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11 Views of Auckland

Social and Cultural Studies

Social and Cultural Studies is a quality-assured interdisciplinary monograph series produced in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Massey University's Auckland campus. This series aims to generate debate and share insights in areas of common interest to scholars and students in the humanities and social sciences. Essays that are eclectic in approach, analytically innovative, avoid unnecessary jargon, and stimulate the imagination are especially encouraged.

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SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES

11 Views of Auckland

Edited by

Jack Ross &
Grant Duncan

ALBANY
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Preface

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Soft-boiled in Ponsonby:

The Topographies of Murder in the Crime Fiction of
Charlotte Grimshaw and Alix Bosco

Jennifer Lawn

&

the sun went down on the sunny lee
of trendy, liberal ponsonby
and after that, why... approached the dark!
on victoria park, victoria park...

– David Mitchell “gasometer/ponsonby”

In February 2010 the *Listener* ran a feature article asking why so many Christchurch women are brutally murdered. An extensive sidebar describes the gory killings of a series of girls and women from six-year-old Louisa Damodran in 1986 to Vanessa Pickering in 2010 (Macfie, 2010). Surprisingly, given the article's tagline, the writer's investigations show that, according to police data, Christchurch isn't in fact particularly criminogenic. The unfortunate title of murder capital of New Zealand goes to the East Cape police district, where one murder occurs for every 33,000 people.

The statistical comfort for Christchurch women, such as it is, appears to be that although the chance of encountering a murder-belt sociopath is relatively low, the chance that he will inflict an unusually sadistic and sexually twisted form of death seems relatively high. However, the commentary quickly veers away from statistics and plunges instead into the realm of urban mystique.

Various informants ranging from social scientists to Christchurch-based crime fiction writer Paul Cleave muse that certain crimes achieve notoriety because they express the unparalleled truth of a place, the truth that its inhabitants try hard not to acknowledge. Thus Christchurch is crime-obsessed not because of the volume of crime committed there, but because the local community falls victim to its own middle class code of propriety. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, murder in Christchurch is perceived to be *something that couldn't happen here*. This aura of genteel repression, it seems, generates a countervailing weirdness and introspection among the city's crowd of misfits and outcasts.

Paul Cleave himself trades on Christchurch's reputation in his internationally best-selling thriller *The Cleaner* (2006). The title alludes to the fact that Joe, the killer, works as a cleaner in the central police station. As a mental member of staff he finds that the police officers unburden their thoughts to him, as well as unwittingly giving access to their files. But beyond

the matter of Joe's criminal logistics, the title keys into the myth that Christchurch's buttoned-up, “clean” puritanism fuels a sexually violent counter-reaction; after all, the saying, “we're going to clean up this town!” is the motto of law-maker and sex killer alike.

Joe's signature murders seem to stem from a psychotic distortion of romance, as becomes apparent in the narrative's darkly parodic epiphany. The killer meets his sexual match when he consummates his desire with a woman who literally broke his balls, and in the morning after he pleasantly surprises himself by experiencing a feeling that the rest of us might recognise as the disenchanting truth of everyday domestic coupling: “I can honestly say I feel no desire to kill her” (404).

Cleave's second Christchurch-based novel, *Blood Men* (2010), inverts another staple plot premise, that of the father-son bond, with the twist that dad happens to be a convicted serial killer in this case. Cleave's is by no means the only fiction in recent New Zealand literature to feature serial murders – in fact there has been quite a revival of crime fiction here over the past two decades – but *The Cleaner* is unusually sinister in the lucidity of the killer's first-person perspective and the fact that the femme fatale who trumps him remains at large at the narrative close.

Although the cityscape of Christchurch is only sketchily rendered as a physical setting, *The Cleaner* seems steeped in the psychogeography of that city, both feeding off and feeding into a persistent criminogenic imaginary. So violent death stains a place, but the stain seems only to bring out the pattern that was already there. Psychologists refer to this dynamic as confirmation bias: events become salient in the public consciousness because they epitomise the “always already known” mentality ascribed to a particular social geography.

