

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

# **Being Local: a sense of place**

**An exegesis presented in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Fine Arts**

**At Massey University, Wellington**

**New Zealand**

**Patrick Valdimar White**

**2008**

**Contents:**

Title page	1
Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Travelling to Gladstone	9
Dwelling as a vernacular act	
1. Being local	12
2. Local know how	13
3. Storied knowledge	15
4. This place: another story	16
Aspects of the work process	
1. Photography	19
2. Stockyard	20
3. The bridge	22
4. Totara stump	23
5. Killing for food	25

6. Performance	27
Last words	29
Notes	32
References	33
Appendix I - Map	35
Appendix II - Gladstone, township	36
Appendix III – Texts; a sense of place	37
Bibliography	102
Index	103

## **Abstract.**

*Being Local; a sense of place* - details a journey during which I explore the notion that one aspect of art is seen best as a local activity, with the artist exploring his/her *sense of place*. Reading of relevant texts, and research of the conceptual basis of the notion, resulted in written and visual works. The writing records selected aspects of my thinking, detailing arrivals and discoveries, the development of art objects. Ultimately the research suggests that a *sense of place* is unfinished business; an ongoing process, a constant part of any vernacular or local activity. 'Place' is a story to be told and retold, a relationship constantly being renewed.

Specifically, the story told here is from my own past to arrival in the settlement of Gladstone where I live on a three acre farmlet. That farmlet is the particular site in which I have carried out work exploring my thesis during 2007. The idea that art works are intrinsically local, inherently determined by my relationship with the place where I work, is an important part of the story. The acting of creating, is one of many relationships entwined in stories without which there can be no place to have a sense of. Another is the sharing of food. I have combined both the making of objects, and the sharing of food, as relational activities expressing 'know how', an art project.

## **Acknowledgements:**

I wish to acknowledge the following without which the research for **Being local; a sense of place** could not have been productively carried out:

My supervisors; Maddie Leach, for her insight and down to earth approach to the ideas I have tried to grapple with, and her engagement with the project

Karin Van Roosmalen who has provided important leads into the literature and encouragement without being asked

The involved interest of other Massey staff has been much appreciated throughout the year.

The support and interest of fellow students and friends on Massey campus, and Catherine Barnett who has been positive all along about my work.

The Wairarapa contingent, Toni Bolland, Jann Lenihan, and Paul Melser have been provocative discussion mates on a regular basis.

My fellow student Catherine Day, who is also participates as wife and chief supporter, has helped in many ways throughout the year, and that has been much appreciated at all times.

## **Introduction**

**Beginning:** 6<sup>th</sup> September 2007

After months of reading, note taking and art making, today I will start telling of what it is to live here. Our place in Gladstone, Wairarapa is being battered by wind this morning. Severe nor'west gales shake the house on its foundations. Trees we have planted bend and dance then stand straight and tremble in aftershock between each gust. The forecasters predict the gales will ease later in the day, before returning from the south tomorrow. Possibly the Rimutaka road is closed.

Before we came to live in this place, Catherine and I cycled for months of 1990 through Italy, Switzerland, France, and then up the west coast of Ireland. We pedaled our way through some rough weather at times, but nothing was quite like the north Atlantic gale that hit us near the Cliffs of Moher in western Ireland. I got blown off my bike. Turning my parka into a sail, a gust of wind somersaulted me over the handlebars and I landed on my back in the middle of the road. There was nothing between us and the North Pole to soften that particular storm. Beneath the 'Cliffs' the Atlantic beat against the rocky shore, huge breakers spraying hundreds of metres, smearing windows a mile from the beach with salt. Men and women crofting there, with stone cottages for shelter must have been tough as goats' knees, and well suited to the task of

emigration to the colonies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century world. The sense of that place, Moher, the beach at Doolin, in my mind has a wildness touched with a feeling of being at the edge of the world. To the Irish exile however, it was home. They kept their sense of place alive with songs, poems and stories. The Irish have such great songs of exile, none more than W. B. Yeats's *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* modified and set to music by D. Farrelly) ;

*I've met some folks who say that I'm a dreamer,  
And I've no doubt there's truth in what they say  
But sure a body's bound to be a dreamer  
When all the things he loves are far away.*

(Yeats, 1938:55)

Yeats and Farrelly capture that sense of 'home' romanticized, set forever in the nostalgia that compensates for the realities of daily life. The point is; an area, region, space, the smallest room becomes a place only by way of events, and their retelling as stories, a recycling of memory.

The way in which the Irish have taken their stories with them to many countries pinpoints that aspect of continuity vital in any consideration of the notion of a sense of place; the making of a story, be it myth, folk tale, song or poem. In exile the

Irish sustain a sense of place that is transportable, by way of music. Even if over the years that function has been commodified and diluted in the pubs and concert halls of popular music. My sense of Ireland as a place is not as an exile but as a visitor. Some of my ancestors arrived in New Zealand from Ireland. Primarily however my bloodlines are Scottish, yet I have no feeling of that country, and have never visited there. They have stories that form a history which I have no sense of sharing; Culloden, Bonnie Prince Charlie, the pipes leading regiments into battle at El Elamein are not mine. Few stories have been handed down within my family either. I have never visited the Isle of Islay, where records of my ancestors go back at least four hundred years. How important is it that I live with a sense of that place 'across the Irish Sea'?

How important is it that I live with a sense of any place? Is John Berger correct when he says, 'to emigrate is always to dismantle the centre of the world'? (Berger, 1991: 57) If so, then how long does it take before individuals in a post-colonial society can 'belong' again to a place? When Wendell Berry writes; 'You can't know who you are, until you know where you are', he implies that belonging somewhere is a key issue of personal identity. (Stegner, 2002: 1)

Before I was fifty years old I lived in forty houses, in towns from Tapanui in Southland to Titoki in Northland. In light of that personal background, and the insight of thinkers such as Berry, my writing will consider some aspects of place. Is it reasonable to be an artist working in, and identified with, a particular location?

Lucy Lippard would certainly think so;

A starting point, for artists or for anyone else, might be simply learning to look around where you live now. What Native peoples first inhabited this place? When was your house built? What's the history of the land use round it? How does it fit into the history of the area? Who lived there before? What changes have been made or have you made? If you've always lived there, what is different now from when you were young?... And so on and on. (Lippard, 1997: 25)

What is it to be local? Is it important to make art that belongs to a specific place? Where does the vernacular fit in a contemporary culture? Does a vernacular way of living or thinking even have validity in a world of global strategies and the promotion of universal consumerism. When Michael Pollan writes about selling food that is grown locally; 'by definition local is a hard thing to sell in a global market place', he could be talking about 'growing' and selling many things; clothing, footwear, or even art perhaps. (Pollan, 2006: 257) Mass production shifts relativities, as does high budget publicity. Even Wairarapa residents will buy 'real art' from Wellington galleries rather than investing in local work. Arguably, it is the publicity rather than their understanding of fine art that provokes this activity in some cases.

Art practice by 'going local' can, supported by critical thinking, at the very least be worthy of debate and further consideration. In 1997 Lippard wrote, 'a place-specific art is still in its infancy. Of all the art that purports to be *about* place,

very little can be said to be truly *of place*.' (Lippard, 1997: 20) Has there been significant change during the last decade? More change is almost certain to occur, as oil supply, climate change and global economies alter our local ways of living.

Without doubt, this year of reading philosophy and art theory coupled with the making of art has informed my own sense of place. I live in rural Wairarapa, which is a sparsely populated area separated from Wellington city by a range of significant hills, 'the Rimutakas'. The intention of the work is to see if something authentic exists behind the romance, the rosy glow of some urban dwellers' view of country living, of owning a block of land. Is there more to it than John Denver suggests in his upbeat lyrics and country music, and, can that something authentic be expressed through art?

There's a fire softly burning;

Supper's on the stove

It's the light in your eyes that makes me warm

Hey, it's good to be back home again

Sometimes this old farm

Feels like a long lost friend

Yes, 'n, hey it's good to be back home again. (Denver, 1974: 2)



## **Travelling to Gladstone, Wairarapa.**

### **Firstly: a site/sighting**

Travel from Wellington to Wairarapa by rail.

