomahawks and axes in the nineteenth century.” Lister suggests that parallels can be drawn with the 1901 release of red deer around Manapouri, a strategy designed to enhance the lake’s scenic qualities and its appeal to hunters. Trout and salmon were also released into the lake for similar reasons.

Lister, in his essay “Picturesque Manapouri: conservation and the camera, states: “The camera sits alongside the axe, the gun the Bible and the specimen jar as colonial tools of

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60 Bonyhady, 192.
62 Lister, 92.
63 Bonyhady, 193.
64 Lister, 92.
preservation.” This suggests a Victorian desire to control, a search for order during the early period of colonial occupation of the land. In other words, the camera, like the specimen jar, enabled control through studying, describing and authorising.

Burton presents himself as a hunter in his accounts of photographing the Southern Lakes. In “A Photographer’s Diary,” written by Burton and published in the *Otago Daily Times*, Burton comments on a trip to Lakes Te Anau and Manapouri: “I find that my record shows that this day I bagged the largest number of “exposures” during the whole trip.” There is something very possessive about the way in which Burton writes about his subjects, as if he is a prospector and finds the Fiordland landscape, as he puts it, to be pictorially “rich,” a treasure trove of the sublime and the picturesque waiting to be plundered with his lens. Burton’s first visit to Lake Manapouri was in fact as a minerals prospector, as a member of an exploration party for the Fiord Country Prospecting Association, of which he was a subscriber. Landscape was very much a medium for Burton, a valuable commodity to be packaged and sold to the tourist market. Burton creates a post-frontier space in an otherwise still-wild area. Although Burton describes the rough conditions of his trip in his journal, the evidence of this is not found in the resulting photographs. Even the photographer’s camp on the shore of Lake Manapouri appears charmingly rustic and picturesque nestled into the bush with snowy mountains in the background (fig.15).

Steven Hoelscher suggests that photographic views in Victorian America “refracted an ideology of human control over nature in their creation of a new, middle class, post-

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frontier space.” Likewise, while Burton presents Manapouri as an untamed landscape, the occasional figure, boat or cleared track provide “enough signs of culture to suggest that the tourist can enter this realm physically – as well as visually or imaginatively.” This is clear in Burton’s Cathedral Peaks from North Arm - Lake Manapouri (1880s; fig.16), in which a figure is clearly visible reclining at ease on the lakeshore. The lake is calm and the sun appears to be shining. This is similar in format to Burton’s images of Milford Sound, in which the photographer frequently included a figure, tourist boat or ship to emphasise the idea that this was a new leisure space.

Aaron Lister describes Burton’s winter trip around the southern lakes as “an unbridled quest for scenes of picturesque beauty. . . His accompanying journal casts the excursion in heroic terms, as a perilous adventure through inhospitable but awe-inspiring terrain.” Burton emphasizes the mystery and majestic nature of Lake Manapouri, painting his trip there as a grand adventure full of perils. This image of the lake very much reflected and enhanced the Victorian invention of Manapouri. As Lister points out, this was the territory of the “lost tribe” of Ngati Mamoe. In addition, three years prior to Burton’s visit, Professor Mainwaring Brown disappeared from the lakeside; he left his camp for a walk and never returned. Lister suggests that the Victorian fascination with Manapouri, sparked by Brown’s disappearance, was “closely attuned to the Māori myth explaining the creation of the lake from the tears of Koronae and Moturua, sisters who were separated and lost while wandering this land.” Burton’s description of his time spent at Manapouri also helped to propagate the myth of the missing professor. He refers to Brown’s disappearance in his journal, reporting: “And yonder—peering over the bush covered point in front of us—are the very peaks of the

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69 Hoelscher, 549.
70 Lister, 92.
71 Lister, 92.
72 Lister, 92.
Matterhorn Mountains, especially the curious Leaning Peak which overhangs the country where the adventurous professor found a grave as yet unknown to living man. By evoking the mysterious disappearance of the professor, Burton’s journal actively replaces the indigenous myths of the area with a colonial tale, using romantic language to create a Victorian myth for the lake. Like the mapping and renaming of this area, the story of Professor Mainwaring Brown shows a new layer of colonial narrative being applied to the landscape, one that is illustrated by Burton’s photographs.

Lister suggests that the “rechristening” of the lake “Manapouri” by early colonial mapmakers “symbolised the arrival of new ways of looking at, occupying, and using this land.” George Griffiths states that the Maori knew the lake as Moturau, deriving from motu (island) and rau (a hundred), a descriptive name for the lake, which is dotted with small islands. An earlier name for the lake may have been Roti-ua (Rainy Lake). Manapouri is thought to be the combination of two possible names – Manawapouri (Manawa, heart; Pouri, sorrowful) and Manawapopore (Manawa, heart; Popore, sobbing) – and is usually translated as ‘Lake of the Sorrowing Heart’ or ‘Lake of the Throbbing Heart’. How the lake came to be called Manapouri is uncertain, the result of a universal process of renaming, changing meanings and spelling that had been occurring throughout New Zealand even before the arrival of Europeans. Colonising through language is a common thread in both surveying and photography from this period. As Alan Trachtenberg states: “The name lays claim to the view. By the same token, a photographic view attaches a possessable image to a place name.

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74 Lister, 92.
76 George Griffiths, Names and Places in Southern New Zealand (Dunedin: Otago Heritage Books, 1990), 50.
A named view is one that has been seen, known, and thereby already possessed.”\(^77\) This way of viewing the landscape as something to be possessed relates very much to the “material gaze,” or representing the landscape in a way that reflects commercial and scientific concerns, “recording values in the land that represented its commodity or resource potential, or as an empirical record of natural features.”\(^78\) While Burton’s images accord to expectations of the picturesque, they also document the topographical features of the lake and its potential as a tourist destination.

Burton’s extensive work in documenting the lake’s scenic qualities was instrumental in encouraging tourism in the area. Manapouri gained appeal through its image marketed by photographic studios as a hunting and fishing destination, and photographers continued to come to reinterpret the idyllic landscape that was made iconic by Burton’s imagery in their own personal snapshots. Due to its popularity, Manapouri became a scenic reserve, and then formed part of Fiordland National Park (established 1952). William Main and John B. Turner suggest that Burton’s photographic coverage of Fiordland played a part in the decision to have the area set aside as a National Park\(^79\). Lister suggests that this “strongly felt need to ‘preserve’ the picturesque was a central cultural drive of the colonial period, representing a particular claim to the land.”\(^80\) This is very similar to the creation of national parks in nineteenth century United States. William Henry Jackson’s dramatic scenes of Yellowstone’s geothermal activity are often cited as instrumental in Congress’s decision to establish the first national park in 1872. Jackson was a salaried employee of the railroads and this move to nationalize Yellowstone was strongly supported by railroad interests “that owned most of the

\(^78\) Whybrew, 286.
\(^80\) Lister, 93.
tourist concessions and rights of way. As a promotional medium photography was successful as it could make the most remote scenery accessible to a wide audience with great detail and a sense of veracity.

**Conclusion**

The topographical albums of Perry and the Burton Brothers reflect the ambivalence of the colonial attitude towards the land in their desire to showcase the alterations being done to the landscape while at the same time preserve its natural wonders. The Burton Brothers photographs, although celebrating the natural scenery of the Southern lakes and fiords, are not conservation photographs. While respectful and at times in awe of nature’s forces, Burton’s images reflect the control of nature promoted at that time, and that photography itself represented. Likewise, Perry’s photographs promote the opening up of the landscape that was occurring as a by-product of the gold rush. Worth noting is the similar descriptions of the expeditions undertaken by both Perry and Alfred Burton for the Burton Brothers firm. These expeditions are described as heroic ventures undertaken by the photographers at great risk to their own safety, evoking a sense of the sublime. There is a sense of the photographers acting at the borders of civilisation, undertaking a perilous journey to attain fine views of the newly accessed landscape. This romanticising of the photographer’s task appears to be an important aspect of marketing the images to a Victorian audience.

Both Perry’s project and the Burton Brothers practice display a commercialism and entrepreneurialism that consciously cater to audience demands and expectations. Perry’s photographs were preconceived with commercial distribution in mind. Likewise, Burton’s images were designed to fit with preconceived notions surrounding Lake Manapouri. As Whybrew states, “the activities of surveyors and gold-miners were well reported, making the

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81 Bright, 61.
Otago public hungry for images of the terrain they were operating in.” Given Hocken’s recollection that Perry was an amateur, it is possible that he embarked on this venture in response to the public demand for this material. Similarly, the Burton Brothers speculatively produced topographical photographs to meet public demand. As Whybrew summarizes, both produced this material “with some understanding of what the public wanted to see - or what the government needed photographs to show - infrastructure and progress in the case of Perry, and romantic ‘views’ in the case of Burton.”

Joseph Perry and the Burton Brothers studio provide a precedent for the representation of landscape for later New Zealand photographers. The strong relation of the work of these colonial photographers to early survey photography is a feature that is continued in the work of the contemporary photographers. As Whybrew notes of survey photography:

Its nature prioritized topographical features, dramatic landscape and the insertion of man-made features within those spaces. It is this straight-forward approach to photography that influenced an aesthetic in North American landscape photography which is now recognized as a characteristic style and provided a precedent for Modernist “straight” photography.

Beyond this, early photographers provide a crucial early reference point for more recent photographers examining our changing relationship with the land. This “land of loveliness” still exists in many images by New Zealand photographers and continues to act as the draw

82 Christine Whybrew, email to the author, May 3, 2012.
84 Whybrew, 284.
card of the country’s touristic potential. It is an image that still defines many perceptions of the country, both domestic and abroad. Nevertheless, at the same time there are photographers who look deeper into this image, recognizing its tendencies to mask our everyday reality. These photographers continue the theme of topographical photography that Perry’s work exemplified, documenting the progress of humankind on its environment, but with different intentions to the nineteenth century photographer. In an age where the limitlessness of the earth’s natural resources is being seriously questioned, images of altered and industrial landscapes reflect an environmental concern or sensitivity that is lacking in the work of these early colonial counterparts. By referencing the work of nineteenth century photographers these photographers point to a long and constantly changing relationship with our environment.

85 *Land of Loveliness* was a stock album cover of the Burton Brothers Studio. Customers could make a selection of photographs from the firm’s catalogue and have them combined under this cover. Examples of this can be found in the Hocken Collections, Dunedin.
3. Photography and Conservation: John Johns and Lloyd Godman

From its very invention photography has been an important tool for recording data about the natural world. In its accuracy and intense detail photography is a means of organizing nature, a way of gathering and recording evidence and statistical information, and a tool for commodification and quantification. Methods such as aerial photography and repeat photography (rephotographing the same scene that appears in an earlier photograph) are valuable tools for investigating and assessing landscape change. Such methods serve to describe the environment and its changes by supplying data and highlighting abnormalities. On the other side of this, these methods also have the power to distance or normalize things which suggest a disturbing decline in the natural world.

However, photography can be an important tool for the conservation of the natural world. Photography has the power to evoke the sublime in capturing the forces of nature and to provide viewers with highly convincing visual experiences of a particular sight/site. Nature can provide an escape from urban life and culture, a relief of sorts. By picturing a pristine wilderness, photographers call on our sentimentality for a lost Eden, an untouched nature. But it is becoming increasingly clear that civilisation is encroaching on the last strongholds of nature; indeed, that these untouched areas exist at all is the result of human efforts to preserve them. What the photographers discussed in this chapter capture is not the untouched landscape, but the landscape that exists as a result of human intervention. Sometimes even this untouched land is temporary. John Johns, the New Zealand Forest Service’s official photographer from 1951 until 1984, captured in his images a period of rethinking about the preservation of New Zealand’s natural resources and a growing realisation of their finite nature. His work offers an image of ordered beauty, of nature benefitting from the careful
management of man. Johns’s photography is crisp, clear, coaxing order out of even the most chaotic scenes of native forest. For Godman, his photographic projects are much more personal in nature, capturing places that are strongly tied to memory and that hover precariously between preservation and alteration. By photographing these sites, Godman preserves the appearance of these places before they are forever changed. Godman’s images of the Kawarau and Clutha rivers capture the Sublime in the New Zealand landscape, a dark and threatening quality that has a long history in national landscape painting. Accordingly, Godman’s photography explodes like shrapnel out at the viewer, suggesting a power and urgency that is in direct opposition to Johns’s ordered frames. Yet both photographers demonstrate that the natural landscape holds an important place not only for New Zealand’s identity, but also in the minds of individuals. These two photographers represent very different landscapes in very different manners. This suggests that while these photographs demonstrate humankind’s influence on the environment they are also very much influenced by it in the way that they have chosen to photograph.

Environmentalist photographers often centre their work on a type of scenic photography characterized by images of a pristine wilderness devoid of any human presence or spoilage. Names such as Ansel Adams or, more locally, Craig Potton, spring to mind, bringing with them scenes of rugged mountains and untamed rivers. The underlying question of this type of photography is whether it has a capacity to contribute to a shift in consciousness, for individuals or societies, conducive to a more environmentally aware way of living. New Zealand photographer Shaun Barnett states:

It’s easy to criticise ‘scenic’ photography as just chocolate box ephemera, but that’s partly disingenuous. Because anyone can take a picture, it is easy to under-appreciate really good photography. The best outdoor photography, like the best
poetry or writing, has a fundamental power to inspire, challenge or galvanise people.¹

Much of this scenic photography in New Zealand is partially illusion: tripods, slow shutter speeds, and F-stop give a photographer the power to slow a river to a silky flow or highlight an atmospheric effect. It rarely features any sign of humanity, and in popular scenic destinations such as Milford Sound, it never shows the trappings of tourism: buses, hotels, and crowds. These images face outwards, not inwards. “Like much photography, they focus the viewer’s attention on a highly selective frame, one deliberately excluding clutter and mess.”² Photographers such as Potton, perhaps New Zealand’s best-known contemporary scenic photographer, choose to depict the “natural splendour” of the country, excluding the spoilage from their frames. Their scenes of fast flowing mountain streams, lush rainforest and snow-topped peaks risk appearing clichéd or irrelevant in the context of the global environmental condition. Yet these photographers do capture a landscape that still exists on some level. While there is a measure of creating the scene, these photographers photograph real places, albeit filtered through their knowledge of photography and personal vision. These images continue to inspire people. Barnett comments: “the reason why scenic calendars still sell is that – cliché notwithstanding – many people are fundamentally still interested in and moved by beauty.”³ However, this way of seeing the landscape becomes tricky in the face of contemporary environmental problems, “largely because they register and reinforce certain binaries – nature/culture, city/country, human/nonhuman – that routinely collapse under the operations of advanced capitalism.”⁴ These operations raise the question of how to picture the

² Barnett, 48.
³ Barnett, 48.
industrialised landscape in a way that still sensitive to the enduring appeal of what we call natural.