I suspect that it is not so easy to sensationalise a signature “Auckland crime.” Unlike Christchurch, Auckland is a city of cities, a mosaic of distinct neighbourhoods. But for anybody who has lived here for more than a few years, parts of the city have become memorials to violent deaths that express particularly local pathologies. Panmure, for example, still resonates with the

murders of three RSA members by William Bell in 2001, bearing all the elements of South Auckland's rough reputation: sawn-off shotguns, armed robbery, gang affiliations, psychopaths at large on parole, and over-stretched probation services. St Marys Bay is still marked by the death of David McNee, whose killer successfully invoked the so-called "homosexual panic" defence. The Waitemata Harbour was the dumping ground for international student Wan Biao, whose corpse was stuffed into a suitcase after a ransom and kidnapping gone wrong.

Although sensationalised by the media, these and numerous other crimes provide a particularly charged example of the more general, circular logic by which stories come to stick to place with all the suggestive freight of myth, so that inhabiting a place and being inhabited by its stories become part of the same continuum of experience.

My particular purpose in this essay is to trace the topography of murder in two novels set in contemporary Auckland both of which explicitly question the interplay between place, crime, and urban experience: Charlotte Grimshaw's *Provocation* (1999) and Alix Bosco's *Cut & Run* (2009). Both novels operate broadly within the amateur sleuth tradition of crime fiction, associated with female domestic experience since Miss Jane Marple's first snoopings into the naughty dealings of British society.

However, the term "amateur" is not completely apropos, as the novels' protagonists – Stella and Anna, respectively – work as legal investigators, and are drawn into the world of crime through their liaisons, both romantic and professional, with the defence lawyers assigned to high-profile cases.

Nor are these reluctant investigators particularly "sleuthy," to borrow a term from Grimshaw's later novel *Foreign City* (2005); nosy, outraged, and sexually distracted might be better epithets. Bosco's work in particular bears similarities to Barbara Elise's self-reflexive mock thriller set in the Wellington suburb of Khandallah, *The Care of the Missing Kitchen* (2003), in which the middle-aged protagonist blunders her way through a series of criminal intrigues via her police officer boyfriend.

Provocation and *Cut & Run* also build on a liaison between crime fiction and the city that reaches right back to the earliest literary detective outings, most notably the Paris of Edgar Allan Poe's 1841 story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Like its international counterpart, local crime fiction sets on display

all the fascinating allure of violent crime, including threats within domestic spaces, and then stages the ways in which such threats might be cognitively managed and allayed through the process of investigation.

As David Schmid has argued, to the detective's eye the city is saturated with potential meaning: every detail, every minor prompt to the senses, might be a clue to the crime, making the city, as well as the crime itself, into "a problem that needs to be solved" (Schmid, 1995, p. 243).

Like Schmid, I will suggest that crime fiction can be read alongside the practices of radical geography, as a mapping of the "spatializations of power" that connect separate parts of a city through acts of violence (243). Such a reading resists the tendency of classic detective fiction to individualise both the perpetrator and the investigator of the crime; indeed, it no longer becomes completely clear where the definitions and boundaries of crime lie.

In using the term "topography" I am paying particular tribute to another influence: J. Hillis Miller's elegant study of the rhetoric of place in narrative fiction and philosophy, *Topographies* (1995). Miller argues that the reinforcement between place described as a physical location, and place inscribed through selected enactments of meaning, reflects a more general truth of representation. He gives this feedback loop the singular name of "topography."

As its etymology suggests, topography indissolubly links place with writing. Its semantic range shows a slippage between the schematic representation of a place (a "topographical" map) and the name for what is described, a "topography" or particular configuration of a surface (Miller, 1995, p. 4). A topographical reading of fiction thus proceeds from the premise that "novels themselves aid in making the landscape that they apparently presuppose as already made and finished" (16). Although all novels show this "complex form of the metonymy whereby environment may be a figure for what it environs" (28), some foreground this process more explicitly. I would suggest that that is the case with *Provocation* and *Cut & Run*.