Disembark the train at Carterton, to be met by a car.

Proceed eastward, leaving town via Park Road past the War Memorial.

Travel until you come to a T junction, turn left.

Take the first turn right, into Gladstone Road.

Travel until you reach a T junction. You will have passed the Ruamahunga River, the pub, and the church will be ahead to your right.

Turn left and travel past the school.

Three houses to the north on your right, turn into the driveway.

Take the first drive on your left, and drive through the olive trees to the plywood and batten house. FN 97 Martinborough-Masterton Road.

The site is not institutionalized, nor does it appear 'inside the white cube' of Brian O'Doherty, (O'Doherty, 1999) rather it sits within a landscape as defined by Stilgoe; '[landscape is] essentially rural, essentially the product of tradition.' (Stilgoe,

2005: 11) Pakeha families, particularly of Scottish descent within this district, have occupied this space as farmland for as many as five generations. Before that Maori were settled within it, and their *marae*<sup>1</sup> and *urupa*<sup>2</sup> are still in use. A last remnant of kahikatea bush at Carter's Reserve gives an idea of what much of the district could have looked like, in low lying areas, or gully sites, where swamp would have been host to flax, or creeks before rising to bush covered slopes. The place I have arrived at, in which to carry out my work is Gladstone, Wairarapa. We are dealing with an art site holding within its metaphoric walls, history and an environment that creates a context, a particular site specificity. This also happens to be a place of dwelling, to be considered later.

After having title to land;

at Moeraki, just down the road from Hampden where my father spent much of his  
childhood

on the beach at Hokitika

in both Ashburton and Christchurch, on the Canterbury plains

at Kokopu and Matakana in Northland

as well as leasing a farm up the Waiuta valley on the West Coast of the South  
Island

my life acquired a certain nomadic history, while searching for my own place in New Zealand, somewhere that I could put down roots. My grappling with these islands brings to mind Roni Horn's visits to Iceland when she says; 'Big enough to get lost on. Small enough to find yourself. That's how I use this island. I come here to place myself in the world.' (Horn, 1996: 89) I now live on three acres only 'a half hour drive' from Whakataki, where my Scottish forebears started out in 1876. For now, it is where I 'place myself in the world'. By staying somewhere, a specific space, adjustments of a different sort occur. A different perception of geography arrives.

Named by Maori, *Waitohiariki*, which can be translated as 'the place of many underground streams', there is somehow more resonance, more poetry, than in the English place name.<sup>3</sup> Gladstone (the settlement) could be paraphrased, a place colonized by immigrants from Britain in the nineteenth century when Mr. Gladstone was Prime Minister of the British Empire. Gladstone, not quite such a presence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, seems a little mundane.

The four hectares Catherine and I bought were sections in what was gazetted as Gladstone township in 1870. (Appendix 1). There was a railway planned to be built through the area at the time. The proposed township never eventuated, as the sections largely failed to sell. The railway was built decades later, on the western side of the region, through Carterton. (Fearon, 1976: 52)

Not knowing until after I was living on this land, that my grandfather and great grandfather had also owned land, at Whakataki, and Whareama not far from where I had settled, developed a further, more personal resonance. Both men I never met, but that is another story. When the Maori talk of 'many underground streams' perhaps they were not just dealing with geological accuracy. Arriving at Gladstone there were personal stories to learn that I had no idea existed.

---

## Dwelling as a vernacular act

### 1. Being 'local'

Some people do not have to travel to arrive at Gladstone, they are born here. Others 'arrive' at Gladstone without ever 'living' here. They buy land and build a house, commuting to work, socializing, in Wellington, maybe Masterton. Their land at Gladstone is a rural retreat, where they can 'get away from it all'. Building at Gladstone, is little more than seeing land as investment and commodity, as possession rather than living space.

Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher, in *Building Dwelling Thinking* develops the premise that dwelling is an activity, rather than an object. (Heidegger, 1971: 143- 159) In 1928 he had a hut built on the outskirts of an alpine village called Todtnauberg in the Black Forest, a place of scenic beauty, close enough to the mountains to have an alpine climate, which became a place for him to comment on matters of rural living, or provincial themes as he saw them. I suspect he aspired to living a traditional rural life there, in that sense of dwelling. The reality was that he lived a philosopher's life, assisted by locals, traditional villagers whose families had roots where he came to stay each summer. Most of the year he lived in the city, as it was there his academic commitments existed. He did not need to harvest produce, cut his own firewood, or kill his own meat.

It was here that he thought his way to a position that is described by Andrew Benjamin; 'the hut for Heidegger provided the possibility for a specific type of philosophical work. Philosophy and place ...oriented each other. As such it can be concluded that there is an important link between geography(place) and modes of thinking.' (Sharr, 2006: xix) The notion arises from other writings. Ralph Waldo Emerson, from a very different place and time, USA in the 1840s, says of the artist; 'though he were ever so original ... he cannot wipe out of his work every trace of the thoughts amidst which it grew.' (Emerson, 1950: 246)

We, however, are citizens of the twenty-first century. Has the passage of time altered the perspective of Heidegger, or Emerson? Is the sense of place described by Wallace Stegner with reference to Wendell Berry beyond our reach;

'He is not talking about the kind of location that can be determined by looking at a map or a street sign. ... He is talking about the knowledge of place that comes from working in it in all weathers, making a living from it, suffering from its catastrophes... that you, your parents and grandparents, your all-but-unknown ancestors have put into it. (Stegner, 2002: 4)

Perhaps Berry is asking too much of our situation? Contemporary postcolonial culture is so disrupted, on the move, almost incoherent with change, and very new in terms of generations of settlement. It is also a situation governed more often by commodity prices than other values, such as ecological balance or sustainability. Cresswell suggests that places are

founded on acts of exclusion, and cites David Harvey to further suggest; 'places are under all kinds of threats from variously; the restructuring of economic spatial relations at a global level, the increased mobility of production, capital, merchanting and marketing and the increasing need to differentiate between places in order to compete'. (Cresswell, 2004: 26)

## **2. Local 'know how'**

To live with a sense of place is to understand *to dwell* as an active verb which is the way Heidegger uses the term. A sense of place may result from nothing more than living locally, without dwelling in a traditional vernacular. Michel de Certeau discusses the idea of a 'third knowledge' existing in an uneasy relationship alongside the disciplines of science and philosophy in *The practice of everyday life*. My understanding from his work is that practical, ie 'third' knowledge is invariably local, or centred on place. He suggests that everyday knowledge of common tasks exists as *know how*; a *making do* which, in my experience, would be defined as common sense. (de Certeau, 1988: 35)

According to de Certeau, historically the role of the artisan/craftsman was to use *know how* to create society's requirements, but over time technology has been developed to an extent where everyday use for crafts is no longer widespread. Why use a painstakingly acquired craft when it is possible to get into a car drive to The Warehouse, and buy an object for less than it costs to obtain raw materials and make it yourself?

Where craft does exist it is still to do with *having a knack*, possessing knowledge that is unspoken and seemingly unexplainable. It is the type of knowledge that we suppose is picked up by association, and is synonymous with traditional craft, folklore, or myth. The notion of knowledge that is owned by insiders which can, it seems, only be verbalized by observers, is notable for being local, possessed by those with a sense of place. (de Certeau, 1988: 70)

The *knack* for a type of work, could be used interchangeably, or described as using the *art of* - the art of tight fencing, building plumb walls, cooking roast lamb, spinning merino fleece. The art comes from doing the job with *know how*, so that it is better than just adequate, possessing a personal touch. I built our first house in Gladstone fifteen years ago, in my 'spare time'. Recycled timber was used as often as possible, and I designed the interior with Catherine 'as we went'. While I have no formal training as a carpenter, landscaper, architect, I've picked up stuff along the way. My attributes may be patience, and a willingness to work hard using my 'know how'. Working as a builder just 'comes naturally', sealed with the frequently heard site talk. "A blind man'd be pleased to see it" or "Y can't build a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

Local individuals have acquired the knack of lighting fires, digging without strain, clean fast shearing, making fine bread rolls, knitting a jersey without a pattern, keeping ancient machinery going, or maybe possessing 'green fingers' to varying degrees. If one has the knack for doing such tasks, one has likely acquired it without much formal instruction, often from

parents with similar skills. The learning of vernacular tasks is characterized by continuity that accepts rather than challenges process.