The work of the following two photographers both fit into the category of environmental photography, although their projects differ dramatically from that of Adams or Potton. Many of Johns’ photographs adhere visually to the style defined by the f/64 group, which was fostered by photographers such as Edward Weston and Ansel Adams. When the group was formed, in 1932, f/64 was the smallest aperture available in large-format view cameras. The name reflected the group's conviction that photographs should not attempt to disguise photography’s capacity to present the world “as it is.”\textsuperscript{5} In Europe this approach to photography was manifested in Neue Sachlichkeit (“New Objectivity”), which also favoured sharp definition and an interest in the formal qualities of objects.\textsuperscript{6} Johns’s incredibly sharp detail renders the object more sharply through photography than it appears in reality. This, combined with Adams’s “‘benediction of light,’ compels an examination of the subject more thorough in photograph than reality.”\textsuperscript{7} However, while Johns cites Adams as an inspiration – a photographer also involved in conservation – his work goes beyond f/64’s “ascetic pursuit of excellence,” and engages directly with the challenges facing New Zealand’s indigenous forests. In 1959, the New Zealand Forest Service’s \textit{Westland's Wealth}, a bulletin co-authored with Geoffrey Chavasse, graphically illustrated the indiscriminate logging of indigenous forests. This was followed by other publications by the Forest Service, all focusing on conservation: \textit{New Zealand Forestry} (1964), \textit{Wild Animals of New Zealand} (1969, co-authored with Lindsay Poole), and \textit{The Story of Mangatu} (1973, with F. Aslop). These were accompanied by Johns’s own work: \textit{The Forest World of New Zealand} (1975), with

Chavasse; a contribution to the *New Zealand Atlas* (1975); *Know Your Camera* (1978); *The Mountain Lands of New Zealand* (1982), with J.T. Holloway; *Native Orchids of New Zealand* (1983), with Brian Malloy; *New Zealand Forest Parks* (1983); and *Tomorrow’s Trees* (1992), again with Poole. Johns takes a thoroughly modernist approach to wilderness photography, never denying progress but celebrating the beauty of New Zealand’s indigenous forests and their need for management as a sustainable resource.

Likewise, Godman’s photographs of the Kawarau and Clutha rivers differ from scenic photography in their intensity and perspective. While these rivers and their valleys make frequent appearances in photographic albums, mostly they are colour photographs that tend to emphasise the picturesque qualities of their subjects. By contrast, Godman’s photographs reduce their subjects back to a primal surge of black and white water. Rather than being distanced from the landscape, these images force the rivers out of the frame, where they spilled across gallery walls in the 1984 exhibition in protestation of being contained by the future Clyde dam (fig. 17). Godman dedicated the project to “all free flowing rivers wherever they may be.”

The photographer combined these photographic works with two performance pieces carried out during the filling of the hydro lake some years later. *Lake Fill I* marked the first filling of the hydro lake at Clyde in 1992, while *Lake Fill II* coincided with the second raising of the lake level. The two pieces incorporated photography both as an integral part of the performance and as a means of documenting the work.

The initial project was a response to the plan to dam the Clutha above Clyde. The title of the project, *The Last Rivers’ Song*, makes it clear that these photographs directly acknowledge and confront the damming of the river and the loss that this will bring about. Yet, as Brian Turner notes, this “hurt never finds its expression in sentimentality, in

prettification, even though Godman is old enough to have grown up aware of the Clutha’s description as ‘New Zealand’s greatest river’. While Godman’s photographs suggest a spiritual element, a veneration of sorts to the power of these rivers, they do not fall into cliché. Perhaps it is because there is something slightly sinister to the stark beauty contained in these black and white photographs. The light gives the effect of “varnish on waters which appear simultaneously to be both giving off and absorbing the glow from the sky,” while the arrested sense of power and speed is both remarkable and threatening.

These two photographers, starting with Johns, are working in a period in which the modern experience of wilderness changes dramatically. From a history emphasizing the abundance of New Zealand’s natural resources, the 1950s witnessed a growing awareness of the importance of conservation of the country’s remaining wilderness. The devastating effects of mining and logging, and the introduction of animals such as deer and possum were becoming increasingly clear in the fragile state of the natural landscape. Protecting wild nature became less about preserving it for spiritual and aesthetic reasons as much as scientific necessity. Post-war burgeoning of family tourism with its caravans, car parks, sealed highways, picnic areas and visiting centres brought about the loss of an earlier experience of nature less mediated through mass culture.

Deborah Bright, referring to American environmentalism in the 1950s and 1960s, describes this time as “the testing ground for conservationism’s growing political muscle.” Up until 1950, the Sierra Club had remained small and local to California, numbering roughly seven thousand members. However, that year it established its first chapter outside that state, and by the early 1980s its international membership was over one-half million. The strategy

10 Turner, 8.
of the Club was to produce for family consumption colour picture books, calendars and postcards in which photographs of the beauty of the natural world “speak for themselves.” It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that photographic expressions were beginning to emerge that reflected a more complex thinking about the interrelations between nature and development. The 1962 publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, which first appeared in the *New Yorker*, “demonstrated the pervasiveness of the pollution of subsoils and groundwater by chemical pesticides like DDT.” It was no longer easy to ignore the toll that industrial pollutants took on the environment. Bright suggests that the debates surrounding the environment were also affected by the counterculture movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. “Sprung from the seedbeds of campus radicalism during the Vietnam War, a small but influential cohort of ecoradicals advocated a new land and consumption ethic, drawn from various socialist, feminist, and antimilitarist ideals.”

The 1980s brought unprecedented media coverage of natural and environmental disasters. This, combined with a growing number of scientific reports on deforestation, ozone depletion, acid rain and global warming, became a source of great international concern by the end of the decade. In New Zealand, the rise of environmental activism followed a similar trajectory to the United States, becoming increasingly energetic during the 1970s and 1980s. Greenpeace, started in 1971, came to global attention with the bombing of *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland’s Waitemata harbour in 1985. Prior to this, in 1984, Prime Minister David Lange barred the entry of not only nuclear-armed ships but also nuclear-propelled ships into New Zealand waters. David Eggleton states that during the 1980s, “with the increasing conservationist promotion of New Zealand as a green ark, albeit a damaged one, nature

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12 Bright, 65.
13 Bright, 65.
14 Bright, 65.
photography’s role as a form of bush evangelism became even more urgent.”16 Nature photography acted like a protest placard, with an image as effective as any clever slogan. A photograph encourages the viewer to share the same sentiment of the photographer – be it outrage, celebration, sadness, or loss. In the South Island, schemes such as the aluminium smelter at Aramoana (project announced by the government in December 1980), the hydro-electric project at Lake Manapouri (first power generated by the station in 1969), and the proposed damming of the Clutha River above Clyde (construction began in 1979) intruded on individual’s ideals of place, and conservation art and photography gained a greater foothold in the public arena.

During the 1980s in New Zealand environmental issues predominated, leading to social division and polarized communities. The New Zealand government proposed large-scale development of natural resources as a means of financial recovery and social security. While some strongly favoured the development, others loudly condemned it. Of this period, Godman states:

I can't recollect, but I'm sure someone once said “change is the only certainty.”

The values and attitudes of one society and generation give way to those of another, and in twentieth century western societies this occurs with increasing succession. The late 1970s through to the early 1980s in New Zealand was a time when the environment was tested in a manner that it had not been before, but it was a time when there was also a response, an environmental awareness.17

The proposed construction of an aluminium smelter at Aramoana, at the entrance to Otago Harbour in Dunedin, was one such ‘think big’ schemes proposed by the government. The

proposal divided the public, with the pro-smelter lobby arguing that the smelter would create jobs and bring growth and prosperity to the ailing economy of an old stagnating city, while those opposed to the smelter argued that it would be detrimental and irreparably change the environment. Prominent artists such as Ralph Hotere, Andrew Drummond, Chris Cree-Brown, and Chris Booth made powerful work that related to the issue, gaining publicity with exhibitions and comment in various art magazines. Godman testifies that it was these artists’ efforts that made him feel that he needed to be part of the cause too: “After all, it was a place I considered my patch. Around this time I was beginning to regard my image-making as a more serious activity and part of my life, and like the other artists, it seemed relevant to link the smelter issue to my image-making.”18 The protest against the smelter at Aramoana proved successful. The proposal became less viable and eventually disintegrated, and any planning for a smelter at Aramoana was halted. All of this proved that environmental art could have an impact on important events in New Zealand.

Today images of a “clean, green” New Zealand are particularly commonplace, acting in conjunction with catch-phrases such as “100% Pure,” the tourism campaign developed by Tourism New Zealand that emerged in 1999, designed to give the country a strong, clear point of difference and boost visitor numbers. These images, which showcase the best and most magnificent of our natural landscape, as much as appealing to an international audience, have ingrained themselves into our national identity. Yet more interesting and arresting are the images that hover on the edge of this type of scenic photography, working within its conventions and yet saying something very different about our physical and cultural landscape.

John Johns: Utility and Beauty

When John Johns (1924-1999) began working for the New Zealand Forest Service in 1951, the Service was charged with balancing the needs of industry with the requirements of conservation. Likewise, Johns’s role showed a balance between indulging his artistic ambitions and the more prosaic ends to which he was employed: documenting every aspect of the Forest Service’s operation. This is demonstrated in his images, which seamlessly blend a preoccupation with formal modernism with content that conveys a wealth of visual information. As Christina Barton, the curator of *Primary Products* (2007) at the Adam Art Gallery, suggests: “this exemplifies both the scientific gaze of the specialist who sees nature as an object or rational study and the eye of the artist seeking aesthetic order and finding it in the linear and textured patterns of his subject. Utility and beauty are here given equal weight.”

The artificial and the natural occur side by side in Johns’s images to create images that show a distinct formal sensibility beyond the documentary. What Johns’s photographs demonstrate is that documentary and artistic need not be exclusive, but instead combine in the photographer’s images to perform a dual purpose: to perform both as visual data and as works of art.

John H. G. Johns grew up on a Devonshire farm in England “which instilled in him a lifelong concern for the management and conservation of natural resources.” Johns served in the R.A.F as a wireless electrical mechanic during World War II. Posted in India for two and a half years, Johns trekked in Nepal and Kashmir, and practiced photography during this period. After the war, in 1947, Johns began forestry training at Dartington Hall, Devonshire, as a Forestry Commission trainee. After gaining entry to the Forester Training Schools in the Forest of Dean, Gloucester, and at Capel Curig, North Wales, Johns obtained a Foresters

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Diploma. He also attended mountaineering courses in Switzerland and France and continued to practice and improve his photography. When he emigrated to New Zealand in 1951, his response to the landscape was immediate: “It was a great landscape and I felt at home in it.”

Johns became the New Zealand Forest Service’s official photographer in 1951 and retained this post until his retirement in 1984.

Johns’s work has been included in a number of exhibitions. While he was represented in the Wilderness Five (1979), most of these exhibitions occurred post-1990, after his retirement from the Forest Service. These exhibitions included thematic shows, such as the Auckland City Art Gallery exhibition Two Centuries of New Zealand Landscape Art (1990) and Pacific Parallels: Artists and the landscape in New Zealand (1991-1993), an exhibition canvassing the history of landscape art in New Zealand as a model of colonial art history that toured to seven venues in the United States. Charles C. Eldredge, for the publication that coincided with Pacific Parallels, defined the role of Johns’s photographs as recording “new attitudes toward the environment and new practices in the management of timbering and forest growth, changes from the rude habits of clearing in earlier generations.”

Retrospective exhibitions showcased Johns’s lifework, like Bath-House Rotorua’s Art and History Museum’s John Johns Photographic Images 1952-1992 (1992); and Trees, Timber and Tranquillity (1995), an exhibition by the National Archives that focused on the value of forests and featured 130 photographs by Johns, were also held. These exhibitions were followed up more recently by the McNamara Gallery, which has held three exhibitions featuring the photographer’s work, beginning with A Life’s Work (2002), a selection of Johns’s photographs from 1950-1996. From 2004-2005 the McNamara Gallery held Fiction.

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21 McNamara, n.p.
an exhibition that featured eight artists including Johns; and then in 2008 the McNamara Gallery again featured Johns in an exhibition titled *Nature as an object for rational study – a thoroughly modernist approach*. In 2007 the Adam Art Gallery at Victoria University, Wellington, held *Primary Products*, which “turned its attention to New Zealand’s exotic forests, and the products, industries, and trade they support.” Christina Barton, the curator of *Primary Products*, described the exhibition as creating connections between New Zealand’s emergence as a modern industrial nation and the rise of modernism in the country. *Primary Products* presents Johns as a modernist photographer, removing his work from the context of the Forest Service and resituating it within the gallery space. Stripped of the accompanying captions and explanatory texts that accompanied them in the Forest Service publications, the photographs appear as purist aestheticized images. However, as Roger Blackley points out, the photographs are “political in intention and relate to his passionate interest in forest management.”

Johns’s work centred primarily on promoting the objectives of the Forest Service in their drive to manage New Zealand’s natural resources by encouraging the plantation of fast-growing exotic forests to relieve pressure from the remaining stands of indigenous timber.

Principal influences for Johns were the photographers Vittorio Sella (1859-1943), an Italian mountaineer, Frank Smythe (1900-1949), botanist, mountaineer, and Everest veteran, and Herbert Ponting (1870-1935), expedition photographer to Robert Falcon Scott’s fatal Terra Nova exhibition to the South Pole in 1910-1912. These were all men who combined their love of the outdoors and adventure with photography. All three demonstrated a high level of technical ability in their photographs. The quality of Sella’s photographs is accredited to his use of 30×40 cm photographic plates. To overcome the difficulty of carrying fragile...
equipment into remote places, the photographer invented his own equipment, devising modified pack saddles and packs, to allow the large glass plates to be transported safely. His photographs were highly praised, with Ansel Adams, who viewed Sella’s work at a presentation to the US Sierra Club, saying that they inspired “a definitely religious awe.”

Human figures in Sella’s photographs are dwarfed by the presence of snowy peaks, which are as much formally arresting in their crisp focus as they are sublime in their power over the photographer’s compositions (fig.18). Accounts of Johns suggest a similar nature to Sella. His pursuit of technical excellence in outdoor photography led him to persist in designing and building his own large-format camera that could withstand aircraft vibration, a necessity for Johns’s work in aerial photography. In this he was aided by Piet van Asch (of New Zealand Aerial Mapping) and Geoff Hunter, who later introduced Johns to half-frame photography.

David Eggleton describes Johns as a “formal modernist,” and has situated his description of Johns for his book Into the Light: A History of New Zealand Photography within a chapter titled “Modernity: From High Style to Humanism.” Formal modernism in photography refers to a “straight” style of photography focusing on the formal elements of the composition and capturing them in a highly defined, crisp style. Of course, this technical quality of image was required of Johns by his employer; however, the extent to which Johns went to achieve this crispness suggests a more aesthetic vision rather than a purely scientific gaze. Barton reports that “stories are rife about the seriousness with which the artist undertook his task: waiting hours for a cloud to move, or requiring workers to rearrange themselves for the camera.” Simultaneously pursuing the instant and waiting for the

25 Eggleton, 98.
26 Barton, n.p.
atmosphere to coalesce, Johns combined an active drive to set the scene with the patience to wait for nature to show itself in the best light.