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Particularly when compared with other Auckland-based crime fiction, the protagonists of Grimshaw and Bosco develop a sense of intimacy between

people and place through which the city becomes, not just the scene of the crime, but a personality or presence in itself. As counter-examples, Simon Jay's early thriller *Sleepers Can Kill* (1968), which features the Parnell Baths and Ardmore Airbase, or Andrea Juron's James Paxton series (2005, 2008), set in Grey Lynn, treat the city spaces thinly and objectively; they know the city two-dimensionally, as if reading a map or a photograph. Ben Sanders' detective Sean Devereaux salutes Auckland's "grimy, disconnected, impersonal, frantic" cityscape in the last few pages of *The Fallen* (2010), but the novel's Mission Bay, CBD, Epsom and Glenfield locales remain only sketchily drawn.

P. C. Laird's fictionalisation of the murder of Nozomu Shinozaki at an Auckland language school, *The Shadow World* (2007), tends in the other direction by eliding the specificities of place in favour of a study of the group dynamics between the other students in his class who killed him. Chad Taylor's *Departure Lounge* (2006), with its dreamlike evocations of North Head and the CBD, also operates at the margins of the detective genre. Taylor melds criminality with the compulsions of memory, as a handful of people remain emotionally bound together in their attempts to recover from the unresolved absence of a North Shore schoolgirl.

Paul Thomas' facetious sketches of Auckland's corporate set in *Old School Tie* (1994) and Rosie Scott's tribute to the gender outlaws of K Road in *Glory Days* (1988) come closer to the spirit of Grimshaw and Bosco, who also enjoy Auckland's many vulgarities, outrages and contradictions. However, it is Maurice Gee's *Aceast Road* (2009) which engages most comprehensively with place, in the sense that characters seem to absorb their physical environment subjectively as they move through it; the fictional world becomes an "acting place" rather than merely the "place of action" (Bal, 1997, p. 136).

In *Aceast Road* Gee revisits the provincial Henderson of *In My Father's Den* (1972) and, as in the earlier novel, relies on the narrative device of an adult return to the environs of childhood. The process of identifying the murderer becomes inextricably woven with the retroactive acid of personal memories. Gee's preoccupation with family secrets brings these works within the ambit of the gothic, as does his talent for making places appear to generate a kind of criminal miasma. Although the killer might finally be identified, the sense of immanent threat can never be fully expunged because it persists, at least in part, both in and around you.

However, Gee's comprehensive vision of the rites and mores of provincial society is outside my scope here, as I want to zero in more closely on specifically urban and contemporary representations of the city.

Rather than displaying the more usual concentration of space in classic detective fiction – expressed in the iconic line "nobody leave the room!" (or hotel / boat / train / island) – *Cut & Run* and *Provocation* multiply the locations of action, and make the movement between places, as well as the affective relationships formed through those movements, as important as the quest to reconstruct the circumstances of the murder. Their narrative progression is not dictated solely by the necessity to piece together clues and nail the murderer, but also allows considerable dilations in which the protagonists drive, walk and kayak through the city environs and beyond. Bosco extends this technique in the sequel to *Cut & Run*, *Slaughter Falls* (2010), which draws lines of affiliation from the gang heartland of Murupara to the seedy quarters of Queensland and New South Wales.

In the first instance, a topographical reading of *Provocation* and *Cut & Run* can proceed simply by attending in a concrete way to the geographical locations and movements of characters. Where do characters begin and end their journey? How do they travel? Who does the character travel with, what relationships are forged or broken during the voyage, and how is one space counterpointed against other spaces in the novel?

Miller cautions against a triumphalist reading in which one single topography is taken to arrange and define all the others. Instead, he says, any one narrative contains "multitudinous places, ... each one regathering in a different way the same configuration of elements" (30). In my reading of these two novels, I will suggest that Bosco's spatial imagination works through an integrative cycle of excursion, initiation, transformation, and return, while Grimshaw's more existential leanings foreground subjective drift and dispersal as the fundamental spatial metaphor for human experience.