When a local sees an ability as intrinsic, de Certeau would suggest he is working in that area where 'art is a kind of knowledge essential in itself but unreadable without science.' (de Certeau, 1988: 68) Using examples from Foucault and Bourdieu, citing their studies of 'other' types of culture,<sup>4</sup> de Certeau reasons that 'know how' exists nonverbally, accepted without definition by those who utilize it. Only when scientists (eg; anthropologists) study the culture, does the information of how it works become available. In other words, in order to observe 'know how' in action, one has to be an outsider; and therefore able to observe while remaining unable to access the intrinsic benefits contained in that specific cultural knowledge. (de Certeau, 1988: 45-60)

Therein lies a paradox. Those who possess the art can use it, but only those who learn the science of cultural use can explain the art. Nicholas Bourriaud has applied a not dissimilar reasoning to fine arts in his *Berlin letter about relational aesthetics*, where he says; 'Whatever the artist's degree of awareness, every artistic practice secretes and transposes social values, bringing them to bear on the individual or collective. The role of the art critic is to take these forms apart, to clarify their content.' (Doherty, 2004: 48) Bourriaud's appropriation of this concept to fine arts will be used as an important

point of departure in the argument regarding the use of 'know how' in my formal art practice. Before entering that discussion it is important to consider another major component in relation to sense of space - the role of story telling.

### **3. Storied knowledge**

Dwelling locally is to become part of that group which knows the stories of a place. The narrative of vernacular carries with it assumptions of insider knowledge. In other words, "stories" provide the decorative container of 'narrativity' for everyday practices. Stories provide boundaries within which to operate, as well as a genealogy of place. (de Certeau, 1988: 125) There is an art to telling these stories, and some people carry the gift with more flair than others. For example, when my father died, among stories told about him were those detailing what a good story teller he had been. He, in turn, became the subject of stories.

One favourite of his, was to do with his grandfather's axe, which he still owned. It had been given a new head twice, and several handles over the years, but was still Grandpa's axe. I don't know where he got that story, or when I first heard it. No matter what the occasion he had the 'yarn' to fit. While others loved his jokes and anecdotes, his children may have heard some of them once too often (but that's another story). Gladstone has its men and women who tell the stories, each with their own style and particularities. Their storytelling acts, de Certeau would suggest, 'as indexes of particulars – the

poetic or tragic murmurings of the everyday' of this place. (de Certeau, 1988: 70) The essential element is that stories verbalize the collective practice that sustains the vernacular. Stories, yarns or anecdotes have a style, most often understated, that gives only a glimpse of local practice. 'They are no more than metaphors...detached from its procedures.' This type of knowledge is 'alternatively artistic and automatic. It is supposed to be a knowledge that is unaware of itself.' (ibid.)

Without the combination of rhetoric and everyday practices – the story that illustrates and reinforces the custom, the vernacular could well have no expression or continuity. Yarning, or chatting together, is also a way in which change can be verbalized. In a sense that keeps the storytelling 'up with the play'.

The role of stories in the vernacular, reinforcing the local, is a feast of many courses and the menu keeps changing. Their collective importance is paramount however in defining place. As the philosopher of place Edward Casey has put it; 'To live is to live locally, and [to] know is first of all to know the place one is in.' (Cresswell, 2004: 23) My own approach to making art reflects upon this thinking, and my first approach was in fact to write a series of texts, to make stories of this place, rather than to create art objects. (Appendix III

#### **4. This place; another story**

Catherine and I moved to Gladstone in 1992. Building our house at Red Roofs took years, and we moved into it with work still to be finished, which is not an unusual story. We planted trees, erected fences, and farmed the acreage with cattle, sheep and poultry. I started learning what it meant to stay in one place for more than a year or two.

Eight years later we celebrated the arrival of the new millennium at a hut high in the Cupola Basin, looking out over mountain tops of Nelson Lakes National Park. We returned home. Later that summer, with friends in the long grass of our front paddock we sat and talked. What a good house site the paddock now was, how fine a dam would look in the swampy area in front of us, how the chestnut trees we'd planted along the gully were growing, we sipped on chardonnay they had arrived to share. Again we looked out across space to mountain tops, the Tararua range. Our place.

By the end of 2005 we had sold seven of our ten acres, along with the red roofed house we had built with our own sweat and labour. During the following year we studied, while carpenters built a new home on the spot where we had shared wine with friends that earlier summer. Our three acre front paddock of the previous ten years was to become our dwelling place – to the south we would move through our new olive grove to the house and, from windows facing north we'd see chestnut trees, plus a woodlot of timber trees we planted over a decade before. The new dam so often seen in my vision of

this new place would be filled with winter rainwater, runoff from paddocks where our sheep and hens fossick and browse. We moved into this house the month before I started work for my Master of Fine Arts.

It seems natural that along with our leaving behind part of our land, and inevitably the story of building our own home, that I would want to think about 'sense of place'. In some ways the year has been a consideration of personal experience, by researching how others have expressed ideas of place. The link between place and thought is no accident. I respond to Roni Horn's desire for, 'a plain knowledge of oneself, a kind of common sense gathered through repeated exposures to distilling experiences ... peace of mind in the world as it is and not as I imagine it.' (Horn, 1994: 24) After a relatively serious bout of ill health in 2004 it seemed important to live more within my physical means, attending more to that 'plain knowledge' of self, and one's own resources. I like the idea of a pragmatic and sustainable relationship with a particular place.

At the same time my work was moving into territory similar to the work of Mary Miss when she says, 'any piece that I'm doing ... is a remark on the content of that place.' (Zapatka, 1997: 14) My research is entwined with the 'way of life' in this place. Observation, commentary and response are contextualized by; the dam, sheep tracks, the woodlot, fencelines, gardens and buildings. These spaces become the locale of story telling, or the art making performance. The research journey has resulted in seeing art making as an organic process in the same way as farming work, characterized by

impermanence, with a slight sense of intrusion. Art for this particular site has attempted to encompass a 'nuanced local knowledge' just as Pollan suggests a successful farmer maintaining a sustainable practice must. ( Pollan, 2006: 191)

I dwell here.

I make art here expressing a relationship with this dwelling place.

The works, in becoming part of a relationship, also form a narrative of place that is ongoing.

If my work considers the need to live with a sense of place, it is also intended that any reading of the made objects also consider a sense of place. Bourriaud is quite clear about the need for intent in his *German letter about relational aesthetics*, writing, 'Art is not merely a trade dedicated to producing forms; it is an activity whereby those forms come to articulate a project.' (Doherty, 2004: 45) My art work is a commentary about relationships with this piece of land, a specific space. Those who view the works, eat the food grown here or share our hospitality, take part in the performance of that relationship, developing it in some way as I will discuss later.

Flaubert in a letter writes; 'Folly consists in the desire to reach conclusions.' (Litt, 2006: 2). In the novel *Bouvard and Pecuchet*.(Flaubert, 2005) his protagonists Bouvard and Pecuchet buy land, with which they compulsively meddle. Their Utopian quest, their constant search for certainty, is seen by other characters in the novel as the object of ridicule. At no

point does the pair stop and wonder if the way things are might be sufficient. Around Gladstone landscaping a garden to be looked at takes place in an area already possessing scenic beauty. One easily gets too busy changing things to allow time for being present with what already exists. Flaubert exposed the folly of this approach, the clumsiness of our desire to improve on the nature. In a sense I use the notion of folly, as my art works contribute little that is functional. Yet folly is not an entirely flippant matter, Flaubert is certainly deadly serious about it. Folly exists in the shadow of a darker beast, humanity's restless seeking of something meaningful. I have considered function (living within a sense of place) and folly (a desire to change things) which are often at loggerheads, and that allows an ambiguity within this project. It is difficult to argue that, while there are aspects of folly within the act, there is anything flippant about butchering your own meat.