The New Zealand Forest Service was established in the 1920s to “manage soil conservation, water protection and scenic values, as well as to oversee the logging of indigenous and exotic forests.” Johns was part of an effort to gauge and record the extent of indigenous forests. Under the then Director of Forests, A. R. Entrican, an extensive survey of indigenous forests revealed an urgent need to create cutting controls for better management and to conserve water and soil levels. During this same period the massive plantings of 1925-36 – principally radiata – which had developed into a massive but little known resource, were harvested. Entrican felt “that to implement the measures indicated by the survey and extract and market the radiata successfully, a sustained promotional campaign would be needed.”

During the mid-1950s, the photographer provided aerial photographic surveys of forest areas using a large-format camera that he was instrumental in designing and building.

In 1959, the publication of a Forest Service booklet entitled *Westland’s Wealth* illustrated the growing awareness of the importance of conservation and the realisation that the golden days of the extractive industries – logging and mining – were over. Eggleton claims that “‘sustainability’ had become the new catch-cry” during this period. Johns’s photographs document the effects of logging, burning and introduced animals, such as possum and deer. His photographs, while clearly detailing the forests and patterns of selective logging, show the forest as pattern, “as intricate arrangements of line and form, as order extracted from the wild.” *Westland’s Wealth* combined large illustrations with a minimum of descriptive text (fig.19). Johns’s photographs contrast scenes of devastation in the

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27 Eggleton, 100.
28 Smith, 65.
29 Eggleton, 100.
30 Eggleton, 101.
environment with areas of virgin forest, enforcing the theme of the book: deploring past mistakes and calling for a new philosophy that better protects our natural resources.

*Westland’s Wealth* was issued under the authority of the Honourable E. T. Tirikatene, the Minister of Forests, who also wrote the foreword. In this text, Tirikatene describes the need to let go of Westland’s gold mining past and instead look to a future of sustainable forestry. The text states the importance of preserving natural forests as an important resource that “will ensure good living conditions for West Coasters now and in times to come.”

Tirikatene defines three different categories of natural forest, all of which have the potential to perform as a valuable commodity: exploitable forests of the lower country that represent a timber resource; protection forests, “which are necessary to protect the restricted farm lands against the evil consequences of accelerated erosion in the mountainous hinterland;” and the forests that make up parts of scenic reserves. All of these forests are presented as commodities in some way. The land on which the protected forests of the mountainous parts of Westland grow acts as a watershed, storing and releasing water to farms and to the lower lying forests that will be selectively harvested for timber. The forests that occupy parts of scenic reserves will encourage “camping grounds, tourist hotels, and other amenities in and near these reserves,” thus bringing added wealth to the area. The protection and management of these forests is handled primarily as a financial investment for New Zealand, one that can bring wealth to its people if properly handled. Hence, the text and accompanying images emphasises the human benefit of proper forest management.

In these photographs the forests of New Zealand are very much for its people, with the New Zealand Forest Service providing not only for economic, but also environmental,

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32 Tirikatene, n.p.
33 Tirikatene, n.p.
cultural, and social benefits. Christina Barton suggests that it was because the Forest Service saw its role as a holistic one that Johns was “able to indulge his artistic ambitions, even though he was employed to more prosaic ends.”

Many of Johns’s photographs contain people, a figure in the landscape that makes even the most remote landscape appear more accessible and, importantly, show a representative of the Forest Service at work. At the same time, these figures perform a crucial service within the composition, providing scale and proportion to the landscape so that the viewer can determine the height of trees or undergrowth. This is the case in an image of a large Rimu trunk (fig. 20). At its base stands a man whose figure is dwarfed by the tree’s immense scale. The trunk stands as a large vertical stripe in the centre of the composition. Taken from a low vantage point, we, like the man in the image, gaze up at the centuries old Rimu. The European technique of including a figure in a landscape image dates back to the Renaissance, the painted figure acting as surrogate for the viewer. As Francis Pound notes, this figure “stands for us. He gazes; we gaze. He represents the displaced glance of the real spectator: he is our painted deputy. Through him, it is the act of our seeing that we see.”

Roger Blackley, who includes the photographer in his overview of New Zealand landscape art, describes Johns’s photographs as representing “a forthright documentary realism.” Through a seemingly straightforward style Johns was able to present the aims and objectives of the Forest Service in a way that was simultaneously accessible and persuasive in its apparent truthfulness. Barton suggests that Johns’s contribution to landscape photography is “to offer a thoroughly modernist approach to his subject that refuses any romantic return to primeval nature, just as it inserts something intensely personal into the

34 Barton, n.p.
36 Blackley, 98.
managed manipulation of our natural world.”

Johns’s photographs do not shy away from human intervention in the landscape, as this is the message that he was attempting to convey: conservation through careful management. Johns met John Szarkowski, Director of the Department of Photography at New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 1978. His comments were an important accolade for the photographer: “He seemed to think that the message was getting through. There was a sense of purpose,” Johns recalled. More than merely formal compositions, Johns’s photographs communicated.

Eggleton suggests that the success of John’s photographs was that they operated on more than one level. The author states: “they provide information about the state of the landscape; they resonate with ecological awareness; and they demonstrate a mastery of formal design.” Johns’s photographs evoke a distinct formal sensibility that is not found in images of the same subject taken by foresters for similar purposes. Barton observes: “What fascinates is the seamless blending of purpose: the combination of images that convey a wealth of visual information reinforced by often detailed captions, and the careful attention to framing, composition and fine printing.”

Main and Turner comment of Johns that “no matter how technical an assignment, he always sought to wrest from it a picture to satisfy his restrained but acute sense of form.” This is demonstrated in his photograph of burnt Corsican pine, Balmoral, Canterbury, 1955 (fig.21). The Balmoral forest fire in 1955 was the most disastrous exotic forest fire in New Zealand at the time, eventually covering 7,790 acres. This large gelatin silver print displays

37 Barton, n.p.
38 Johns, quoted in Smith, 64.
39 Eggleton, 98.
40 Barton, n.p.
a composition of standing and felled pines, stripped of any foliage by fire. The geometric pattern of the vertical and horizontal pines is effectively captured by the monochromatic print. Johns is responding to the environment by capturing it in a way that highlights its formal qualities. Like the fire, the printing process has stripped the scene of any colour, reducing it to its most basic parts. The contrast between the silver pines and the white sky creates an interesting arrangement of negative shapes carved out of the skyline. Johns’s photograph shows a landscape that is ordered, geometric, displaying a simplicity of design that is surprisingly dynamic.

While Johns’s photograph efficiently documented the charred interior of the Forest Service tract, Charles C. Eldredge, author of Pacific Parallels: Artists and the Landscape in New Zealand (1991), saw much more. Eldredge links Johns to other national artists who employed a “frozen flame and slain tree” motif in their work. The author suggests that the use of this motif bespoke an international awareness on the part of New Zealand artists, with historian Michael Dunn linking the regional subject to such international imagery as “Max Ernst’s mysterious forests, Yves Tanguy’s surreal spaces, and Salvador Dali’s suggestive forms, to themes of trees or nature by Edward Weston, Paul Nash, and Henry Moore.”43 This linking of Johns to such artists suggests an effort to re-evaluate the photographer’s work to something approaching Modernist art, a far cry from the documentary mission Johns was set by the Forest Service. However, Eldredge states that Johns’s work was primarily a “conservationist’s crusade.”44 While the uniformity of the ordered exotic forest appears discordant amongst the tangled native bush, the photographer’s images “celebrates the managed forests of fast-growing trees, both for the formal inspiration they provide and, equally important, for the precious relief they offer to New Zealand’s imperilled stands of

43 Eldredge, 42.
44 Eldredge, 47.
indigenous growth.”

While exotic forestry lent itself easily to geometric formal arrangement, the photographer has “had to work hard to extract such designs from the tangled line and form of the New Zealand bush.” Yet even Johns’s images of the wild forests of the West Coast of the South Island hold some element of formal arrangement, of the photographer somehow composing out of the natural forest a simple yet elegant design that holds the focus of the image while also providing data on the subject. This is particularly present in Johns’s close-ups, in which features of plants and animals appear like modernist abstract designs (fig.22), and in some of his aerial photographs, in which the topography is flattened into shapes and patterns, like a patch-work quilt (fig.23). The photographer’s close-up shots of plant species are particularly reminiscent of the work of Karl Blossfeldt (German, 1865-1932), whose highly detailed images of plants belonged to the Neue Sachlichkeit (fig.24). Yet where Blossfeldt removed his plants from their natural habitat, Johns’s photographs of plants reside firmly within the context of his conservation work for the Forest Service.

Johns’s photographs demonstrate that the photographer viewed the landscape in a highly formal way. His crisp, compositionally arresting scenes speak of a landscape that is not primeval, but carefully managed and preserved by the actions of humankind. Many of his images suggest a dynamic simplicity in the carefully captured cultured forests. Johns’s photographs conjured order from the wilder indigenous forests, conveying a formal viewpoint while simultaneously offering a wealth of visual information. The formal aspects of his work can be read not as abstract images devoid of content, but as references to modernity and

45 Eldredge, 47.
46 Smith, 66.
industry. Formally, they resemble other photographs of the modern industrial era, displaying regularized, altered forms.

**Lloyd Godman: Humanised Nature**

A river rushes towards the camera, droplets spraying the lens and rising up into the air in an image of arrested motion. The horizon is tilted on an angle, giving the effect of the camera being jostled by the strong current. The landscape beyond the river is cast into shadow, while the water is a graphic mix of white river foam and the darker, more sinister depths beneath. This is an image of the Kawarau River, taken by photographer Lloyd Godman (fig.25). The generic idea of landscape in art tends to be quite narrow, often comprised solely of scenic views, a picturesque scene shown from a distant view-point. Yet landscape is in fact everything we see when we set foot outside our door or glance out the window. Godman brings to his images an immediacy that is alien to much landscape photography. The photographer’s work surrounding the Clutha and Kawarau rivers, in its chaotic, pulsing imagery appears less concerned with the formal elements of the picturesque as much as preservation; of the life of the rivers, of a memory, of a time, of a place. His images connote something highly personal, homage to the places that he photographs, which are tied in to his own psyche. In the tradition of artists such as Petrus van der Velden and Colin McCahon, Godman’s photographs attest to the spiritual resource of nature, and its elemental rhythms that remains potent up to this day. These photographs are a testament to the power that nature holds, not just physically, but also in our minds – a power that is tied to memory and identity. Godman states: “Photographs are something I have always been intrigued with. From as early as I can remember, I was captivated by their ability to act as depositories of memory, they allow us to recall with specific detail people, places and events
of our past.” Photographs function to augment our experience of a place, reinforcing our memories and allowing us to experience visually events to which we may not have been physically present.

Born in Dunedin in 1952, Godman developed an interest in photography in the late 1960s, when he met American-born New Zealand wildlife photographer Kim Westerskov. Godman’s passion for surfing took him to Hawaii in 1973, “where photography became his second passion.” His experiences surfing influenced his approach to photography: “When you surf, you spend a lot of time waiting for the right wave to come; so you can either curse the situation or tune into a whole host of organic experiences.” While he was unable to train as a photographer in Dunedin in the late 1970s due to a lack of courses, he completed a Diploma in Professional Photography through correspondence with the School of Modern Photography, New York. Godman was employed by the Otago Polytechnic, first as an audio-visual technician, then as a photography technician, and then as a photography tutor.

Godman now lives and works in Australia, where his interest has turned to the photosensitive properties of plants, and the construction of living plant sculptures from the Bromeliad family.

Godman’s photographs of the Clutha and Kawarau rivers were exhibited at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1984. In 1989, The Last Rivers’ Song was published as a book featuring reproductions of a selection of the photographs from the original exhibition. The photographs that make up Godman’s The Last Rivers’ Song (1983-1984) literally preserve the appearance of the Clutha and Kawarau rivers before the damming of the Upper Clutha in 1989. The construction of the dam filled the gorge above Clyde, creating Lake Dunstan.

49 Main and Turner, 82.
50 Lloyd Godman, quoted in Main and Turner, 83.
51 Main and Turner, 82.
New Zealand Government passed the Clutha Development Empowering Act in 1982 to authorise the Clyde scheme; the dam was completed in 1990, but lake-filling was delayed due to a number of landslide risks. Filling of the lake finally commenced on April 19, 1992, proceeding through four controlled stages until completed in August, 1993. Lake Dunstan covers an area of twenty-six square kilometres and raised original water levels by sixty metres.\(^52\) Taken shortly after the passage of the 1982 act, these photographs are the two rivers’ last song, recording, amongst other locations, the rocky, powerful stretch of water above Clyde before it was flooded. Now a placid stretch of water covers the Clyde-Cromwell Gorge, choked with extensive aquatic weed beds and covering the area’s orchards, farmland, historic sites and holiday homes.

The project was made up of two components: large composite photo murals over six metres long and smaller photographic-panels. The work was followed up with two performance works ten years later, one undertaken in 1992 and the other in 1993, during the filling of the hydro lake above the town of Clyde. The performance works, titled *Lake Fill I* and *Lake Fill II*, involved both photography and a ritualistic ceremony performed by Godman. The photography aspect of the works involved taking a series of photographs with an underwater camera of a selected vista looking up the river. The images show the land gradually disappearing beneath the rising water of the lake. Godman completed two ritualistic ceremonies to coincide with the first and second fillings of the lake, which were also documented through photography. Godman entered the water of the new lake with a camera in a water-proof casing to take a series of photographs while the lens was slowly submerged. This method of combining performance art with the documentation of photography had been around in the art world from the 1960s. At this time photography extended its conventional role in fine art. Developments such as performance art, land art, temporary installations and

conceptual art made photographic documentation essential. These art forms relied on photography to capture the appearance of the work, while still maintaining the primacy of the original. Here Godman combines photography and performance art more intrinsically, with photography being both the performance and the documentation aspects of the project.

The photographer used an interesting perspective for *The Last Rivers’ Song*, with many of them taken using a remote-controlled and motor-driven camera positioned on a retractable boom roughly five metres long and fixed low to the surface of the water. Turner states that “the results are startling; the sense of movement, of power, of speed – sometimes frozen or arrested – is remarkable and disturbing.” The drama of this perspective is heightened by the blurring and gliding of the water which sometimes partially covers the lens and casts a veil over the landscape beyond. The graphic qualities of the images are exceptional. Film grain “explodes like shrapnel,” highlighting the urgency of the imagery. In the exhibition hung at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery the large scale images were arranged on the walls in a manner that reinforced the power of the subject. Some hung in triptychs, while others cascaded down the wall in an echo of the rivers’ movements. To accompany the exhibition, music composed and recorded by Trevor Coleman (synthesiser) and Paul Hutchins (flute) gave the effect of the “roar and piping of water as it grinds rock, the hiss of rock chips carried down the channel.” This was not a tidy exhibition, but a noisy, raging one that pushed you beneath the surface of the rivers in something that was “almost an installation.”