Through these movements, the novels also elaborate a structural account of the ecology of crime, in the sense that crime is shown to be endemic to the workings of ordinary social life, right down to the level of everyday interactions in the domains of work, family life, the business world, and sex.

Of the two novels, *Provocation* is the more difficult to place within a single genre: along with the amateur sleuth line, Grimshaw also tosses in shades of noir, female gothic, melodrama, satire, and legal procedural. In retrospect, the novel reads like an overture to the ongoing preoccupations of Grimshaw's later, stylistically more coherent novels, which also draw on a sense of intangible urban dread.

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Before becoming a full-time writer Grimshaw worked as a criminal lawyer, and an eroticised fascination with crime pervades her writing. But in *Provocation* she refuses the comfort of solving the crime, or even really determining what exactly the crime was; arriving at the end of the narrative is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle that has one irritating piece missing. In Grimshaw's fictional universe, point of view saturates every detail, and her suspicious eye can turn even the petals of a bunch of carnations into hundreds of peeping eyes, without ever quite tipping over into psychosis.

Grimshaw's tense, acutely self-conscious young women career through life with a kind of self-gnawing energy; they find themselves caught up in fatalistic love affairs (Grimshaw scores the highest coition rate of any New Zealand writer that I am aware of); they seem surprised to find themselves where they are and don't seem quite sure how they ended up in this state.

Provocation opens with Stella, its 21-year-old law student narrator, watching CNN on television and comparing the pumped-up daily melodramas of the American mediascape on the screen with the monochrome vista of the Waitemata harbour viewed through the window. Stella longs for some heat, and soon she gets it: her de facto partner and boss, Stuart Chicane, is assigned as defence counsel for Carlos Lehman, who shot his neighbour dead after years of harassment over a boundary dispute in a rural property south of Tauranga.

Given that the identity of the murderer is revealed so early in the piece, *Provocation* signals that it will not be a whodunit in which a "death must be solved," but rather a metaphysical crime story "in which it is life which must be solved" (Holquist cited in Delamater & Prigozy, 1997, p. 74). For Grimshaw's jaded consciousness, anxiety is a fundamental condition of life,

not a sensation that is aroused and then defused by the typical crisis and resolution pattern of detective fiction.

Provocation's social world is steeped in the self-absorbed milieu of the "pastel-shirted America's Cup good-time set" in the darkest phase of New Zealand's economic neoliberalism. Although the exact date of the action is not specified, the share market crash of 1987 is still in recent memory, as we hear one social butterfly lamenting that Bollinger has been in short supply lately.

The appearance of CNN, if taken as a literal temporal marker, would place the action as early as 1990, when Sky first broadcast cable television in New Zealand and when *Law & Order* happened to kick off its first season. The maw of conspicuous consumption is evident in the gas-powered cremation unit – a cavernous BBQ large enough to incinerate an entire sheep – on Stuart's patio.

Like Jagers in Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Stuart's office is peopled by a crowd of hangers-on serving out favours to him. He trades on the confidences and secrets of his criminal coterie, with the whole social microcosm of instrumental and cynical relationships held together in an unstable equilibrium between gratitude and resentment. Stuart runs his home office as a cash economy, money is literally coming out of the walls, "crime pays and pays."

Although there is some degree of legal heroism in Stuart and Stella's quest to help Carlos, Grimshaw's more satirical urge turns Stuart's profession into a mirror image of the casino capitalists and insider traders who rode out the conflagration of the financial markets: Stuart's forensic alchemy "turns crime into no crime at all – it's what he does, after all."

Stella's reaction to the sickness of domestic and public sphere alike is properly hysterical. She works out the confusions and contradictions through bodily agitation in heedless fits of walking. Exactly where she walks is sometimes a matter of geographical licence on Grimshaw's part, but always Stella's intention, in her own analysis, is to walk herself into oblivion, seeking out the state that is the closest thing to being dead.