---

## **Aspects of the work process.**

The earliest work of 2007 involved the building of a viewing platform in a tree pruned of all its leaves, and the setting of solar garden lights high in a poplar not far from our house. They remain within the site featuring my final works, but are no longer central to my thesis, even though they do encompass aspects of play and folly which pleased me at the time of their installation. My year started to take shape, literally and metaphorically, with the labour involved in creating *Stockyard* off which other works orbit.

### **1. Photography**

Part of my research uses photography, a digital point and shoot camera, supplemented by text. The simplicity of this approach has been intentional, using the precedent of artists such as Roni Horn. She says, of work in Iceland using folds (sheep enclosures), as structures of interest, 'this subject allowed me a way of photographing the landscape without focusing on the landscape itself. I could use the image of the fold to impart a sense of place.' (Horn, 1994: 25) Photography, with textual matter has allowed her another mode of expression.

Photographs in my work are, like Horn's, 'selected images to convey the most accurate sense of place.'(Horn,1994: 26)

Physical features become informed by weather, land use and wild life, among other considerations. Any documentation is contextual, defining a relationship within this project. Using the place, with animals and trees that are grown or nurtured here, I have documented activities such as; butchering, burning after clearing hawthorns, weather and so on. I have also documented the making of art works; *the viewing platform, bridge, yard, and lights.*

Three old merino-cross wethers (emasculated rams), gifted to us on condition they did not end up in the freezer, have been photographed as both comedians and beasts of the field. The wethers signify aspects of living here, demonstrating the way in which one activity may be linked with another. Spinning of their fleece, and other spare time craft activities create valuable commodities as handmade gifts to family. Some of these activities will also become photographic opportunities.

Regardless of how I select this documentary aspect of the work, it must be seen to be a comment that has its own desires and directions which I may have imposed intentionally or unconsciously. It is naïve to suggest my images have access to other than a tentative truth, one aspect of the journey to a sense of place.

## 2. Stockyard

*'On a farm every single animal is a prisoner – grouped, sorted and finally, with great premeditation, killed.'*

Morgan Jones; New Zealand sculptor.(Jones, 2004: 15)

Jones' statement, though central to my art work is not the full story. It would be folly to consider premeditated killing of animals a complete truth of farming life, or a sense of this place. While farming as a whole may be more diverse, stockyards play a pivotal role at times of culling, sorting, and controlling the destiny of farm animals lives. Folds, or small yards are fundamental to the management of domestic creatures such as pigs, cattle and sheep. In some ways their structure defines the domestic relationship for both man and beast. *Stockyard* is central to my year's research. It gathers strands together, featuring as it does the skin of the ram lamb I butchered, dried and home cured then draped over the yard rails.

The object deals with enclosure, denoting both ownership and control – of land and domestic animals, and in extreme cases human populations. In documenting this work, I acknowledge Horn's awareness of sheep folds in her Iceland works and recognize the importance of fence structures in works by Mary Miss such as *Field rotation* (1980-81).(Zapatka, 1997) Yards generally acknowledge the contract we have with domesticated animals, species that evolved long ago to the

point where 'they were more likely to survive and prosper in an alliance with humans than on their own'. (Pollan, 2006: 320) Fences do not only confine my sheep, they protect them from predators. In rural districts every year, dogs are shot for 'worrying' – a euphemism for running sheep down and tearing them to pieces, an instinctive act.

To handcraft wood approaches an act of 'know how' for me, as I have no memory of when I actually started using wood to build things. My approach has purposely been to extend the low-tech possibilities in my recycled or home grown materials. The approach may have taken a lot of effort and time, but has resulted in my becoming more connected to the materials. Apart from four 4" nails used in the making of *Bridge*, and some limestone I have used nothing but the wood as material for the documented works.

For the *Stockyard* I took posts and battens discarded from paddock fences on our own block and others. Originally cut from totara trees, growing at times adjacent to the site being fenced, now the posts are aged, lichen covered, and often unable to have staples driven into them without splitting. I ground back the wood to show the red even-textured grain and then used a chisel and mallet to cut slots into the posts, where the battens can be driven home to form a snug mortis and tenon joint. Using this painstaking method where each slot is a different shape, I've had time to appreciate the subtle differences of grain and texture in each piece. The *Stockyard* is a gesture of acknowledgement to another style of living altogether. This traditional method of working is no longer the vernacular of our place. Old totara posts, with slots cut in them for rails still

exist as garden ornaments for non-farmers locally. We live where machine sawn timber, treated pine posts, and economies of time and scale mean economic viability. Bigger is better, quicker is best.

Heidegger places building as an intrinsic part of dwelling. (Heidegger, 1971: 144-146) In lifestyle New Zealand, building, fencing and other construction is what we do to hike up the capital value of our investment in land. When poet Robert Frost proclaims; 'Good fences make good neighbors', he sure knows that good sayings make good poems. (Frost, 1971: 33) But, I can't resist noting there is a natural world where his poetry doesn't hold true. Fences do not denote ownership, ask any bird in flight.

### **3. The Bridge.**

In *Building Dwelling Thinking*, Heidegger is poetic in describing 'the bridge' and its work;

'The bridge *gathers* the earth as a landscape around the stream. Thus it guides and attends the stream through the meadows.' Or a few lines further; 'The bridge lets the stream run its course and at the same time grants their way to mortals so that they may come and go from shore to shore. Bridges lead in many ways.' (Heidegger, 1971: 150)

Historically access to land has demanded huge efforts within New Zealand, creating an infrastructure capable of taking people into resource rich areas for; gold, timber, coal, farming, tourism, or even just the dream of ownership by a beautiful beach. Roads and bridges have been the traditional business of County Councils, with financial backing from central government. Roads and bridges are constructed, and over the decades modified or renewed in the name of progress. They have even been created as memorials for the war dead. Two bridges in particular have influenced my own construction; the '*bridge to nowhere*' on the Wanganui river, and the Kaiparoro memorial bridge near Mount Bruce, Wairarapa. Neither bridge has a particular function any more, beyond tourism. It is not their construction detail that is a feature, but rather their suggestion of past aspiration, buried now in the instability of memory which is connected to very little substance. They have been abandoned or superseded, by road alterations at Kaiparoro, and failure of a 'pie in the sky' post-World War One soldiers' settlement up the Wanganui on the way to nowhere.

I have constructed a foot bridge that provides an aesthetised entry point to the site of the *Stockyard*. It is placed by the water of a dam, across a gully just as easily crossed in gumboots winter or summer, using timber that is either recycled or grown on the property. Only after considerable effort was the bridge functional, and unnecessary. As a gesture of recognition to the limestone hills that overlook our farmlet, I have used limestone rock to support the bridge stringers which are eucalypt trunks. The trees we planted here, fifteen years before I felled them for this task. Poplar, eucalypt, totara and pine are all used in this object, a lot of resources for something superfluous.

It would be nice to think my *Bridge* is an illustration of de Certeau's thesis regarding the role of stories or 'bridges';

[privileging] a "logic of ambiguity" through its accounts of interaction. It "turns the frontier into a crossing, and the river into a bridge. It recounts inversions and displacements: the door it closes is precisely what may be opened: the river is what makes passage possible: the tree is what marks the stages of advance ...The bridge is ambiguous everywhere; it alternately welds together and opposes insularities. It distinguishes them and threatens them. (de Certeau, 1988: 128)

Heidegger suggests; 'Thus the bridge does not come first to a location to stand in it; rather' a location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge.' (Heidegger, 1971: 152) Faced by the philosophical as expressed in the words of de Certeau and Heidegger, I am attracted to the simplicity of a child's delight, when I tell them the story of *The three Billy Goats Gruff*.<sup>5</sup> The clicketty clacketty bridge is only needed to 'get to the other side'.

#### **4. Totara stump.**

Having built *The bridge* and *Stockyard*, it became appropriate to mark the site in which this activity took place. For that purpose a 'monument' was erected, using materials consistent with the other works. Inevitably a friend facetiously referred to this piece as, 'your latest erection' which, while subverting the action's serious intent, provides a welcome lightness to an obviously phallic object.