While today these images may be viewed online, or in Godman’s publication of *Last Rivers’ Song*, these reproductions fall short of the arresting power of the original exhibition.

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53 Turner, 8.
54 Lloyd Godman, interview with the author, November 14, 2011.
56 Lloyd Godman, quoted in Jenson.
In a review of the exhibition held at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Kai Jenson states:

“These are not so much photographs as a deliberate attempt to drown anyone who walks into the east room of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. They are whole rivers, suspended on the wall, with no guarantee that they will stay up there.”57 The huge photo-murals of the river rushed towards the viewer in a torrent that overwhelmed the senses, “a determined assault on the human viewers by the inhuman energies of rock and water. They are, if you like, the rivers’ revenge for the dam, a denial that humanity exists.”58 By reducing the scale of these photographs they have, like their subject itself, lost some of their power on the viewer, they have been calmed to an extent, but not entirely stilled.

The involved perspective of Godman’s The Last Rivers’ Song series, in which water explodes towards the viewer with an immensity and power, gives an effect that is at once threatening and seductive. Some might argue that some of these images, with their intimate perspective, are not landscapes, as most photographic albums are taken up to some extent by rivers and valleys shot from a distance, removed from the power of their subjects. Godman brings back to the landscape photograph the raw power of nature. Godman’s work is animated, explosive, showing nature as alive and in a constant state of movement or transition. The photographer states: “For me it was the movement of the river that would be lost when the dam was filled.”59 Godman was primarily concerned with the vitality of the river, and he talks about his subject as one might about a living model:

The rock was hard solid and contained the water, while the water was soft, fluid wore away at the rock – at times it even threw huge boulders downstream with amazing power. And yet despite the opposites, there were evident parallels in the

57 Jenson.
58 Jenson.
59 Lloyd Godman, interview with the author, November 14, 2011.
veins and ribs in the white water and the lines in rocks that suggested they had
once been liquid.60

Godman’s use of language suggests that he views the rivers as living entities in some way. When describing the contrast between rock and liquid in his images, the photographer discusses the ripples and rapids of the rivers as veins and ribs, vital parts of the human body. What is most captivating about the photographer’s work is that it appears to live and breathe on its own, containing a kinetic quality apart from the photographer, the project and even the subject. Eggleton describes this effect by suggesting that photographers like Godman invest in nature “animist energies.”61 This is compounded by William Main and John B. Turner in their anthology of New Zealand photographers, which describes Godman’s work as frequently centred on the balance of life and struggles for survival.62 Godman photographs a kind of holy wilderness, in which rivers are worshipped for their life-giving qualities. Brian Turner suggests that the effect of the swirling waters is one of “extraordinary vitality.” The writer goes on to propose that the photographer “is not so much in awe of the river, more entranced by it – for its life-giving, stimulating life-enhancing qualities.”63

The speed with which these rivers rush towards the viewer gives the feel of the image being on the brink of chaos, a threat to the viewer in its raw, primeval quality. Turner comments that many of the photographs are explosive: “the water seems to spread like shrapnel or come at us like tracer. Others convey threat or menace; but all insist that here is something closer to the true reality of rivers in general, and these rivers in particular.

60 Lloyd Godman, interview with the author, November 14, 2011.
61 Eggleton, 149.
62 Main and Turner, 82.
63 Turner, 8.
Godman’s images show or imply that the forces at work are, on the one hand, raw, primeval, dangerous, and on the other, seductive.”

Godman himself comments:

But from my very first visit to this environment, I also sensed that here in these canyons was something of a primeval New Zealand: a quintessence that only the initiated could perceive, a darker mysterious side to the landscape that opposed the popular image of yellow poplar trees, blue water, the delicate cultivation of the orchards, the cheerful escape of a summer vacation. It was a distinct quality that Van Der Velden, McCahon, Baxter, Hotere had already perceived, a blinding light against a primeval blackness.

Godman views his work as continuing the lineage of New Zealand artists who found a spiritual power in the landscape. This relates strongly to Godman’s choice to use solely black and white for his photographs of the Clutha and Kawarau rivers, recalling in their graphic qualities the work of Colin McCahon. The dark tones and turbulent energy of the images speaks to the river’s uncontrollable power. Godman chose to photograph the Kawarau in flood, which he then displayed in seven overlapping panels with a total mural height of three meters and a width of seven. Godman places our eyes in midstream, inches above the white water. The big Kawarau mural was taken during the snow floods, when the river is at its strongest, having risen four metres (fig.26). “Most people think a river just flows” Godman says, “but the Kawarau surges. I saw it flow down one side of a rock and then surge back up the other side, more like a tide than a river. To get this shot, however, I had to be down low. With such violence, with boulders being pushed around, I wondered what I was doing there.”

Godman does not allow us a sentimental view of the river. Instead, his photographs

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64 Turner, 7.
66 Godman, quoted in Jenson.
evoke a primal strength of form focused on the movement of the currents. Turner comments: “Even in those images in which the river appears benign, almost serene, one senses that this is no more than a veneer: there is always a hint of the dark paradox inherent in an element that enlivens and yet can so easily, so quickly destroy us.”

Godman’s photographs epitomize key qualities of the Sublime, a sort of pleasurable terror that relies on darkness, sudden transitions and magnificence. Godman himself references Robert Capa’s photograph of an American soldier landing on Omaha Beach in Normandy on D-Day (fig.27) as the inspiration behind the graphic quality of the film grain in his images: “From this photograph I learned that photographs don’t have to be sharp or have a rich zone system tonal scale to have sublime power. For me capturing the wild river had a similar urgency and power to D-Day.” The blurriness of his photographs effectively captures the movement of the rivers and the passage of time.

For Godman the significance of Last River’s Song is a matter of place. The artist recalls holidaying at Cromwell in the summers of his childhood, stating that “the Clutha river was also a place of family nostalgia, a place I had emotional possession and one I belonged to.” Godman had holidayed with family for many summers at Cromwell, at the junction of the Clutha and Kawarau rivers: “It was a place where I had hunted tadpoles as if they were strange magical creatures that might possess the answers of life, fished for eels in black waters and flickering fire-light, slept under the clear inland skies and wondered how large really was the universe.”

However, rather than documenting the human history that would be flooded by the filling of the dam, Godman chose to explore a landscape that is primeval. There is little human presence in these images. In one mural, a triptych of three separate

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68 Pound, 19.
69 Lloyd Godman, interview with the author, November 14, 2011.
photographs, the photographer has used gold dredged from the Clutha River over sepia tone to produce a rich medley of reds and browns, which appears like the rust on the photograph (fig.28). This gold toning ties the image more intrinsically to the place where it was shot as it contains not only the visage of the river, but part of the river itself. The mural displays successive shots of one view, a bluff taken from the water level. The red is used only on the middle panel, giving a sinister edge as the lens is wholly submerged (fig.29). The water obscures the only hint of human presence in any of the five murals on display (fig.30), a tiny telephone pole atop the bluff in the background. Kai Jenson suggests that, to Godman, this pitiful artefact is a deliberate reminder of McCahon’s symbol for “the crucifixion of the land.”

Godman clearly views the damming of the Clutha as a loss. The power captured in his images was lost forever when the gorge above Clyde was filled in the early 90s. The artist’s photographs represent the cost of the hydro-electric scheme. This loss is not economic. Impossible to calculate in monetary terms, the value of the river as it existed before the dam has in some way been visualised by Godman. His images represent a yearning for a pre-animal, primeval landscape, uninhabited and redolent with spiritual energy. Turner suggests that Godman “is implying that, physically, by our very nature, we too are rivers, part of the blood of the earth, of this planet which we enjoy and often gravely abuse.” These rivers, which have “cut deep into our consciousness,” represent in their water and currents the movement of blood around our bodies. By damming the Clutha we are stilling the circulation of the life blood of the landscape. It is the last time that the sound of the water will carry through the gorge above Clyde, its last song.

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71 Jenson.
72 Turner, 8.
Environmental photography in the context of Johns and Godman is not necessarily about protesting change or alteration. It is about documenting these changes, acknowledging them and asking the viewer to acknowledge what is lost or gained. Johns’s photographs as part of the Forest Service’s campaign represent a change in the management of indigenous forests and a shift to viewing nature within the context of conservation. Godman’s photographs witness the last moments of the Clutha and Kawarau rivers before the damming of the Clutha. While Godman is not opposed to the building of the dam and the benefits of hydro-electricity, his photographs recognize the cost of the dam, not to the people within the landscape but to the rivers themselves as their vitality is lessened and harnessed for our use. Johns’s work, in its ordered beauty and clarity of composition, has gained recent popularity in the art world for its modernist elements; however the focus of his photographs is the conservation of the landscape and its forests through careful management. The work of these photographers resists the clichés of scenic photography, and contains a message of conservation that remains relevant to this day.
4. The Engineered Landscape: The Photography of Wayne Barrar

This chapter will examine altered landscape photography in New Zealand through the work of photographer Wayne Barrar. The subject of altered landscapes in New Zealand photography is not unique to the work of either Barrar or Haruhiko Sameshima, whose photography will be discussed in the succeeding chapter. Ans Westra, Peter Peryer, Peter Evans and others have engaged in work that shows, as Westra defines it, “how people have left their mark on the environment, have shaped it to suit their needs.” Barrar has extensively explored contemporary and historic interactions with the landscape and by doing so engages in dialogue between nature and culture. To see the landscape as it was once experienced by our tipuna is no longer possible. To imagine the landscape as it once existed in an Edenic state is even further from the reality. Despite this we continue to describe our landscape as it may have existed at the time of its human discovery. Missing are the new and ever increasing subdivisions, construction sites, mines, and hydro-electricity schemes. Even those of us living in our expanding cities appear to have a somewhat Arcadian view of our national landscape that has nothing to do with their everyday environment. Barrar suggests that “the reality of our landscape is a dynamic indicator of the social changes constantly facing us. What doesn’t appear in our national vision of landscape may therefore be of more significance than what does.”

Wayne Barrar (born in Christchurch, New Zealand in 1957) is currently an Associate Professor and the Director of Photography at the School of Fine Arts at Massey University.

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1 Ans Westra, quoted in United Banking Group Ltd and Sarjeant Gallery, Photographic Award (Whanganui: Sarjeant Gallery 1990), 83.
University in Wellington. He holds a Master of Design from Massey University, and a
Postgraduate Diploma of Fine Arts from the University of Auckland. Barrar also graduated
with a Bachelor of Science from the University of Canterbury in 1978, and for a time taught
science at Whanganui High School. Besides numerous exhibition catalogues, Barrar has two
work, and *Wayne Barrar: An Expanding Subterra* (2010), the result of an extended
photography project focusing on underground mining spaces in New Zealand and overseas.
Critical writing on the photographer includes reviews of these publications, published and
unpublished essays on Barrar’s photographic series, and various published interviews with
the photographer, including an interview with Allan Smith in *Contemporary New Zealand
Photographers* (2006). Beyond this, Barrar has been included in both Main and Turner’s, and
Eggleton’s histories of photography in New Zealand.

Barrar offers a new viewpoint with his images. The photographer takes a turn of 180
degrees, facing, not out into the wilderness, but back in at our culture, thus examining how
culture and industry are making their footprint on our natural environment. The
photographer’s publication *Shifting Nature: Photographs by Wayne Barrar* demonstrates that
landscape is inherently a cultural experience, inseparable from social or political context.
*Shifting Nature* is a significant landmark in Barrar’s career as it “presented for the first time,
nine series of photographs spanning over fifteen years of sustained practice, in a single
publication.”³ It was this publication and the accompanying essay by environmental writer
Geoff Park (1942-2009) that “firmly placed Barrar at the centre of discussions around the
impact of human activity on the land, and the sustainability of this interaction, particularly in

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³ Aaron Kreisler, “Ground Control,” in *Wayne Barrar: An Expanding Subterra*, by Wayne
Barrar (Dunedin: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2010), 114.
a New Zealand context.” One of the series presented in *Shifting Nature* was *Landscape of Change*, an on-going project that Barrar describes as laying “the foundation for my approach to issues related to the habitation, appropriation and control of our land.” The on-going nature of this project reflects the basic theme of Barrar’s work: the continuing impact of humans on the land. Barrar first exhibited images bearing the series title *Landscape of Change*, in a solo exhibition at the Sarjeant Gallery, Whanganui, in 1987. The series was augmented in *Shifting Nature* to include more recent photographs of locations such as Maxwell, near Whanganui (1988), Rarangi Road, Marlborough (1999), and Mitre Peak, Fiordland (2000; fig.31).

The photographer presents a new way of seeing and knowing our country that does not rely on the picturesque to bandage the scars which we have left on the landscape. As Park comments, Barrar’s method of picturing the landscape allows us to slip inside, his photographs work by “pulling at our legs, imploring us to come down from the Picturesque Viewing Tower. He doesn’t shout because he knows that won’t get the message across and considered. But he doesn’t want us to stay up there in the bitter colonial wind.” Rather than venerating nature, Barrar explores our interaction with it and encourage us to look further than the view that has been constructed for us. Like the first aviators, we are seeing what might be a familiar landscape from an entirely new perspective. Barrar introduces the typical New Zealand landscape, a melding of the vernacular and the scenic to create a particular type of beauty.

**Wayne Barrar: A Serious Kind of Beauty**

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4 Kreisler, 114.
Barrar’s work since the late 1970s marks him as a “veteran photographer of the built landscape.” Matthew Coolidge, Director of the Center for Land Use Interpretation, an organisation which has worked with the photographer, describes Barrar as possessing “an established sense of the sublime, a capacity to recontextualize the familiar, and the experience to effectively explore the margins of the known.” The power of Barrar’s images lie in their ability to present an environment or situation that may be familiar to the viewer in a way that offers an entirely new visual experience, presenting the landscape in a way that is both unexpected and disarmingly straightforward. Primarily Barrar’s photographs display a firm knowledge of the working aspect of our landscape and how it has been further manipulated to perform for us. Moreover, the photographer’s work draws attention to the dualities present in these landscapes: of natural and artificial, organic and inorganic, and the sometimes surprising relationships between nature and industry.

Barrar’s interest in science is reflected in his work process, which involves sustained research concerning a site or issue prior to shooting. He grounds his photographic narratives of place in knowledge of the processes that have formed particular environments. Joanna Paul, in her essay “A Human Ecology,” which informed the exhibition catalogue for Barrar’s *Saltworks: The Processed Landscape* (1989) points out the scientific aspect of the photographer’s work:

[Barrar] remains scientist/artist in his use of the camera. He understands and masters the technique without being deflected from his singleness of purpose . . .