Although Stuart's house is located on the North Shore, Stella describes one pre-dawn escape from the house that reads very much like the cramped strip of land that skirts St Mary's Bay between Point Erin and Victoria Park on the

south side of the harbour bridge. This stretch is now, in 2010, closed to the public for the earthworks to construct the Victoria Park tunnel, but even before the fences went up it was an amputated space.

Access to the north is cut off because the harbour bridge has no walk- or cycleway (a mass protest in 2009, when thousands of cyclists forced their way onto the bridge for several hours, has failed to budge the Bridge Authority's stance). The sea itself, and Westhaven Marina, are cut off by cars roaring past on the eight-lane motorway. The hillside is laced with agapanthus, canna lilies and convolvulus below looming, two- and three-storey wooden houses.

Stella walks on past the cold glow of the gas station (the Fanshawe Street BP?), the black mouth of the carpark entrance (Wilson's?), the humming white light of the swimming pool (the Tepid Baths? Or a transposed Parnell Baths?). Later she walks in the CBD across the corrugations of Queen Street and lower Grafton Gully from Victoria Street to the Domain, stroking her own extravagant sense of tragedy.

Grimshaw's Auckland is scarcely fit for human habitation, it is waterlogged, slimy, rotting, hostile to the scale and pace of the human frame – yet curiously sublime, even daemonic, in Stella's feverish, expressive circuits.

•

The heart of *Out & Run* lies just a few kilometres up the hill from Stella's concrete-bound nightmares, but a world away in its sense of embedded habitation. I can't say which suburb Bosco herself lives in, as the name is a pseudonym for an Auckland-based writer who has published widely in other media and whose identity seems to have been well guarded so far. But the protagonist-narrator of *Out & Run*, Anna P. Markunas, certainly feels the kind of affinity with Ponsonby Ridge and its southern incline into Grey Lynn that Grimshaw's undogged consciousness would never allow.

In the opening chapter, Anna takes a taxi from the lower CBD, up Franklin Street, into Ponsonby Road, where she asks to be dropped off at the Ponsonby fish and chip shop. Anna's pace is andante, and the amnesiac complexes of Stella's mean streets are replaced by Anna's layered sense of settled space.

As flâneur, Anna positions herself as "an observer of life just across the street but light years from the centre of the action." She observes the media darlings sip their sauvignon at SPQR restaurant, which used to be a motorcycle shop; turning down Richmond Road, she strolls past the Screenworks production company at the corner of Millais Street, formerly a foundry, and in the next block the "gothic pile" of Carlisle House, which was the Richmond Road children's home until 1930.

The neighbourhood is like an old patchwork quilt for Anna, with each piece a memento of the sojourners who have washed in and out: Catholic workers, drawn to the area's early industry, followed by Pasifika migrants, students, artists, halfway-house incumbents, gays and lesbians, and, most recently, yuppies who find consolation for their whopping mortgages in the gentrified suburb by maxing out their credit cards in the "golden axis" of fashionable restaurants along Ponsonby Road between SPQR and Prego.

However, it soon turns out that Anna's habit of detached belonging is itself a form of bad faith, an emotional cocooning from the traumatic memories of her earlier career as a social worker in South Auckland and subsequent emotional breakdown. Like *Provocation*, *Out & Run* is a post-crash novel, though in Bosco's case the primary action takes place after the global financial crisis of late 2008.

Along with her deceased husband, Graham McGowan, Anna is a refugee from the bruising defeat of Pakeha left-liberalism in the post-1984 era. Graham himself is something of a Solomon Grundy figure, in the sense that his representative life story reads as a post-mortem for the values of full social security.