A weathered totara tree trunk has been machine-ground back to sound timber, removing the accretions of many years, possibly even centuries, submersion in the Manawatu river bed. Complete with root structure, the trunk must have fallen into the river long ago, and has its own story to tell. The choice of this material references carvings of tangata whenua,<sup>6</sup> as much as the colonial community's practices of raising monuments to promote a sense of nationhood in the face of achievement or loss. My own great uncle's name is inscribed on ANZAC memorials in Wairarapa.<sup>7</sup> He experienced first hand the sense of nationhood promoted by the builders of monuments, at the end of a bullet.

Historically 'place symbols such as flags, ceremonies, maps, monuments and all manner of images are constructed to make a place a part of people's lives', so that a sense of place in art can expect to reference 'the complex entanglement of history and geography that go into making 'place'.' (Cresswell, 2004: 101-102) The construction of a work that references the monument automatically takes into account ideas beyond the vernacular. However, it is also possible to subvert the very public nature of the idea of monument. Again, Cresswell (2004: 103) suggests 'The use of place to produce order leads to the unintended consequence of place becoming an object and tool of resistance to that order ... The clearer the established meaning and practices of a particular place the easier it is to transgress the expectations that come with place'.

Is creating works of folly, of art in non-art places, a transgression? My monumental four metre high totara trunk is another ambiguous work that may be monumental, but is an unlikely monument. In any farming community, all work is vulnerable to the interrogative gaze across the boundary fence wires. Most locals prefer to 'keep their head below the parapet' through reticence. It may well be the evolution of a different sense of place, the change taking place in this area, allows me to get away with making the work I have, while avoiding adverse comment. Things haven't only changed here, they are in full flight. Appropriate memorials do exist elsewhere in the district.<sup>8</sup> The monumental piece achieves a site specific aim, proclaiming the point of entry to a site in which there are objects, of which it is one.

A book I have returned to many times is '*The unknown craftsman*' by Soetsu Yanagi, translated by Bernard Leach. The timber works made this year could be considered a token act of recognition to the many unrecognized men and women including my own forebears, whose sense of craft inform my own desire to attend to craft know how while making art. In other words all the work is a memorial of sorts.

## 5. Killing for food

*You have just dined and however scrupulously the slaughterhouse is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity;*  
R.W. Emerson. (Pollan, 2006: 226)

The everyday activity of human intervention is aestheticised by my documentation, in the same sense as Darcy Lange, filming freezing workers on the killing chain, or bushmen felling trees during the 1970s in New Zealand, aestheticised their work.

A ram lamb has been used in my own work to illustrate the inevitability of the process of domestication, ending up “on the hooks” to use the vernacular phrasing. Be it a ‘killer’ or one of the three old merino wethers these creatures are domesticated, but they are not pets. Their role is not that of performing seals, nor is it a chance to ridicule or poke fun at their ‘otherness’, in the sense that Edwina Ashton’s 1997 video performance *Sheep* exploits postmodern irony. A similar attempt to use irony/ comedy occurs when Gregor Kregar dresses a dozen sheep in coloured woolen jumpers, held in a yard for his work, *Matthew 12:12*. (Waiheke Island, 2003.) It appears that the urge to anthropomorphize domestic livestock in art is alluring. At best that approach results in little more than one-liners, rather than an integrated consideration of the source of the art. Conjoint with that urge is non-engagement with the wider debate regarding the eating of meat, and the conditions in which most domestic animals trade security from predation for slaughter. While not wishing to enter that debate fully, compelling writing toward this debate is offered by Michael Pollan. *The Omnivore’s dilemma*.

'Folly in the getting of our food is nothing new. And yet the new follies we are perpetrating in our industrial food chain today are of a different order. By replacing solar energy with fossil fuel, by raising millions of food animals in close confinement, by feeding those animals foods they never evolved to eat, and by feeding ourselves foods that are far more novel than we even realize, we are taking risks with our health and the health of the natural world that are unprecedented. (Pollan, 2006: 10)

Closing one's eyes to the relationship we have with the natural world allows us to eat food, (either meat or vegetable) from sources that degrade what we use to sustain our bodies.

The mention of being at home with the food we use reminds me of Alec Wilson a retired farmer;

*The only words I can remember him saying were. 'If you've got livestock, then you're going to have dead stock'.*

*The truth of his words are vacuous, if viewed by a society who obtains meat from a supermarket counter, and gets the local pest destruction officer to destroy wasp nests, vicious dogs, and any other pesky creature that is out of control. For those few people who still live outside cities, it may not be quite so clear cut. I own a butchering knife, as do my farming friends. We own rifles. They are periodically used for their sole purpose – to kill a living being. Thinking about this recently, and doing some tallying, it became apparent that killing has been my consistent companion For meat with a knife or rifle; deer, rabbits, from time to time a hare, sheep, pigs, young cockerels, old hens, on occasion a bull or steer, wild fowl, pukeko. All manner of fish, I've caught with net, spear, bait or lure; eels, shark, kahawai, trout, and more besides, flounder, sole, gurnard, herring.*

*Then there have been the maimed, ill, or just plain pests that have been dealt to; gummy ewes, the cow with a broken leg, cows and ewes at birthing, possums, wasps, magpies, dogs with a taste for blood, feral cats.*

*And then when bush has been felled, or swamp drained, god alone knows what mayhem has been visited on the lives of the many small crawling, swimming, flying things. About now I arrive at Gary Snyder's paraphrasing of the First Buddhist Precept, or teaching which directs that we 'commit no unnecessary harm'. It is not compulsory that we all, to paraphrase Roni Horn, set about remaking the place in which we live in 'the image of mankind'. If one is a farmer, or a person on a city street, we have the same choice it seems, to live with awareness of the natural, the animal self. 9*

Neolithic man made art on cave walls depicting animals. At that time, according to Joseph Campbell, 'a kind of covenant between the animal world and the human world' existed, in which what was eaten was known intimately. (Campbell, 1989: 72) Flaubert if he was to write today, would probably say we have long lost the capacity, to use a Pollan phrase, to 'look our food in the eye', which is indeed a great folly.

And, Pollan deserves the last word; 'It seemed to me not too much to ask of a meat eater, which I was then and still am, that at least once in his life he take direct responsibility for the killing on which his meat-eating depends'. (Pollan, 2006: 231)

## 6. Performance.

There is an element of performance, of shared participation, implicit within the work as it is presented. At times friends have helped to move heavy materials into place, an explicit act of participation. A random audience can view the site from the road. Placed in a site close by our house, the works can be viewed from the kitchen window, as part of a living environment, a farmlet in action. Inside the house, we eat as part of the work. Pollan suggests, 'the way we eat represents our most profound engagement with the natural world. Daily, our eating turns nature into culture ... [then] eating puts us in touch with all that we share with the other animals, and all that sets us apart. It defines us.' (Pollan, 2006: 10) Aspects of his stance would sit well with the practice of artist Rikrit Tiravanija who in 1992, created works incorporating food within art spaces, at 303 Gallery in New York, and then at the Venice Biennale in 2003. (Doherty, 2004: 45).

In critique situations I have offered home-cooked mutton sandwiches, or spare ribs, as an offering of a living (nature morte) art in process, before viewers engage with the objects waiting to be viewed. By killing a ram lamb and presenting that as a performance, the sculptural works shift their emphasis. The lamb was held in *The Yard* prior to slaughter. It grazed on *the site*. The ram lamb joins anyone who eats its flesh with the soil of this place, turning 'nature into culture' as Pollan says. Over the rails of *stockyard*, a sheepskin is a reminder of that act in which there is complicity if we eat flesh, or

perhaps even view the action as art. When the sculptural works, with their aspects of folly, are related to the performance with food they develop a context with implications beyond their stance as art objects in a defined space.

Sharing food, meat and vegetables grown here, also creates the opportunity for a different engagement within the art project. My possession of the knack (skills) to provide the food, hints at knowledge which is possibly subversive of the established order. Self-sufficiency implies a questioning of capitalism, commodity and culture. De Certeau [suggests] 'some ways of thinking about everyday practices ... are of a tactical nature. Dwelling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping, and cooking are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses'.