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8 Matthew Coolidge, Director, Center for Land Use Interpretation, “Accumulating Histories: Photographs by Wayne Barrar,” in *Accumulating Histories* (Whanganui, New Zealand: Sarjeant Gallery, 2003), n.p. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at the Sarjeant Gallery, Whanganui. The Center for Land Use Interpretation is a United States based research and education organisation founded in 1994 that focuses on humankind’s interaction with the contemporary landscape.

9 Coolidge, n.p.
As a clear teaching aid the camera centres its ‘subject’, the delicate or frank intervention of technology or purpose in a landscape.  

Behind Barrar’s photographs lies a thorough understanding of both the medium and subject. His photographic style is crisp and straightforward, its effect centred on the subject of the image. The photographer delves into how the land has come to be shaped in a particular way, be it through natural processes or artificial means. This is coupled with a suitable photographic process that matches the experience of capturing a particular site. This involves not only the consideration of what would suit the output of the project, but relates to how Barrar has experienced a site, and his continuing interest in different processes as “another tool to tap into.”

Barrar’s early photographs of altered landscapes date from a similar period as those of the ten artists involved in New Topographics – with his solo exhibition Landscape of Change opening at the Sarjeant Gallery in Whanganui in 1987 – but his work evolved without the influence of this exhibition for some years. As Barrar states, there is “always an assumption in New Zealand that you always follow the trends of the US, and often this is true of course, but equally evolution can be parallel.” Like the photographers of New Topographics, Barrar was influenced by the work of nineteenth century topographical photographers, in his case Daniel Louis Mundy (1826-1881), who began photographing in New Zealand around 1864. Barrar suggests that Mundy’s work parallels a number of American photographers working in a similar period and landscape: Carlton Watkins, Timothy O’Sullivan and Andrew Russell, photographers also working during a period of substantial change in the natural environment,

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11 Wayne Barrar, interview with the author, August 11, 2011.
12 Wayne Barrar, interview with the author, August 11, 2011.
as the American landscape was being converted from an unexplored to humanised space.\textsuperscript{13} It was the work of these photographers and others that brought about a renewed interest in the landscape genre in the 1970s, exemplified in such exhibitions as the 1976 \textit{New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape}. Barrar states: “I was impressed with the shift in viewpoint they indicated. These works respected the fact that all in the landscape was not untouched. They also allowed the photographer to radically change his or her viewing perspective from a position set in ‘civilisation’, looking out to the wilderness, to a stance that pointed the camera back at the encroaching industry or commerce at the edges of our towns or cities.”\textsuperscript{14}

Barrar is not necessarily interested in environmental activism. Rather, he is fascinated by the complexity of issues surrounding landscape. Thus he does not photograph the landscape that remains outside of our control (what little of it there remains) but the zones of land adjacent to towns and cities, “the areas that constitute our working countryside.”\textsuperscript{15} It is here, Barrar feels, that “the tensions between natural or climatic processes and land practices are most evident.”\textsuperscript{16} It is in these areas that landscape is expected to produce food and other necessities such as timber and electricity, and to act as location for our leisure activities. Barrar describes this landscape’s defining characteristic as “the substantial level of control evident.” Artificial barriers divide the landscape for multiple uses, and the collaboration between nature and the engineer has resulted in a space that is expected to “perform.”\textsuperscript{17} Barrar’s camera focuses on the landscape that we have created to serve our demanding lifestyles. The photographer suggests that it is these spaces that “typify the nature/culture

\textsuperscript{14} Barrar, “Landscape of Change,” 24.
\textsuperscript{17} Barrar, “Shifting Nature,” 6.
battlefields more clearly than most.”\textsuperscript{18} The photographer recognizes in his work that land-based activity has come to be governed by rules and regulations that reflect a shift towards a “controlled and modified landscape.”\textsuperscript{19} Barrar comments: “We encourage a clean green New Zealand image while our surroundings become increasingly humanised.”\textsuperscript{20} These inter-zones are becoming increasingly vast, and are unalterably transformed by a history of human interaction.

The photographer recognizes the political dimension to his work in that “all land in New Zealand is a contestable space.”\textsuperscript{21} Thus all landscape photography is essentially political, addressing or reflecting such issues as who sees themselves as having stewardship, indigenous land rights, or control over resource management. In contrast to the \textit{New Topographics} photographers, Barrar immediately abandoned any notions of objectivity in the production of his photographs, which by their very existence ascribe importance to a particular site. The photographer does however subscribe to some ambivalence in his work, stating:

Photographs related to the process of resource management may be seen as a comment on our collective relationship to the land. Like that relationship, they can be ambivalent. They can reflect both the constructive outcomes of a committee decision and the negative consequences of poor decision-making.\textsuperscript{22}

Likewise, these photographs can be ambivalent in terms of their recognition of the beautiful in the ordinary or industrial. As Barrar comments, “In extracting this visual potential from the

\textsuperscript{22} Barrar, “Shifting Nature,” 8.
modified landscape, photographs can contribute to the challenging and reforming of attitudes towards it.”

**Altered Landscapes: A Binocular Vision**

A common response to *New Lake/New Ramp, Marlborough* (1985; fig.32) today is to assume that it is a digitally produced double exposure due to the hard edge running down the centre of the photograph. However, this is a straight photograph that is free of darkroom or digital manipulation, which was not widely available in 1985. The edge of the boat ramp slices vertically through the water of the lake resulting in one side being composed of smooth concrete and the other of rocks and submerged grass or reeds, making it appear as a composite image of spliced landscapes. This photograph is part of Barrar’s series *Landscape of Change*, which brings together an eclectic array of landscapes photographed from a unique vantage point. We view these landscapes through the frame of our control over our environment. However much we may want to see only the natural environment in Barrar’s images, the cultural or industrial environment continually obstructs our view.

Barrar describes his *Landscape of Change* series as “a ‘default’ project,” as it provides the foundation for the photographer’s “approach to issues related to the habitation, appropriation and control of our land.” All of his projects appear to link back to issues surrounding nature and culture. As the photographer states, “my work has evolved into a number of series – some finite, others ongoing. They may vary in approach and process, but in all of them the central consideration is this inter-relationship between culture and nature in an increasingly complex society.” For *Landscape of Change* Barrar took into consideration “the heritage of landscape photographic practice that precedes my efforts and that may have

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shaped the way I ‘represent’ contemporary landscape.”

Barrar mentions Mundy’s photographs of the New Zealand landscape from around the 1860s in relation to *Landscape of Change*:

> When I view his work, it is apparent that he moved through an expanding colonial landscape which was being converted from a largely ‘unknown’ to a ‘humanized’ space. . . . Mundy, and others such as Alfred Burton and James Ring, provide topographical reference points that photographers of contemporary landscape in New Zealand can use in developing a new viewpoint.

Works by these early photographers today function as historical documents, but they also allow us to “consider what made it important enough to hold the photographer’s gaze.”

Mundy, photographing at a time when scenic views of natural wonders flourished in the pages of photographic albums, “responded positively to the engineered view, and featured even the most rudimentary and vernacular of constructions in his images.” For Barrar, these early images of New Zealand provide an important reference point for his own image making, as they reveal something about our changing relationship with the land.

The collage effect of *New Lake/New Ramp* suggests a dualism of nature and artifice, a common thread that runs through Barrar’s work. Derek Schulz suggests that this dualism in Barrar’s work contains a wealth of ironic reference, “from dualism and the Newtonian foundations of technology, to the human body itself and the arbitrary manner in which the

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binocular vision of the photographer is channelled through the single lens of the camera.”

By the Newtonian foundations of technology, Schulz refers to Sir Isaac Newton’s theory of motion, specifically his third law, that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, drawing in scientific notions of duality and balance. More than this, Schulz states, this dualism, found here in the illusion of collage, lends to the images the sense that one might fly or escape into them, which was “not part of the descriptive ambition of the topographical photograph.”

The landscape photographed in *Main Trunk Rail Line/Concrete Power Pole* (1989; fig.33), a Cibachrome print from the series *Saltworks: The Processed Landscape* (1987-1989) retains this theme of duality, appearing as if viewed through a window frame, divided as it is by the concrete power poll that bisects the photograph. This may relate to the way in which most New Zealanders view this site: either from the road, the window of the train that passes through the saltworks, or from the air, thus allowing the entire operation to be viewed at once.

The landscape at the Lake Grassmere Saltworks appears highly synthetic due to the processes involved in salt production. Captured in high-gloss Cibachrome printing, the pink to purple colour of the crystallisation ponds is caused by natural microscopic green algae that change to pink due to the high salt concentration. Barrar captured the progress of the brine held in the series of ponds by recording the range of colours that it passes through during salt production. The photographer comments that the landscape appears simultaneously “natural or organic while also exhibiting a visual toxicity of unfamiliar hues.”

The photographer intentionally highlighted the colours by rendering them on the highly artificial polyester

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31 Schulz, 67.


surface of the Cibachrome print: “Recognition and awareness of this artificiality are at the core of the Saltworks series. In accepting the beauty of the transformed Lake Grassmere, it is necessary to accept that such a landscape can have meaning beyond productivity.” In his photographs Barrar has made the lake a place of contemplation and wonder. Different hues, and the reflection of the landscape in the storage pond, create a series of vistas, transforming the scene into something mesmerizing, almost abstract (fig.34). Barrar saw this as an opportunity to “test the boundaries of conventions in rendering landscapes.” The photographer presents a twist on “the most common of landscape photographs,” capturing a sunrise over the lake, in which the usual hues, reds and golds, are found more in the water than the sky (fig.35).

Barrar’s interest in these landscapes goes beyond their visual characteristics. Both sites show a symbiotic ecology at work. The lake in Marlborough is an artificial construct, a hydro lake constructed in a region prone to draught. Likewise, the saltworks operation at Lake Grassmere relies on the lake’s natural properties and location to produce salt, an abundance of warm north-westerly winds (Māori know the lake as Kāpara-te-hau – ‘wind-ruffled waters’), and long hours of sunshine and low summer rainfall, which provide the evaporation necessary for extracting salt from the sea at this latitude. Unlike any mining based operation, the salt extraction is carried out by pumping sea water through a series of evaporation ponds to increase its salinity, a slow process that relies on a replenishable resource. This is an entirely artificial zone, without the control cycles of the saltworks the

landscape would quickly return to how it existed until the 1940s: “a mud bath in winter and a
dustbowl in summer, with the occasional natural deposit of salt.”

Barrar takes the landscape that we see every day – the altered or industrialised
landscape – and presents it to us in a way that we have not seen before, highlighting its
artificiality and highly designed nature, its beauty, and the complex relationship between
industry and the natural environment. At the sight of one of his photographs, the viewer is
driven to understand why Barrar chose to capture a particular scene, to investigate what drew
the photographer to what might even be a bleak or ugly environment. Something pulls you
into the photograph and you come to the understanding that what might initially appear ugly
or engineered in fact has its own sort of beauty that continues to haunt you even after turning
away, “making you think in ways you should have but haven’t until you saw it.”

Park, in his
essay for Barrar’s book Shifting Nature, describes an experience he had while paddling solo
on Lake Tongariro: “But were someone with me, I would say: ‘It’s as though we’ve paddled
into a Wayne Barrar photograph.’ So I tell myself.” Park was a scientist and nature writer,
an ecologist who Barrar met in the early 1990s. Barrar describes Park’s work as paralleling
his own, his photographs a visual articulation of Park’s writing. Park felt that Barrar’s
photographs offered him a new way of viewing the landscape, “freed from map lines and
units, and from dogmatic determinations of what it is.” Like Colin McCahon, Laurence
Aberhart and John Bevan Ford, Barrar’s photographs inspire Park – and us as viewers – to
view a particular landscape in new ways, stimulating “the tentative, wondering, regardful
sense of country that must precede comprehending it as sign and symbol.”

37 “Salt - Early industry at Lake Grassmere”, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand,
38 Park, 16.
39 Park, 13.
40 Barrar, interview with the author, August 11, 2011.
41 Park, 13.
In our search for the scenic picturesque Barrar exposes what we have been missing up until this point and what we will miss forever as these landscapes have been irreversibly altered and we will never again view them in their “original” state. Yet Barrar’s work, rather than overtly mourning the loss of an untouched landscape, reaches a strange equilibrium between the immense industrial structures and the gravity of the landscape. They present a contemporary type of beauty, one that gazes, not out at the wilderness as the colonial photographers did, but back in at us. As Geoff Park suggests, “we don’t need people-in-the-landscape to discern that it’s not nature that he’s pointing the camera at – it’s us at work on her, harnessing her power and being summarily humbled.”

These photographs are a depiction of place. The photographer tells a narrative of the landscape and its inhabitants, capturing culture, time and history in his images. This reflects the 180-degree shift that the New Topographics photographers presented in their work. Where conventional modernist landscape photographers stood on the edges of civilisation and looked out from the roadside, New Topographics stood at the same point and looked back at civilisation, firmly situating their work in the contemporary context. While Barrar remains interested in unadulterated space he is aware that even these reserves exist because they are enclosed, allowing access in and out, marking it as another element of artificial space.

**Mason Bay: A Natural Succession**

Sometimes, human intervention in the landscape is more subtle and may even pass un-noticed. Wayne Barrar was initially drawn to photograph Mason Bay, on the west coast of Stewart Island, as it “appeared to have the potential to function as a ‘reference point’ . . . a place where few people go and cultural influence is negligible.” Having visited this area myself, it is easy to understand how this landscape could suggest an untouched, isolated

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42 Park, 18.
location. The rolling dunes that back into the dark waves of the Tasman create a primitive environment that can leave a visitor feeling terribly exposed to the elements. However, as Barrar states,

Even this relatively isolated location exhibited the classic symptoms of human meddling. Sure, it was a powerful and dramatic environment rich in ‘natural’ indigenous values. But it also reminded me how subtle cultural interventions can be, even mimicking natural features in much the same way that a virus can disguise itself in the body.  

The presence of European marram grass in these dunes is a reminder of the extensive changes that are occurring in even our most remote landscapes. This introduced species competes with the native orange pingao that is used to weave Māori kete. Barrar recounts that “to walk around Mason Bay is to experience the actual shifting interface of this quiet colonisation. The marram is a true post-colonial remnant, visually apparent. Large zones of the grass have replaced pingao through ruthless interspecies competition.” The photographer suggests that this process is complicated further by the successional changes of a landscape in a constant state of movement. Barrar’s photographs show dunes colonised by marram, either partially or fully, and forests being swallowed up by the marching sand dunes, creating a landscape that appears chillingly post-apocalyptic (fig.36, fig.37 and fig.38). The photographer describes this landscape as “rough and messy but nonetheless striking in its ambivalence.”