Graham grew up in Kurow, where his father worked in the public service as an engineer on the Waitaki Valley hydroelectric dam scheme. In adulthood, Graham became the secretary of the Hospitality Union, only to betray his own cause by having to lay off staff under decompulsorisation of union membership in the early 1990s. In the early 2000s, he joined the capitalists by mortgaging the family home to purchase a rental apartment. Naturally, given the earlier deregulation of the building industry, the apartment turned out to be a leaky building. So Graham took the only way out by hanging himself, but the rotting rafters gave way and he died bathetically from a blow to his head

when he fell to the floor. "So capitalism let him down, even at the end," as Anna's friend Maeve observes drily.

Secured with an independent income from Graham's life insurance – his one astute investment – Anna takes up employment transcribing affidavits for a law firm, a task that she explicitly likens to the vocation of the novelist: "My stories always have the same beginning; instead of 'Once upon a time', it's 'My name is ...'" (44). But as Anna becomes a witness herself, writing herself into the field of action in the first person, so the metafictional commentary shifts gears also; Bosco implies that the vocation of the writer can't be ethically separated from the investigative task of finding causes, defining and judging social behaviour, and exposing the factors that show why some crimes count as "grievable" in the mainstream social imaginary while others don't.

Anna's mission becomes to set right all the accumulated social dislocations summed up in her husband's decline, while proving that she herself has adapted to a rejuvenated, post-neoliberal social environment. It's not that Auckland is a kinder place than in the days of Rogernomics; social disparities between the rich and poor fuel the political economy of crime that Anna uncovers.

One of *Chit & Rini's* important topographical metaphors is that of traffic: the CBD, Ponsonby, the North Shore, and South Auckland are all implicated in a web of drug running, immigration scams, and the pimping of Asian language-school students. Anna's travels between these areas expose the channels through which Ponsonby Road's lust for the high life ruins the lives of the kids in Flatbush who join the drug supply chain for their best chance of a steady income.

Anna's method revolves around another topographical schema, that of the hub. Anna describes Three Lamps as the "epicentre of her *tuangawaewae*," "the benign stone face of the old post office and the solid bluestone kerbs running east to the city, north to the harbour, west to the Waitakere and south along the Ponsonby ridge." The legal firm where she works is located on the isthmus of Oranuhi, represented as a hub of social classes, a mixture of "old working class, down-at-heel immigrants, ... and some pockets of upmarket middle class aspiration."

What Anna intuits here through the spaces of her leisure time and work is a kind of reintegrative geographical unconscious that she must learn to convert

into political action, so that the vibrant Auckland of 2009 can redeem the soulless city and impotent left-liberalism of the last quarter century.

Anna's investigative movements take her through a series of concentric circles that radiate out from the Auckland CBD and reach their outer limit at Whangapoua on the Coromandel Peninsula. Through a series of three life-threatening climaxes, each concentric space becomes the ground for the discharge of an emotional debt.

In Whangapoua, Anna returns to the eventual settling place of her immigrant mother. There Anna is metaphorically reborn through immersion in the waters of the Pacific – rather appropriate, given her mother's profession as a midwife. Back to the city, Anna ventures to the Grey Lynn sculpture park – specifically to Barbara Ward's sculpture of three chunky women picnicking on the grass – where she acquires herself of her role in the earlier murder of a south Auckland teenager by aiding a police sting operation. The final showdown with the murderer takes place in a downtown hotel which faces the lower Queen Street building which now occupies the site of the old His Majesty's Theatre.

In the novel's political narrative, the demolition of His Majesty's Theatre in 1988 turns out to be the foundational corporate crime and a primal scene for the socialist cause. Built in 1902, His Majesty's was one of the last remaining heritage buildings in the downtown core, after a spree of demolitions in the early 1980s, some of which are commemorated in John Radford's three-piece sculpture, "TIP," in Western Park at the southern end of Ponsonby Road.

The story of His Majesty's demolition is one of corporate ambush and bureaucratic sleight-of-hand. As New Zealand Historic Places Trust chair Dinah Holman has documented, His Majesty's was brought down just as a process was nearly completed to give the theatre a higher grade of protection under the Trust's classification system for heritage buildings (Holman, 1988).