This is in reference to the way *know how* can be the means of subverting and questioning power structures. He also refers to *know how*, or what I term the possession of a knack in doing things, as being aligned with art, or the middle ground between the approaches of science and philosophy which is where artisan (and art) exist. (de Certeau, 1988: 39-40 )

---

## **Last words.**

*'Places are never finished but always the result of processes and practices.'* (Cresswell, 2004: 37)

The works have used everyday activities to consider day to day relationships that exist in this place? The cycles of life in which producing 'food for the family', or utilizing land to provide wool, firewood or other needs, depends on acquired knowledge. How does that knowledge accrue? How it is used, or performed?

Second guessing nature in ways that go with the flow is an art. It is not necessarily art. However, if one is carrying out the process within a context of aesthetic concerns it can shift the activity into that of art practice as Bourriaud showed in his study of *Relational Aesthetics*. (Bourriaud, 2002) Having the mix of experience, common sense and creativity to efficiently make decisions, while dwelling or building, is the realm of the artisan (artist) and seems always to be site specific. In another sense such a way of approaching day to day life, indeed *'the Practice of Everyday Life'* is always going to be relational, a performance of belonging and know how.

My year's work has become localized in focus. Each piece in certain respects contributes to a story about belonging here. It is developing in other words, a sense of place. Is there any other way for that mix of attributes I have encountered in my work to be acquired, without the growth of a sense of place? 'We pay too much attention to the design of places, when it is

what we routinely do in them that gives them their character. "It is our sense of time, our sense of ritual" and everyday occurrence ...which in the long run creates our sense of place." ' (Pollan, 1997: 274)

These works are unlike anything I've made previously as art, and are based on farming practice learned as long as forty years ago, as much as decades of reading as part of art practice. In not dissimilar circumstances, Miss started working within the environment and claimed, "It was like redefining what art could be." (Miss, 2004: 23) In so far as the work brings me into contact with the meaning of the act of dwelling here at Gladstone both physically and intellectually, the research has proven to be worthwhile, while the project could grow to fill all available space. Our sense of place, so often becomes our sense of self, mirrored in a location we have created, changed, or altered. We consider willingness to change desirable. Many of us consider our own desires of primary importance. We also think of materials as consumable, and land, like art, as a commodity. Are there alternatives for the artist? When Pollan writes; 'It is too late in the day – there are simply too many of us now – to follow Thoreau into the woods, to look at nature to somehow cure or undo culture ... today it is probably more important to learn how to mingle our art with nature in ways that culminate ... in forms of human creation that satisfy culture without offending nature.' (Pollan, 1991: 114) He is suggesting that we have to be sensitive to where we are, physically and culturally. Is he also proposing we learn new ways of relating to place? I think so. When we make a pathway, it is part of a personal journey. Be the pathway metaphorical, through the living room, or negotiating a way across a hay paddock, we take part in the creation of narrative, a sense of place, a journey that has no

true beginning or end. Cutting a pathway from one work to another was the last act I carried out in 2007, at this place. The pathway is now part of a story that creates a sense of this place.

Here, there have been interventions; fire sites, tree planting, fencing, building, the introduction of livestock. There will be others as 'No place is a fixed or concluded thing.' (Horn, 1994: 23) It is folly to seek out certainty, or closure. My tenure of this acreage is little different from the tenure of others, in so far as the interference with nature is a characteristic of human occupation. The most benign or well meaning presence will still cast change into the air, and across the earth being occupied. There may be a case for being more tentative in our vision, of our status as artists, or occupiers of a particular space. It could be time we learned to question the desire to change things, to be accepting of our place or role in things as more passive participants.

*"Is it right, that one of those still frost-distilling nights in August last year, you went out for a piss ... and that you were able to reach up, to actually touch a star?"*

*"I'm not sure about that son. Tell you one thing though. Go out on a clear night. Let your eyes have a moment to accept darkness, then look up. What have you got? The greatest free show on earth, that's what." 10*

My art, and my thinking, are inextricably linked and conditioned by living here. Time passes, change will occur. The process will continue with work, and a deeper sense of this place, unfolding in stories yet to be told.

---

**Notes:**

1. The marae is named *Hurunui o te Rangi*
2. *urupa* – there are a number of family cemeteries used by local Maori families.
3. Toi Walker, local Maori resident and tangata whenua. Informal conversation, probably 2004.
4. Foucault, M. (1975). *Surveiller et punir*. Paris, Gallimard. (1977). *Discipline and punish*. Trans. A Sheridan. New York, Pantheon.  
  
Bourdieu, P. (1972). *Esquissed'une théorie de la pratique. Précédée de trios etude d'ethnologie kabyle*. Genève, Droz.
5. *The three billy goats gruff*, a traditional folk tale from Norway.
6. *tangata whenua* – the people indigenous to this place, in Wairarapa, the Maori of Kahungungu or Rangitane tribal descent.
7. Private John Robert Dunn, Ruahine Machine Gunners, Wellington Regiment. Died 8<sup>th</sup> August 1915, Chunuk Bair, Gallipoli.
8. Examples are; ANZAC War Memorial, Memorial to first recorded flight in New Zealand, by David Percival Fisher June 21-23, 1913.
9. An extract from Appendix III *Texts; a sense of place*
10. An extract from Appendix III *Texts; a sense of place*

## Reference List:

- Berger, J. (1991). *And our faces, my heart, brief as photos*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational aesthetics*. Paris: Presses du Reel.
- Campbell, J. (1989). *The power of myth; with Bill Moyers*. New York: Doubleday.
- Cresswell, T. (2004). *Place; a short introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- de Certeau, M. (1988). *The practice of everyday life* (S. Rendall, Trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Denver, J. (1974). Back home again (pp. 2): BMG Music.
- Doherty, C. e. (2004). *Contemporary art; from studio to situation*. London: Black Dog.
- Emerson, R. W. (1950). *Essays; first and second series*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Fearon, K. J. (1976). *Gladstone*. Carterton: Fearon.
- Flaubert, G.(2005). Bouvard and pecuchet. Normal, Ill: Dalkey Archive.
- Frost, R. (1971). *The poetry of Robert Frost*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Heidegger, M. (1971). *Poetry, language, thought* (A. Hofstadter, Trans.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Horn, R. (1994). *Inner geography*. Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art.
- Horn, R. (1996). *Earth grows thick*. Columbus: Ohio State University.
- Lippard, L. R. (1997). *The lure of the local; senses of place in a multicentered society*. New York: New Press.
- Litt, T. (2006). *We're all spooks now*. Retrieved 18.11.2007, 2007, from

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/generalfiction/0,,1883390,00.html>

McKenzie, D. W. e. (1987). *Heinemann New Zealand Atlas*. Auckland: Heinemann, with Dept of Survey and Land.

Milburn, F. (2004). *Morgan Jones; Journeys and decisions*. Christchurch: Christchurch City Art Gallery

Miss, M. (2004). *Mary Miss*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

O'Doherty, B. (1999). *Inside the white cube; the ideology of the gallery space*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Park, G. (2006). *Theatre country; essays on landscape & whenua*. Wellington: Victoria University Press.

Pirsig, R. (1976). *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance*. London: Corgi.

Pollan, M. (1997). *A place of my own; the education of an amateur builder*. London: Bloomsbury.

Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma; a natural history of four meals*. New York  
Penguin.

Pollan, M. (1991). *Second nature; a gardener's education*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell.

Sharr, A. (2006). *Heidegger's hut*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Stegner, W. (2002). *Where the bluebird sings to the lemonade springs*. Retrieved 31.10.2007, 2007

Stilgoe, J. R. (2005). *Landscape and images*. Charlottesville, USA: University of Virginia Press.