This series presents an image of “landscape as ideology.” D. W. Meinig describes this concept of landscape as follows: “Just as the scientist looks through the facade of obvious elements and sees processes in operation, so others may see those same elements as clues and

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44 Barrar, “Mason Bay: A Natural Succession,” 74.
45 Barrar, “Mason Bay: A Natural Succession,” 74.
46 Barrar, “Mason Bay: A Natural Succession,” 74.
the whole scene as a symbol of the values, the governing ideas, the underlying philosophies of a culture.” Meinig’s book, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (1979), was published at a time where new cultural landscape studies were questioning the nostalgic idealization of previous American scholars, similar to the way in which the photographers of *New Topographics* questioned the relevancy of images of wild and untamed landscapes of contemporary America. Barrar’s photographs act as powerful discussions about colonisation. The images investigate the subtle visual realities inherent in a landscape that appears to be unaltered but is nonetheless a product of human contact, playing on our inability to recognize the introduced from the natural native. The European marram has replaced the indigenous pingao to the point that the introduced species appears as the natural vegetation in its new habitat, raising disturbing parallels between this and the wider colonial process in New Zealand. Meinig suggests that this particular view of landscape “clearly insists that if we want to change the landscape in important ways we shall have to change the ideas that have created and sustained what we see.” This reflects Park’s suggestion that Barrar’s photographs act as “learning posts” for the first stage of the journey towards greater environmental sensitivity. These photographs urge us to recognize something important about ourselves and our culture, our limits and our capability to control our earth.

**Going Underground: Mapping the terrain of industrial mining**

To get away from the contested spaces that make up the New Zealand landscape – and indeed any landscape – Barrar took his photography underground, exploring landscapes that we are only just starting to recognize as landscapes, the rapidly expanding Subterra, a neologism based on “subterranean,” or “sub-terrain,” and evocative of appellations used on

48 Meinig, 42.
49 Park, 20.
early maps and charts, such as *terra nova* (the New World) or *terra australis* (Southern Land). From 2002 to 2010 Barrar worked on a project that focused on the photographing of underground mining spaces, especially locations where post-mining habitation has occurred. These underground spaces encompassed deep mine sites and power stations, suburban dwellings in Australia, commodified mining spaces, and tourism spaces, such as the underground dive site in Bonne Terre, USA. While an architect might view these spaces as buildings, constructed as they are through careful excavation and shoring, Barrar sees some of these sites as landscapes with a sense of prospect and distance, and simulation of inside and outside. There is also the contrast between natural and inorganic, with humanized structures inhabiting a subterranean landscape. The huge caverns and massive tunnels do not give the viewer a sense that the photographer is inside, rather he is underground, exploring a landscape that is both new and artificial, and ancient and primal. In a way, this project is an extension of Barrar’s *Shifting Nature* series, as these images too look at the interface between human and industrial, organic and inorganic.

Many photographs are more obviously landscapes, picturing as they do a built inside space featuring windows and doors. It is interesting to see that people have chosen to simulate an inside and an outside within these underground spaces. Within huge caverns people have created spaces that suggest an interior: windows and doors, lighting. Likewise, a sense of exterior is suggested by the presence of railroad tracks and roadways, which create a sense of prospect and perspective (fig.39). In New Zealand Barrar captured the Rangipo Underground Power Station, in which wild ferns grow on an underground tunnel wall (fig.40). The tunnel is lit by fluorescent lights, which illuminate a series of pipes. The combination of organic and inorganic is a reoccurring theme in Barrar’s work, but here it is taken to a new level by the utter incongruity of the ferns growing in such a manufactured environment. In an essay in the book produced in conjunction with the exhibition, David L.
Pike refers to subterranean spaces as landscape when discussing their representation throughout history. Hanna Scott and Ann Shelton describe Barrar’s underground subjects as “neither properly indoor nor outside, the interior landscape of underground mining spaces is a contradiction in terms, but it neatly describes what happens when “sub-surface space” becomes sub-surface place.”

These converted industrial sites highlight Barrar’s overarching preoccupation and ongoing investigation into altered nature, into landscapes that have been modified by human intervention. In fact, all of Barrar’s photographic projects may be viewed as extensions of this central theme or concern. Here the transformation of raw space into specific place or site “is achieved with the introduction of human scale; perhaps carparking lines, perhaps some borrowed vernacular architecture from above ground.” While these converted industrial spaces are not usually spaces of tourist interest, Barrar has packaged them here into something like “tourism’s anti-sites.” Scott and Shelton suggest that “to make postcards of these sites is to single them out as destination, perhaps not landscape as we know it but a curious marriage between interior and exterior, positive and negative space, a contrived landscape in a state of conversion from one land-use to the next.”

Duality is again present in Barrar’s work, here in the tension that exists in these underground spaces as “sites of sanctuary, safety and quiet but conversely also places of burial, danger and secrets.” The photographs reach a balance between the natural and the manmade, with rough-hewn walls or ceilings acting as a repeated motif in Barrar’s

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compositions amidst the more familiar elements of aboveground life. These spaces represent a new form of land-use that we are still coming to terms with. Like many of Barrar’s other photographic series, these images have the power to unsettle us in ways that we may not fully understand. Primarily we gain a sense of viewing something hidden and therefore highly compelling. These photographs, perhaps more than any other series by the photographer, expand our ideas of what a landscape is and how it might be defined.

**Conclusion**

Barrar views the landscape as a system. The land, buildings, constructions, roads, and trees are viewed not so much as individual and separate objects, but as clues of underlying processes that interact and rely on one another. Humankind is an inexorable part of the systems portrayed in the photographer’s images, and it is this human interaction with the landscape that engages the photographer’s interest in these sites. Our structures and movements in the landscape are physical signs of social and economic systems. Therefore, Barrar photographs not only the land, but the web of networks, interactions and input-output that lies beneath the surface and is so much a part of what we might call our cultural landscape. The complexity of New Zealand’s eco-systems means that “nature does not simply start and stop in the carparks at each end of the Heaphy Track.”

> Successful management of our landscape “must consider processes on a regional scale operating within a system of ecological subdivision rather than real estate.”

Barrar’s photographs point to the complexity of our environment and eco-systems, and the artificiality of sectioning off areas for conservation as if the natural environment was not all around us, connected by processes beyond our control.

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A tension exists in Barrar’s photographs of landscape between naturally occurring processes and those imposed on the landscape either to enhance its performance value or to encourage it to perform in a different way. While his focus as a photographer is the New Zealand landscape, Barrar’s images take on a very different theme to the natural wonders that make up much of the catalogue of our national landscape photography. The photographer’s portfolio is full of landscapes that may often go unnoticed or unseen. These landscapes may be awkward, or ordinary, or they may have a more overt beauty or sublime quality. What ties these images together is a powerful tension that makes them striking. This tension between the artificial and the natural, between nature and culture captures the contemporary New Zealand landscape that contrasts sharply with the nostalgic vision promoted to an international audience for tourism purposes. Barrar’s work deals with the “revision of naturalness in a post-industrial world.”58 While these landscapes may appear at times sinister or even hyper-real they are real indicators of our relationship with our environment. In an international context, Barrar’s work sits comfortably alongside the photographs by North American New Topographics artists, and was included in an updated exhibition of altered landscape photography, where his work was shown alongside Robert Adams’s and others at the Nevada Museum of Art in 1999.59 Barrar’s photographs cause us to re-evaluate our cultural practice and its manifestation in the worked landscape. Beyond this, Barrar’s photographs contain a strange beauty. His ability to rethink spaces creates an entirely new visual experience of what we think of as the New Zealand landscape.

58 Barrar, interviewed by Allan Smith, in Contemporary New Zealand Photographers, 89.
5. The Collector: Haruhiko Sameshima and Bold Centuries (2009)

Haruhiko Sameshima works directly within the context of New Zealand’s photographic history, exploring visual culture and spectacle and letting this form his work. The photographer’s on-going eco-Tourism project, begun in 1994, demonstrates how a contemporary photographer might engage aesthetically with the country’s photographic history and tourism industry. Sameshima developed his knowledge of New Zealand photography through visiting museums, galleries, and libraries around the country with significant photographic collections. This involved not only familiarising himself with New Zealand’s photography, but also taking photographs of the sites in which the collections were held. Beyond this, Sameshima would also photograph landscapes using an approach that referenced aesthetically the photographs from these historic collections. Sameshima consciously engages with the characteristics of these photographs, drawing on their conventions while producing something that is entirely contemporary.

Sameshima (born 1958, Shizuoka) emigrated with his family from Japan in 1973. His father made his first trip to New Zealand in the late 1960s, returning with a collection of his own snapshots, picture books and post cards, which formed Sameshima’s first visual impression of the country to which he would later relocate. The prospect of moving to New Zealand, Sameshima states, “seemed like an exciting adventure and the photographs worked their seductive magic on my teenage mind.”¹ When Sameshima did arrive in the country “such picture perfect impressions were pushed aside in the challenge of encountering a foreign set of social mores.”² Yet these early encounters with representations of New Zealand

² Sameshima, Bold Centuries, 9.
obviously stayed with the photographer, continuing to exert a strong influence on his practice. Sameshima perseveres in collecting others’ representations of the New Zealand landscape. Examples by the photographer’s contemporaries and mass media are distributed amongst the pages of his photo-book *Bold Centuries: A Photographic History Album* (2009).

Sameshima’s turn to photography recalls that of other immigrant photographers to New Zealand, such as Ans Westra and Marti Friedlander, who approached photography in part as a way to make sense of the new culture and world in which they found themselves. Yet while the work of these older photographers is thoroughly modernist, Sameshima’s photography is decidedly more postmodern in style and approach.

Sameshima’s long-term photographic research examines ideas surrounding landscape and tourist sites as expressions of identity. The photographer focuses primarily upon the packaging of the environment, such as man-made landscapes and visual displays, which give a particular story to a place. *Bold Centuries* is a continuation of Sameshima’s exploration of the concept of New Zealand and how it is represented from a visitor’s viewpoint, examining how the country was, is, and will be pictured in the future. The publication draws on the photographer’s previous projects like *The Shopping Mall as a Place of Contemplation* (1996) and *Eco-Tourism*. The photo-book resembles a curated exhibition of how New Zealand has been packaged visually, placing Sameshima in context with his photographic predecessors and contemporaries. The eight accompanying texts deal with issues that surround the collection and Sameshima’s work, without addressing the work of the photographer directly. Covering topics such as the archive, photographic practice, Lake Manapouri, and the representation of Māori, these essays work around specific elements of the collection, allowing space for the reader to interpret as they choose. This chapter deals with two sections of *Bold Centuries*: photographs of Lake Manapouri and surrounds, accompanied by an essay.
by Aaron Lister, and photographs of suburban development in Central Otago, part of a
section accompanied by an essay by Fiona Amundsen.

Sameshima makes use of “a variety of photographic traditions” in the photo-book
*Bold Centuries*. For this publication, Sameshima aimed to “get inside the narrative structures
of a variety of photographic languages.” He compiled an album of photographic images, some his own, others taken by contemporary photographers, still others
collected or taken from museum, gallery or library archives and being of a historical nature.
The album functions as an eclectic image library reminiscent of a cluttered yet compelling
family album. Like a family album, Sameshima’s *Bold Centuries* is a scrapbook of images,
thematically and chronologically scattered, and without a conclusion. Captions that provide
meaning and narrative to the photographic reside at the end of the publication, so that one
may browse through images largely uninterrupted by text. The photographs are interspaced
with eight essays, none authored by Sameshima. The author states: “It is like a nineteenth
century empirical model of collecting. Everything is fair game as an image; every subject fits
into my project. But there is no possibility that the project will ever conclude or that the
archive will ever be complete.” Sameshima questions the ability of this model of collecting to
provide some sort of truth through the inconclusiveness of his project, stating that his
collection of images cannot “act as an adequate representation of the world.” Yet it is an open
narrative that Sameshima seeks. While the photographer recognizes the hopelessness of this
approach, he also finds a “corresponding freedom from the burden of fidelity to only one kind
of truth.”

As suggested by the subtitle *A Photographic History Album* this book is not a
straightforward photographic journal with an easily grasped theme. The eight essays

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3 Haruhiko Sameshima, email to the author, December 8, 2011.
contained in *Bold Centuries* dance around their topics, never directly addressing the images themselves. Sameshima deliberately sought to create this sense of elusiveness:

I like to open possibilities that ask questions in the reading of images, rather than give easily grasped meanings and answers. The essays in *Bold Centuries* function just as the collection of found images or clusters of my own photographs in the book – as elements of the collection. The authors were not given power to explain or legitimise the works in the book, as many texts do in photography books in relation to the images.  

While Sameshima gives up his right as photographer to give a specific meaning to his images, likewise he denied this power to the authors. This serves to open up possible readings of images and to provide the photographer’s work with a complex neutrality. By suppressing authorship, Sameshima draws on difficulties photographer’s face in defining neutrality in their work. Overall, the titling of Sameshima’s photographs follows the stylistic convention of traditional topographic photography, stating place, time, and a description of what is in the photograph. This approach reads as an attempt to open up the interpretation of images to the viewer’s perspective and their knowledge of the place photographed. David Eggleton suggests that Sameshima collects images “so as to consciously avoid any sense of a signature style,” in a move towards neutrality in his photographs.  

However, Sameshima acknowledges that his neutrality is “troubled and not straight forward.” The photographer recognizes that by choosing a site or image he is ascribing importance to it, and states: “I do

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5 Sameshima, email to the author, December 8, 2011.
7 Sameshima, email to the author, December 8, 2011.
have a position; I can never deny that and it is never neutral. I am implicated by being there and photographing or by choosing the found image.”

Many of Sameshima’s photographs in this book reference or make homage to either individual photographers or photographic trends, while also being conscious of wider traditions in Western art. This appropriation perhaps relates to Sameshima’s status as an immigrant to New Zealand from a non-European culture. The photographer consciously adopts the visual traditions of Western art, resulting in a studied neutrality and artificiality of composition. Sameshima comments that one way for him to achieve this affect was “by declaring that I am being a tourist – a passive superficial observer of complex local situations.” Although a long-term visitor to New Zealand, Sameshima prefers to return to a more familiar tradition: “like his Japanese forebears who strictly imitated Chinese landscape painting as early as the seventh century, Sameshima emulates regional pictorial stylistic concerns from his New Zealand contemporaries.” Sameshima lists in his book the photographers who have had a direct influence on his work. These range from contemporary photographers with whom he has had a personal acquaintance, to those he has never met, both contemporary and historical. These photographers represent an eclectic range of influences, including historical photographic studios such as the Burton Brothers, environmental photographers like John Pascoe, the Pictorialist George Chance, and renowned contemporary New Zealand art photographers Anne Noble and Peter Peryer. Sameshima also cites the work of immigrant photographers such as Ans Westra as strong influences on Bold Centuries. Westra worked very much as an outsider in her engagement with Māori culture. As a Dutch photographer, Westra felt that her photographs relied on her not belonging to this

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8 Sameshima, email to the author, December 8, 2011.
9 Sameshima, email to the author, December 8, 2011.
particular culture, commenting, “I had to very much stay on the outside and be uninvolved to get my pictures.”