While a crucial report was pending, the owner of the theatre, Pacer Kerridge, set the demolition orders in place shortly before Christmas Eve. The City Council treated such applications as confidential, and had no listing for His Majesty's on its own heritage schedule, which operated without reference to the Historic Places Trust system. The Council, which was planning its own rival events centre in the form of the Aotea Centre,

approved the permit secretly over the holiday period, and by 5 January the demolition workers were moving in.

In Bosco's version of events, Graham McGowan was right there at the scene of corporate vandalism, joining the 24-hour vigils to stave off the wrecker's ball. His Majesty's held a personal association in Graham's mind with the Fabians, "those socialist utopians who were at large in England when His Majesty's was built," and its fall came to epitomise all the base interests of fast capitalism, political collusion, and the kneecapping of civil society as any kind of viable force in the shaping of the city.

Ironically, heritage has now become bankable as a tourist attraction, and in 2008 the Auckland City Council established an annual heritage festival. The architectural remnants of Graham's socialist ideal are now the object of picturesque contemplation for the global creative class.

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Bosco's narrative of transitive social action is fundamentally disallowed in Grimshaw's worldview, as can be seen by elaborating another repeated topographical motion in *Provocation*: the swerve or deviation.

As announced by the novel's title, Stella's investigative process turns around a legal technicality centering on intentionality. If Carlos can successfully plead provocation, the charge of murder will be reduced to manslaughter. The sticking point for the defence team is that Carlos did not shoot dead his immediate tormentor, Boyderman Leonard, but rather Boyderman's brother, Cyril.

Cyril had taunted Carlos for his poor farm management, which had in turn touched off Carlos' memory of his Pakeha in-laws fearing that their Maori son-in-law would commit the unthinkable crime of dragging their daughter out of Auckland into the provincial peasant life. The basic facts of the legal case show how social animus wells up from various capillary sources, compounds unpredictably, and then becomes deflected off the immediate target onto a (never entirely innocent) third party.

This pattern of evasion marks other social relationships in the fictional world. The rising tensions in Stuart and Stella's relationship descend into fevered sex scenes and heated accusations of infidelity (*Last Tango in Paris* is

whimsically referenced), but it is Wayne, Stuart's creepy odd-jobs man, who is the catalyst for Stella's eventual reaction against male sexual predation. Even the simple car journeys from one place to another prove difficult, as drivers in the novel stray into ditches or bang into walls. The whole effect is of a social system off-kilter, with intentions lurching off target within the constant play of instrumental relationships.

However, between the settler tribalism of the rural community and the cynicism of Auckland's corporate set, Grimshaw does allow a geographically mediated equilibrium to emerge in the form of a third space: the mythic lands of the Coromandel. While bailed to his parents' home Carlos disappears, apparently absorbed by the bush or the sea.

With this fade-out, *Provocation* merges with what Miller terms the "atropical" zone that lies in every topography: "sooner or later, in a different way in each case, the effort of mapping is interrupted by an encounter with the unmappable" (Miller, 1995, p. 7). Through this scene of subjective dissipation, Stella finds a calm centre and ultimately a stronger sense of individuation: "I am learning to live alone" is the final phrase of the narrative, echoing an earlier conciliation by Carlos' wife.

Anna, too, reaches an unmappable place, in this case through her encounter with the maternal. Anna tests her sense of place against a quotation by Grimshaw's father, C. K. Stead, emblazoned on the foyer wall in the office tower located at 48 Shortland Street: "Each of us has a piece of New Zealand we regard as ours – not the part of it we occupy, but some remote beach or farm, mountain or bush reserve." Not the part we occupy. If true, how sad.

Anna has earned the right to call Auckland hers, but it is through the paradox that she must be literally excluded from her home to learn to inhabit it more fully. Once she embraces her mother's exilic consciousness, Anna can abandon the disinterested mask of the flâneur and come to own the effects of her actions on her extended social world.

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