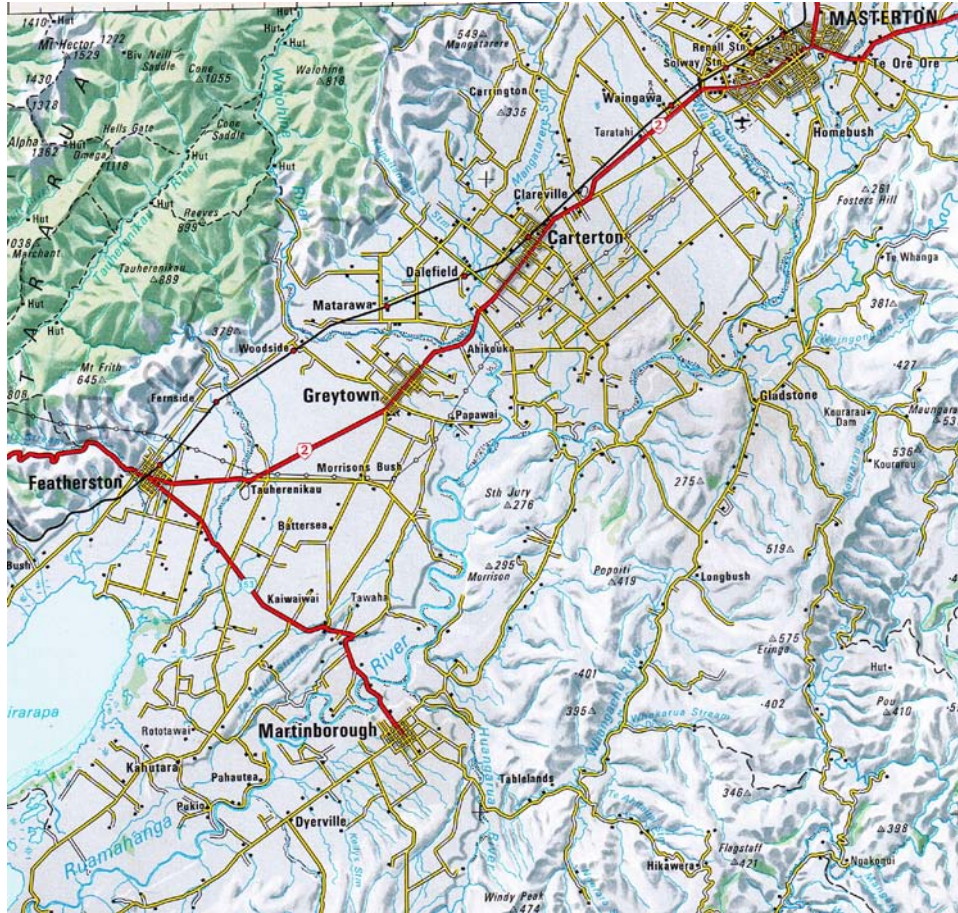
Turner, B. (2006). The sins of our fathers. *New Zealand Books, Vol 16*(No. 4 (Issue 25)), 3,4.

Yanagi, S. (1972). *The unknown Craftsman; a japanese insight into beauty* (B. Leach, Trans.). Tokyo: Kodansha International.

Yeats, W. B. (1938) *Selected poems; lyrical and narrative*. London: MacMillan.

Zapatka, C. (1997). *Mary Miss; making place*. New York: Whitney Library of Design.

## Appendix I



(Heinemann New Zealand Atlas, 1987. p 51)

Appendix II

ROLL 1817 SHEET 3 ASSETS 10 - 149  
 TOWNSHIP OF GLADSTONE  
 SOUTH RIDING  
 WAIRARAPA SOUTH COUNTY



Plan of the unsuccessful Township of Gladstone, which was surveyed and sub-divided in 1870

Map of projected township of Gladstone. (Fearon, 1976. p 52)

### Appendix III

An integral part of the work for **Being Local: a sense of place** was carried out provisionally as a text and photographic document. The perception early in my year was that this would ultimately become a separate work, from that presented for the examination by exhibition/performance. Therefore, because it is still an important component of my years work, I have chosen to present **Texts: a sense of place** as an appendix which supplements the exegesis, rather than being part of it.

It can be used to inform some of the thinking I have carried out, in an attempt to arrive at an expression of a 'sense of place'. To arrive at complete autonomy, the 'texts' require further work. They are, however, still a valuable presence within my thesis, as they provide an intimate documentation of some aspects within the work, another way of seeing as it were, the place in which I live.

I refer in my exegesis to the ongoing nature of my art process. The 'texts' are therefore required to stand as they are, a progress report, a part of things.

## A sense of place

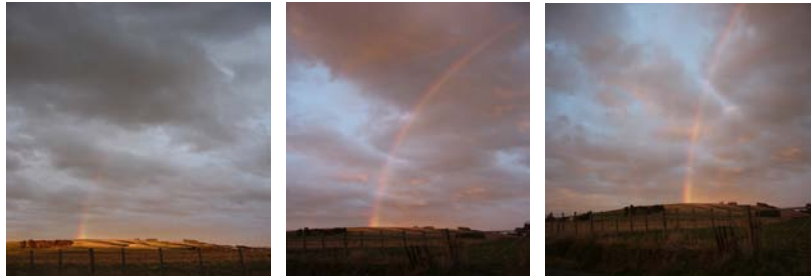


...Heidegger asserts that landscape is not reduced for him to the object of observation – landscape as an aesthetic event. Almost in the guise of autobiography he notes, “Strictly speaking I myself never observe landscape. I experience its hourly changes, day and night, the great comings and goings of the seasons.” observes Andrew Benjamin in the prologue to Adam Sharr’s *Heidegger’s Hut*. It seems the philosopher is unable to remove the lure and romance, of the sublime presence, the weight of the mountains, from his words. Almost as if he is trying to put the world right about the way living in a place ‘like the Black Forest’ should be. To use words in this way, ‘the great comings and goings’, seems to me to limit the cycle of change that is the seasons, to proclaim judgement upon nature, to hallow it while you rein it in.

Another approach could produce more empathy perhaps, more sharing and less pronouncement. What if it was as James Galvin writes in *The Meadow* :

Those of us who’d known Lyle longer knew he didn’t have moods, he had weather. Not some inner weather that could have been a mood Lyle had *the* weather. Inside him he had going on exactly what was going on in the sky, or some combination of recent weather and what was likely to develop. Old friends were perfectly happy to get snowed on for a couple of hours over

coffee, though anyone would have preferred the happy emanation of cloudless sky and sun, even if the sun was shining on a snowdrift ten feet deep.



In a sense, Heidegger may have lived close to nature. But, was he ever really there? When he built his 'hut' at Todtnauberg in the style of the local population of traditional farmers, he was borrowing a rural vernacular rather than defining it, acting as spectator rather than participant. As Adam Sharr notes in his monograph, *Heidegger's Hut*, when Paul Celan visits Heidegger at his mountain retreat; '...in the Black Forest, Celan was better informed on plants and animals than he himself was. They also talked about contemporary French philosophy, but Celan's attention was elsewhere ...'

One evening just on dusk, we called on Tommy McKay for some reason or other. It was August, the middle of a rough lambing spring. Wet weather had bogged down ewes, chilled and killed lambs, and made the local farms exhausting places to be. By then Tommy must have been in his late sixties, and his body bent over an orphan lamb he was bottle feeding would have ached like it was breaking in half. We greeted him, discussed the weather, commiserated, stated our business and sorted everything. As we were leaving, for some reason I've forgotten, Tommy smiled a tired smile. "Treat nature well, and she'll treat you well," he said. "Goodnight."

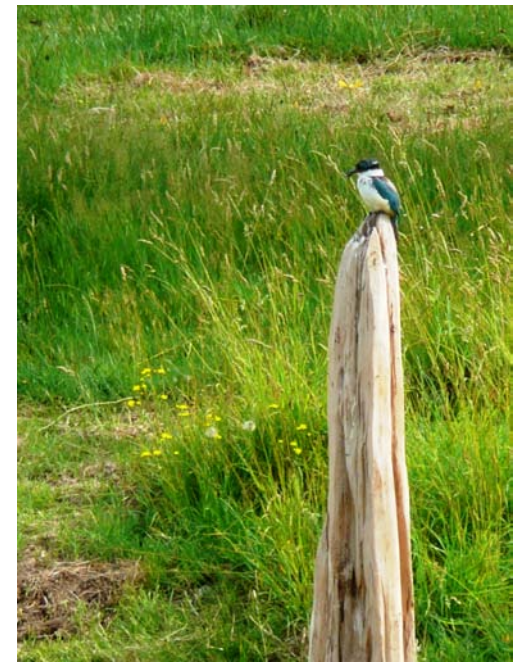


## Observation Post

And then the viewing platform was made, as a living form. To be titled *viewing platform*, or *observation post* occupied my mind for some time. They are very different objects, carrying out the same task but at times for very different purposes. The viewing platform is a salute to the sublime, or at least to our pursuit of the sublime as a visual encapsulation of our surroundings. While an observation post has a military or surveillance use connected to it.