In a similar way, Sameshima’s photographs rely on his self-described status as a tourist to New Zealand culture.

Sameshima’s outlook as an immigrant photographer is highlighted by the publication *New Zealand – By the Way: Immigrant Photographers & Photographers of Immigrants* (1996), which features images and an essay by the photographer. The publication, organized by Jenner Zimmerman (born 1950, in Munich, Germany), showcases the contemporary contribution of three immigrant photographers to New Zealand, displaying their work alongside images of immigrants by three native-born New Zealand photographers. The project was designed to take up where the textbooks stopped, by representing visually some of the different cultural groups that have made New Zealand their home. Sameshima’s contribution to *New Zealand – By the Way* is titled “The Shopping Mall as a Place of Contemplation.” Similar to *Bold Centuries*, in this earlier photo-story Sameshima compiles a collection of images of both contemporary and historical origins. Creating tentative connections between a diverse range of images, the photographer functions as much as a composer as an author. Many of the images in the series have been cropped and formatted to appear as isolated television screens, one double-page spread showing a collection of photographs that document the different ways in which people may arrive to the country (fig.41). Some appear to be snapshots from a family album, giving a holiday feel to the spread. Sameshima designed the juxtaposition of images throughout the photo-story with the aim to “cast a more critical gaze on what is casually presented to us as everyday reality.”

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The photographs are a collection of images, some taken by Sameshima while shopping, others snapped while relaxing afterwards in front of the television. They all deal with everyday life, employing the shopping mall as a site where cultural identity is carefully controlled and manufactured. Sameshima’s accompanying essay describes the shopping mall as offering an experience, often tailored to relate to your own identity: “These identities are often carefully considered by the designers of the shopping mall to fit the make-up of the population of the area, and tailored to the gender and age mix of the shoppers that frequent the malls.” 13 The photographer links this to the wider concern of whether these representations of identity reflect society, or whether “society is shaped by these representations.” 14 Sameshima’s fascination with the representation of everyday life is part of his own “cultural baggage,” crossing over from his experience of Ukiyo-e and Manga, and shaping the way he uses “photographs as a means of communication.” 15

For Bold Centuries Sameshima explored the history of photographic images of New Zealand. Examining how the land has been packaged and photographed, he used this as a reference point for his own photography. Although often photographing in the style of preceding photographers, Sameshima did so in an entirely contemporary way. The photographer first experienced the landscape of New Zealand through photographs and picture books. Sameshima recalls that after arriving in New Zealand for the first time these images of exotic landscapes were “confirmed, even if only in a partial manner, in early visits to tourist destinations such as Rotorua and Central Otago.” 16 These visits were followed by more, with car journeys to sites of cultural or geological significance, “sought after by my

13 Sameshima, “The Shopping Mall as a Place of Contemplation,” 62.
14 Sameshima, “The Shopping Mall as a Place of Contemplation,” 63.
15 Sameshima, “The Shopping Mall as a Place of Contemplation,” 66.
16 Sameshima, Bold Centuries, 9.
scientist father in a professional capacity but also in his enthusiasm for travel.”

Sameshima’s photography points to the cultural and historical nuances that reside in images of landscapes. He therefore brings to his shots a studied formalism that reflects this knowledge, composing his photographs in ways that reference the pictorial landscape traditions of New Zealand, both painterly and photographic. Sameshima appears to focus often on the colonial underpinnings in the representation of his subject, be it a garden, a scenic attraction or a seemingly natural or untouched landscape. His photographs point back to the history of European representation of the landscape and how this is still very much present and recognizable today.

Picturesque Manapouri

As sites of tourism go, Lake Manapouri has a long history of being appreciated and appropriated through representation. Sameshima’s photographs of the lake as part of his Eco-Tourism project investigate how Manapouri is and has been packaged for visitors to this country. Eco-Tourism began in 1994 when the photographer returned to Elam School of Fine Arts at Auckland University to study for a Master of Fine Arts. Sameshima’s project involved visiting museums and institutions around the country that held significant photographic collections. Part of the project was taken up with photographing the sites where these collections were held, the other part required Sameshima to photograph landscapes “using an aesthetic approach that made reference to the photographs he was seeing in museum and gallery collections.” The photographer deliberately chose to engage with the stylistic characteristics that he had become familiar with in the photographic collections, both historical and contemporary.

17 Sameshima, Bold Centuries, 9.
A number of the photographer’s images of the lake and its surrounds dating from 1995 have been included in a section of Bold Centuries, accompanied by the essay “Picturesque Manapouri: Conservation and the Camera,” authored by Aaron Lister. The essay deals with the lake’s representation through photography, beginning with an account of Alfred Burton’s winter trip around lakes Te Anau and Manapouri in 1889, and including an excerpt of the photographer’s diary recording the expedition. Lister suggests that the camera was “complicit” in “the invention of Lake Manapouri for the European imagination,” creating an image of mystery and romance that persists to this day.19

This section of Bold Centuries presents a selection of photographs by Sameshima of the lake and the nearby Milford Sound alongside reproductions of found historical post, cigarette and stereoview cards, as well as images of the same destinations by his contemporaries. Sameshima’s shot of the modern tourist ferry in the West Arm of Lake Manapouri (fig.42) is displayed opposite another image of the lake, a found postcard of “Maoriland” with photographs captioned “Lake Manapouri from Circle Cove” and “Cathedral Peaks, Manapouri.” The two postcard images bear a striking resemblance to Sameshima’s more modern depiction. Like his image, the two postcard scenes show a boat travelling on the tranquil waters of the lake, with native forest rising up in the background (fig.43).

The convention of including a boat or other sign of human occupation of Lake Manapouri dates back to nineteenth century photographs of this landscape as an early tourist destination and, further, to the conventions of European landscape painting. This is demonstrated by Charles Barraud’s Lake Manapouri looking toward Cathedral Peaks (1886; fig.44), in which a sailboat can be seen out on the water of the lake. This motif functions to

19 Aaron Lister, “Picturesque Manapouri: conservation and the camera,” in Bold Centuries: A Photographic History Album, 92.
portray the lake as a tamed environment, by signalling activity and development, it allows potential tourists to easily imagine themselves within this landscape. Sameshima’s image refers back to such photographs of the lake as those produced by the Burton Brothers firm of Dunedin, discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. The top of the postcard features the banner “Maoriland,” printed with a koru-inspired font upon a traditional Māori carved wooden figure with shell inserts. The postcard continues the romantic mythology of the lake despite the fact that by the time the first run-holders moved into this area in the late nineteenth century it was essentially uninhabited, with the eighteenth century Māori settlements abandoned sometime earlier. These images point to the close relationship between the industries of tourism and photography, a relationship that strongly persists to the present day. While photographers seemingly aided the tourism industry in promoting the region as a scenic wonderland, in 1923 the tramper C. Smeaton White noted “the rubbish left behind by photographers after capturing their shots of pristine nature” in her account of an excursion around the lake. While photographers presented an image of pristine wilderness, it would seem that this did not go hand in hand with a reverence for the physical environment.

Situated between the reproductions of the postcard and Sameshima’s new imagining of the lake are two other images, both by the photographer. These photographs, from left, 

*Manapouri Power Station (Access Tunnel Marker ‘99’)* (1995; fig.45) and *Manapouri Power Station (Illuminated Sign)* (1995; fig.46), show another side of the lake. The Manapouri Power Station first started generating power in 1969, and was fully completed in 2002 with the construction of a second tailrace tunnel. The power station’s machine hall and tunnels

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21 Lister, 92.
were drilled or blasted out of granite beneath the Fiordland Mountains. The hydroelectric station is the largest in New Zealand, and is situated at the edge of the West Arm of Lake Manapouri, in Fiordland National Park, which makes up part of a World Heritage area established in 1986. The first photograph shows the rough-hewn wall of an access tunnel. The second image depicts an illuminated sign, a mixed two and three dimensional diagram of the power station. This sign shows a cross-section model of the power station on the bank of the lake. The pylons visible in the first image (fig.42) can be seen here in miniature. These photographs capture a subject that seems to be a rather unlikely tourist destination in comparison to the lush scenery elsewhere around the lake. Yet this too is now part of the modern tourist experience, part of the changes made to the lake by the hydroelectric scheme.

The tourist experience in New Zealand is becoming increasingly complex. Sameshima captures a particularly contemporary experience of the lake in his photographs that blends nature and technology. In the photographer’s vision of Manapouri, tourists may gaze at the natural wonder of the lake and its surrounds while being transported in a modern ferry to visit the power station in the West arm of the lake (fig.42). Above the lake, like a daisy chain through the indigenous forest, runs a string of pylons that link the power station to the national electrical grid. Nature and industry combine for a tourist experience of a landscape that is at once thoroughly contemporary and seductively primeval. The tour is offered by such companies as Real Journeys, which describes the tour in typically dramatic language: “The Manapouri Underground Power Station, located deep beneath Fiordland, harnesses the energy of rushing water to generate electricity.”

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Manapouri continues the romance, adventure and mystery that have surrounded the European representation of the lake and the celebration of the achievement of industry over nature.

While Sameshima works within a contemporary context, his images of the lake and its surrounds differ little from the style in which they would have been photographed during the nineteenth century. The photographer’s images fit almost seamlessly into the European tradition of representing Manapouri as a site of tourism and leisure. Like Alfred Burton, modern tourists experience a mostly static natural landscape; only the signs of culture have advanced. While Burton travelled by rowboat, we may now travel by jet boat or ferry. Burton employed men to transport his heavy camera equipment around the lake while the modern tourist’s camera can be stored in a front pocket. The photographs may have burst into colour, but the image of Manapouri as a scenic wonderland has remained roughly the same in the public eye. This landscape is Edenic, with this particular representation of the lake taking the viewer on a nostalgic journey back, not only to a “simpler” colonial past, but also to what Gavin Hipkins describes as “the innocence of mythical preconsciousness.”

The photographers of the National Publicity Studios maintained this vision of the lake well into the second half of the twentieth century. The task of the National Publicity Studios “was to provide advice to government departments and state agencies on the provision of photographic, art, and display services and in particular to assist in the production of publicity material aimed at conveying a favourable image of New Zealand.”

This all changed with the Manapouri Power Station, the construction of which “cast a long

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24 Hipkins, 74.
25 Lister, 93.
shadow over the lake.” 27 While photography was then used by the National Publicity Studios to promote the government agenda for Manapouri, the camera was also employed to challenge the resulting industrial ideals presented in the picturesque panoramas that mapped the proposed power stations and tunnels. Lister notes that it was at this time, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, that “the picturesque and ideals of preservation took on new, explicitly politicised meanings.” 28 Sameshima’s assimilation of the styles of historical photographers and the National Publicity Studios is less an art statement than what Hipkins describes as a “working methodology of convenience;” his work strives to acknowledge the power of photography to popularise or enforce a particular way of seeing. 29

Sameshima looks at the way in which the land has been represented in New Zealand and to what ends. In the essay “Imperial Landscape” (1994), W.J.T. Mitchell argues that landscape is not a genre in Western art but a “medium found in all cultures.” 30 Landscape is then like “language or paint, embedded in a tradition of cultural signification and communication.” 31 In this, it functions similarly to photography, also a medium that is capable of expressing meanings and values. Hipkins suggests that the landscape photograph in New Zealand and Australia “is a reminder of a scene of continuing potential colonisation – of living there, of utilising/exploiting the natural resources at that place.” 32 Landscape is a valuable commodity “to be presented and re-presented in “packaged tours,” an object to be purchased, consumed, and even brought home in the form of souvenirs such as postcards and photo albums.” 33 Sameshima taps into this concept of packaged landscape, drawing on the

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27 Lister, 93.
28 Lister, 93.
29 Hipkins, 72.
31 Mitchell, 14.
32 Hipkins, 74.
33 Mitchell, 15.
repetition of the representation of Manapouri by countless tourists and professional photographers. The title of the series to which these images originally belonged – Eco-Tourism – refers not solely to any form of environmentally sensitive tourism, but also to economic-tourism, “an industry of resource exchange.”34 This brings a sense of ambiguity to the term, and problematizes its reading. Sameshima’s series has more in common with advertising or product photography, partaking in the kind of cultural marketing embodied in archetypical postcards of New Zealand, which offer a sort of nostalgic return to a wholesome, natural landscape. It is an image of an ideal landscape that has maintained its appeal throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and into the present. In other words, this landscape sells.

In 2007, an exhibition at the National Library in Wellington focused on the contested landscape of Lake Manapouri and its surrounds. Curated by Aaron Lister, Manapouri: Art, Power, Protest featured the work of Sameshima, Barrar, and Alfred Burton. This exhibition situated images from Sameshima’s Eco-Tourism series within the context of the photographic history of the lake and the artistic reaction to the hydroelectric scheme. The exhibition was divided into four sections; “Manapouri as a site for art,” Manapouri as a site for industry,” Manapouri as a site for protest,” and “Contemporary Manapouri,” with Sameshima’s work occupying the last section. This section was designed to feature artists who “respond to Lake Manapouri as a contested site where political, artistic and environmental ideals clash.”35 Although the lake has changed “in both a physical and symbolic sense,” Sameshima has been able to present it in a manner incredibly similar to how it was pictured in the early years of

34 Hipkins, 74.
colonial leisure in the area, raising questions about the role of tourism and photography in constructing a particular image of a place.36

Subdivisions and the Southern Alps

Another section of Sameshima’s *Bold Centuries* reads like an album of before and after shots, in which it is the landscape, rather than some unlucky beauty contestant, that has received a make-over. Sameshima is obviously aware of altered landscape photography. His images of housing in Fernhill, Queenstown, and subdivision developments at Lake Dunstan employ the same straightforward deadpan reality employed by the *New Topographics* photographers in 1975. *View, Pisa Mooring Development, Lake Dunstan* (1995; fig.47) suggests a landscape that could sit alongside Robert Adams’s photographs of tract housing in Colorado, with Sameshima’s empty subdivision a sort of prequel to Adams’s vernacular images of American suburbia (fig.3). Sameshima up-dated this photograph in 2008, re-photographing the same site from the same viewpoint (fig.48). Earlier captured in black and white, the later image has burst into colour to depict the contemporary landscape of a developing subdivision. Sameshima plays with the juxtaposition of black and white to colour, which is a common device in photographic publications, where black and white signals a historical image, and colour a contemporary image. In the more recent image, houses have sprung up surrounded by manicured lawns. The image features many of the trappings of vernacular suburban architecture: kit-set homes, streetlights, driveways and street signs. Sameshima has included a summary of the property by a real estate company in his description of the photograph. This summary contains numerous references to the landscape: “Directly opposite the home is a reserve leading to the lakefront . . . expansive views, Recreational: Boat ramp, skiing, fishing, hunting nearby.”37 The description reduces the

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36 Lister, 93.
landscape to its dimensions and to the services it may provide for the owner. This is landscape as real estate, with monetary value attached to everything in view. This is what D. W. Meinig would term “Landscape as Wealth,” in which each property “affects the value of its surroundings, as do other site qualities – trees, hills, valleys, and especially “views” from residential property.” In this view, development is usually considered as improvement, reflective of our cultural values and representative of the idea that land is primarily a form of capital, a quantitative type of thinking in which land is only secondarily home and standing place. Hipkins suggests that “the notion of private ownership is inherent in the viewing of landscape.” Sameshima’s photographs of developing subdivisions depict a packaged landscape that, like the manicured lawns and designer street signs, is presented as a decorative element to be purchased as desired.

We live in a country where the sublime can often creep into our domestic backyard, or, conversely, the vernacular landscape starts to absorb the sublime. The roofs of freshly constructed houses in View from Wynyard Crescent, Fernhill, Queenstown (1995; fig.49) mimic the lines of the mountains that shape the horizon. Like Pisa Mooring, this is a site undergoing extensive development. This area, which has become an adventure playground for the wealthier tourist and holiday homeowner, was rephotographed by Sameshima in 2008 (fig.50). The view that once carried across the lake to encompass the surrounding mountains is now stopped short by a modern timber home, made private by a cultivated garden of native and introduced plants. The present owner of this home may appreciate the view while others are limited to peeking through the bushes.

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39 Hipkins, 74.
Sameshima’s images draw upon photography’s role as an important method for gathering evidence and statistical information in nature. This is a very pure form of chronotope. The collection of historical photographs of a single location and the rephotographing of the same scene that appears in an earlier photograph provide valuable tools for investigating and assessing landscape change. Sameshima’s work thus demonstrates photography’s value in topographical documentation. Sameshima photographs landscapes undergoing a transformation. The result is the creation of a vernacular landscape that could comfortably fit into the *New Topographics* exhibition of Northern American subdivisions and tract housing, reflecting a globalisation of domestic architecture in a banal style, so indistinct that it could be located almost anywhere in the Western world. Yet while Sameshima’s photographs document the metamorphoses of these landscapes, his images are “devoid of ‘scientific rigour,’” acting more like partial historical records in a fractured picture of the representation of landscape in New Zealand. Sameshima’s work is very much aware of the deadpan style utilised by Northern American altered landscape photography. The photographer comments:

> I think my overt reference to the New Topographic style here comes from the subject matter – the grand landscape of Otago that I perceived in the tradition of the Wild West, perhaps Arizona, and the subdivisions that divide it into human scale and which are typically repeated in human activity the world over.

His images of industrial sites and subdivisions show the commoditisation of our landscape and the spread of vernacular architecture. Very much like tract housing in Arizona, the subdivisions of Central Otago mark an end to our envisaging of this landscape as an untamed frontier.

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40 Hipkins, 75.
Conclusion

The work of both Sameshima and Wayne Barrar encourages us to question the ecology of land practices that may otherwise go unnoticed or uncriticized. The ever-shifting context of landscape photography is a reference point for both photographers, as their images look back on not only or environmental history but also our photographic history.

Sameshima’s *Eco-Tourism* project examines how our landscape and culture is packaged for the tourist experience, and how photography engages with and supports this major industry. His photographs of Manapouri draw on the history photography shares with the lake, while his inspiration for his photographs of subdivisions is drawn from further afield, deliberately referencing the work of such *New Topographics* photographers as Robert Adams. Above all, the work of Sameshima and Barrar demonstrates the development of a new kind of landscape photography in New Zealand, one which makes the viewer think a little more deeply about the complex relationship between nature and culture.
Conclusion

How photographers capture the New Zealand landscape has changed dramatically throughout the last 150 years. These changes point to a developing sensitivity to our environment, and the evolution of a new way in which to picture our increasingly altered surroundings. This thesis charts humankind’s interaction with the landscape as a subject that has persisted in capturing the imagination of photographers since the early years of New Zealand’s colonial history. While these early images of the engineered landscape have commonly been treated as veritable documents to the past, the findings of this thesis point to these images occupying a more complex space, as mediators of cultural values. As W.J.T. Mitchell comments, “Landscape is not a genre of art but a medium.”¹ Landscape has been assigned its own language in accordance with cultural and societal values, and is therefore capable of conveying narrative or meaning. Thus, landscape in art is a medium through which much may be read about our evolving culture and relationship with our environment. As such, the term “Altered Landscape” is actually a tautology. The photographs discussed in this thesis reveal that there is no un-altered landscape, as even the most ‘untouched’ landscape is a culturally constructed concept.

This thesis demonstrates that there are many ways in which to view a landscape. As D.W. Meinig states, the number and form of elements such as trees or houses in a landscape may be commonly agreed upon, “but such facts take on meaning only through association.”² This is confirmed by the photographers discussed in this thesis. Their work may centre on a

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common subject, yet we may read in their images a range of narratives and messages that vary dramatically. Although focused on landscapes largely absent of the human figure, the work of these photographers reflects on how we shape the land to our uses, either physically or visually, confirming that “any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads.”

The meanings of photographs vary not only through personal understanding, but through time, evidenced by the fact that we now read images by historical photographers in a very different way to how they were originally intended. Contemporary photographers draw on this image bank, using the visual formulas of past practitioners to consciously reference the ways in which our landscape has been pictured. This thesis provides a chronotope of sorts, tracing not only the changes that have taken place within the landscape of the South Island, but also the way photographers have responded to these changes. Their photographs demonstrate that it is not only the landscape that has changed dramatically, but also the ways in which it has been presented through photography. Our structures and movements in the landscape have evolved through time, and so too has the way in which we represent and reflect upon them.

With the exhibition *New Topographics* (1976), altered landscape photography emerged as the contemporary voice of landscape photography. Unlike the pristine wilderness photographs of Ansel Adams and the Sierra Club, these new photographers documented and even embraced the aesthetics of a landscape that was in a constant state of change and development. Yet these photographs also reflected a growing concern for a landscape that was becoming increasingly homogenized. Photographers such as Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz presented a landscape that no longer held any hint of the frontier, rather their images captured a landscape that had been paved over by an increasingly consumer oriented culture.

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3 Meinig, 34.
Their images pointed to a high level of interaction between humans and their environment. This relationship appeared to centre on power and control, showing a landscape that was being manipulated to perform in a certain way for humans.

The work of nineteenth century photographers documents the emergence of this type of relationship with the land in New Zealand. Joseph Perry captures a landscape that is just beginning to be developed and manipulated to suit the needs of its inhabitants. While Māori had made their own mark on the landscape before the arrival of Europeans, this alteration of the natural environment marked the start of a large-scale transformation. To a modern viewer Perry’s album is a disconcerting blend of the raw industry of the gold fields and the scenic. The photographer showcases the natural features of the region of Otago within the context of opening up this landscape to industry. This very much reflects the image of New Zealand presented from the beginning of European contact: that of an Eden awaiting settlement and domestication.

While the Burton Brothers studio made its living by presenting a New Zealand that was more Edenic than productive, the photographers still shaped the landscape to their uses, commodifying the picturesque beauty of the Southern Lakes. Destined for the tourist market, the firm’s images captured a romantic beauty that strongly appealed to their Victorian audience. Their photographs give new meaning to the Lake Manapouri, reflecting the European invention of the lake as a site imbued with mystery, adventure, and romance. Spectator figures in the firm’s photographs signal the arrival of culture to Manapouri, and its potential as a new leisure destination, while the natural beauty of Manapouri appealed as an antidote to the rough and dirty life of a newly industrialised society. The Burton Brothers’ images opened up the landscape visually and imaginatively to a European audience while leaving it largely untouched physically. However, their photographic compositions were not attained through complete reverence to nature. Felling trees to create the perfect shot,
although hardly devastating to the landscape, reveals “an ideology of preservation through intervention that structured European land use through this period.”

A growing awareness of the fragility of the natural landscape and the importance of its conservation is reflected in photography from the 1950s onwards. Both John Johns and Lloyd Godman engaged in photography as a means of encouraging the conservation of our landscape. Their work displays a concern for the New Zealand landscape that is felt in two separate ways. Johns worked within the New Zealand Forest Service to promote better management of our natural resources, using a highly formal approach to photography to document the need to conserve our natural forests while promoting the controlled logging of introduced species of pine. Although Johns’ work is largely valued today for its modernist tendencies, the photographer’s images convey a wealth of information about a rapidly changing relationship to the land in New Zealand. From a constant struggle to rework the indigenous landscape to suit the needs and desires of European settlers, came a growing governmental realisation from the beginning of the twentieth century of the negative effects of extensive burning, draining, and logging. Johns’ photographs, in their highly formal qualities, suggest a landscape that is ordered, controlled, yet nurtured by the Forest Service.

For Godman the landscape signifies something much more personal. The photographer’s imagery reflects the wilder side of nature, capturing a landscape that is dangerously violent and sublime. The chaotic, pulsing photographs are not distanced from the landscape, rather the rivers themselves explode into the viewer’s face, giving them an immediacy that is uncommon in landscape photography. Godman’s photographs mourn the loss of the untamed Clutha and Kawarau rivers. The loss is not economic; on the contrary, the filling of the gorge above Clyde provided an effective means of producing power through a

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hydroelectric scheme, rather, the damming of the Clutha stilled what Godman views as the life-blood of the region. Through these photographs, he asks us to acknowledge the fact that through damming we are lessening the vitality of these rivers, stilling their sublime power.

The work of photographers Wayne Barrar and Haruhiko Sameshima reflects a growing awareness of landscape as a “scene mediated by culture.” Wayne Barrar approaches photography partly as a method of scientific enquiry, and partly as a means of capturing the everyday lived experience. The photographer connects his work inescapably to issues surrounding natural and imposed features in the landscape. His images are a response to the patterns and processes that underpin what we consider to be our environment. Barrar focuses on interconnectivity, with his images demonstrating that nature does not exist only in those areas we have sectioned off as national parks, but all around us, permeating everyday life. The power of Barrar’s photography relies on a tension between the natural and the artificial. This tension neatly captures the contemporary New Zealand landscape in a way that may feel uncomfortable to the viewer, but is simultaneously undeniable in its truthful quality.

Likewise, Haruhiko Sameshima approaches the landscape as a means of exploring New Zealand’s culture and visual history. Sameshima attempts to evoke a formal neutrality within his work. He acknowledges the power of photography in promoting or enforcing particular ways of seeing. In *Bold Centuries*, the photographer engages in a deconstruction of the photographic language. By appropriating the styles of other photographers, Sameshima disrupts the easy reading of images and derails the understanding of photography as a transparent medium. Stripped of authorship and personal style, the photographer’s images give themselves up to multiple readings. For his images of Lake Manapouri, Sameshima explored the way in which the area has been packaged by photography to support and promote the aims of the tourism industry. His shots deliberately took on the history of

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5 Mitchell, 5.
photographic representation of the lake. For his images of newly developed subdivision, Sameshima turned to *New Topographics* for inspiration, employing the photographic language of these photographers to explore a complex neutrality in the documentation of an altered landscape.

Landscape for these photographers is as much medium as subject, a means of exploring the relationship between the human and the natural. Therefore, while the work of these photographers all centres on the New Zealand landscape, it is manifested in different ways. This thesis does not attempt to define in any way a national style of landscape photography, and is limited to a discussion of images taken within the South Island of New Zealand. Rather, it examines the diverse array of voices working within New Zealand, looking across a broad range of photographers, some working within the context of art, and others not. Future discussion of landscape photography in New Zealand may revolve around the possible emergence of a national brand of photography uniquely inspired by our landscape. Central to this discussion must be the apparent absence of Māori photographers working predominantly within the conventional landscape genre in art. While the work of many indigenous photographers is closely tied to the land – either by subject or by inspiration – there does not appear to be any well-known practitioners who either focus solely on landscape or describe themselves as landscape photographers. This absence may call for further examination of what constitutes a landscape photograph, and how this might be altered or developed to encompass a broader range of artistic practices that centre on the landscape, if not necessarily directly picturing it.

While the landscape of the South Island has experienced radical changes since the arrival of European settlers, so too has our relationship to the land changed drastically. When Pākehā first settled in New Zealand, the landscape must have appeared as much forbidding as it was inviting. Since then our relationship with the land has continued to develop and
become increasingly complex. What has become evident is that resources that were once considered infinite are now glaringly finite, and a landscape that we may have taken for granted can now only be found in areas that have been sectioned off, protected and isolated. Today, photographers shoot not only their physical surroundings, but, by doing so, the processes and politics that underpin the contemporary landscape. Resource consent, conservation laws, and industrial and cultural practices are now commonly reflected in photographs of New Zealand landscape. With the steadily advancing global environmental crisis, landscape photography by its very subject cannot help but become more closely intertwined with contemporary thought and inquiry. Bringing into focus the state of our national landscape, photographers turn their gaze, not out into an ever-shrinking wilderness, but inwards, towards the culture of the landscape’s inhabitants.

The chronological spread of the New Zealand photographers discussed in this thesis points to an enduring interest in the altered landscape and the spaces where culture and nature intersect. There is a quality to these scenes that continues to capture the interest of photographers since our early colonial history. While methodologies and approaches have changed, photographers have continued to be drawn to the subject of the altered landscape. While we view these spaces in a very different way to how they might have been considered 150 years ago – or even twenty years ago – there is a common thread. The work of these photographers suggests that the relationship between humans and the natural world is a complex one that no one image can fully encapsulate. This complexity is most evident in the spaces where the landscape has been manipulated in some way to fulfil a purpose impressed upon it by humankind, areas that have been transformed in some way to perform either visually or physically.

The range of approaches to landscape by these photographers reflects the diversity of voices in New Zealand landscape photography. This diversity points not only to the highly
varied topography of the south island of New Zealand, but also to the diverse approaches of the photographers. While all are working within the landscape genre, their photography differs greatly in terms of both style and intended audience. It is this diversity that reinforces the complexity of our relationship to the land and its place in art as a medium, employed to convey different concepts and narratives. David Eggleton, in his discussion of nature photography, draws the eye to the “schisms and sects” that make up the “broad church” of ecology.\(^6\) These photographers may be grouped in a similar fashion. While their methods and styles may vary and even juxtapose one another, their work suggests a shared sensitivity to the landscape, and an interest in the interconnecting processes that form our environment. While some photographed purely for commercial gain, others found a spiritual quality in the landscape. Likewise, while some photographers engaged primarily in the formal qualities of the scene, other photographers looked deeper, in order to examine what exactly it is that makes up a landscape.

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