In titling this piece *Viewing platform* there is an ambiguity present. One has no need to clamber onto an unstable platform to view the mountains across the Wairarapa plain. In fact the Tararua mountain range rises above the patchwork of paddocks and vineyards west of this site gathering sufficient authority to demand attention without my intervention. To the east the Maungaraki hills reflect the state of the season, as paddocks change colour according to the dry of summer, untidiness of autumn, the wet feed-bare look of late winter or the lush greens of spring ... and need no viewing platform to offer that information.

Perhaps the only clue is the dam which sits down a bank from the platform. Observation over time would enable a viewer to track the passage of kingfishers (kotare) as they perch and wait patiently for movement in the water below. For months on end the life cycle of a variety of creatures provide interest to kotare, and their highly developed predatory skills. From early spring when frogs first croak their amorous intentions to the world at large on a warm night, the dam becomes the local supermarket, a magnet to beaks of birds that hunt. Not only the kingfisher arrives, looking out supplies for a hungry nest, but at times a little black shag or a long-legged blue heron will take up residence for days at a time. It is only a few days ago, that I saw for the first time, a kingfisher perched on the leading edge of the art work ... and yes, as I watched he swooped toward the surface of the dam then lifted away with something glistening in the grip of his beak.

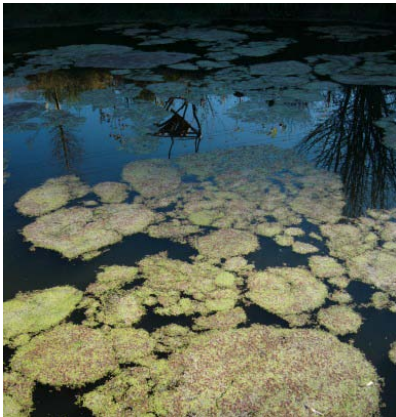


That is the law of this piece of earth. The dam provides habitat for frogs, and insect larvae of all sorts. They provide food for kingfishers, swallows, and other birds. Thousands of tadpoles must hatch in the dam, but we find few little green frogs migrating from the dam to their hibernation hideaways each autumn. The untidy grass round the dam provides cover for other attractions to the hungry birds, varieties of lizards or skink try to maintain cover there.

Hawks regularly use the gully leading into the dam as part of their scavenging beat, gliding on the most subtle of air movements while using their fantastic vision to seek out the day's sustenance. Again the dam can be host to a vulnerable species as grey ducks, mallard, and teal all try to raise broods round the edges of the water. Any straying duckling that is out of luck will be gone if the hawk happens to be on patrol ....



And, always above the dam is the weather. Defining each days activity, for human and animal life alike. This year has been dry.



It continues to hold the pattern we know to be a late summer drought. Now time has passed to the extent we are looking at a serious situation for local farmers. We have not had the usual growth of autumn pasture which is necessary for winter feed. Of course it will not only affect the farmers. Some bird species rely on autumn insect hatches to provide the energy and body fat they need to see them through the winter months. Without rain, the insects tend not to proliferate.

The ground is still hard and dry. We are less than four weeks to the shortest day of the year, and there is dust to be raised if one attempts digging ... dust and blisters on hands if they are unprepared for the task.



July 16;

I have been feeding a hawk. For all I know it may be more than one hawk. Yesterday we saw three harrier hawks drifting on thermals over Tommy McKay's paddocks. It is lambing time, and they are always ready to feed on a dead lamb, or a scrap of afterbirth that some ewe has not eaten. The hawk will circle, ever patient, while a caste ewe, or one with a bearing slowly rotting from her rear end struggles against the inevitability of her situation. Scraps of meat, that is all farming means to a hawk. Opportunists, they do well where paddocks replace bush. All I wanted to do was see if they would eat offcuts from the beef we get out of the freezer for our own meals.



Maybe there is a photograph opportunity to be had if they swoop down onto the platform. Tim Low, Australian author of *The New Nature* would describe my act as typical of human beings that want to meddle with the natural order. My charity can be seen as altering the survival chances of other species, by encouraging a predator to hang about in the skies above the dam and trees we have planted. And, it has to be admitted, we have provided and encouraged many other smaller birds and animals to enter this space by doing other things; leaving grass to grow long, fencing sheep and cattle out of some tree growing parts, planting different sorts of

trees, flaxes, and native grasses. Just about every step we take alters the natural balance of the area. Mind you, leaching of sprays from crops further up our gully alters the balance also, and we have no control over that as the land is not ours.

## Longing and belonging

I.

Brian Turner is just one writer who tangles with this question, and the maze-like answers than come back from the asking ... *driven by a belief that all need to see land as – to borrow from the great Aldo Leopold – a community to which we belong, rather than a commodity.* Turner is confronting the term *indigenous*. A word that, a label that defines our sense of belonging. Twined inside the alphabet of our desire to be part of something, the word *indigenous* bestows rights, a history and claim to place that no amount of longing can assuage. But, indigenous is no more than a word. No bird, fish, or mammal, no insect or amphibian gives a damn, they live and die right where they are, or where they end up.



II.

After my mother developed emphysema, a tendency to be reclusive hardened into an attachment to being indoors, where she could watch birds through a window. She wrote letters that became a litany of birdlife, and what she had seen of their activities in the garden. One season, she had my father feeding quail on the lawn each day. We would read how many she had seen each week. By the time I was fifty years old I had lived in forty houses. We can ask no questions of the dead, but I wonder sometimes if the constant shifting and sense of displacement drove my mother mad?



III.

Hank arrived in New Zealand as a Dutch immigrant, back in the early 1950s. He came from a place where girls had gone out in the fields of Arnhem and stolen parachute silk from the corpses of American and Canadian paratroopers during the early days of Normandy. The first time he left Holland was as a member of occupation forces who served in Indonesia after the Japanese and Americans had finished fighting there. From that point on he only returned 'home' to visit family for funerals and farewells. There was no returning to the place where strong men wrecked their lungs in coal mines, and youngsters earned the money to emigrate picking potatoes out of paddocks in water up to their knees.





## Fencing

I.

My first day of paid employment as a farmhand in 1966 was fencing. Colin MacDonald at Coal Creek on the West Coast was milking cows for town supply, and sending the milk in to Greymouth each day. He bought a neighbouring property and hired me to work for him on his much enlarged property. Fencing. He took me down to a straggling growth of blackberry and gorse, with a slasher and fencing pliers. Beneath the wilderness of thorn and prickle was an old barbed wire fence, four rusting strands stapled to silver pine posts rotting out at ground level. My job was to cut the wire free of the wilderness and roll it into coils so that the gorse and blackberry could be cut with a rotary slasher.

Slashing gorse or blackberry is a shitty job, the pliable sap growth springing off the blade against the body of the person doing the slashing. To remove the wire out of the tangle meant moving the cut growth, which in turn meant handling a nest of thorns and lodging painful splinters of thorn in your flesh. Then manipulating the fencing pliers to remove staples from posts has the capacity to bark the skin off knuckles when one is not practiced in using them. As a final test of desire, pulling the barbed wire of away from the fenceline and rolling it into coils is a rat's nest of a job, with the rusty barbs always capable of tearing pieces of skin from hands that are not yet adroit in this task.

I worked away for hours, until at last it was time to go and help with the evening milking of the fifty big Friesian cows. My hands ached from the jarring work, but it was all exciting and new, so I worked with a will.

The next day was to be the same again. When I arrived at six in the morning for milking, Colin grinned. “You decided to come back for more?” he said. My hands were red from scratches, and swollen where a needle had been used to dig out pus-causing thorns the night before. We milked the cows.



## II.

Hank lives across the road. At eighty-plus, he is still hired at Clinton-Bakers, and Moorhead's which has just been sold (it is Booth's place now), to do fence repairs, replace rails on yards when mustered bulls smash them, drench ewes and lambs, and care for dogs when their owners are away. Nellie is getting a little absent minded these days. We drop in for a cup of coffee and a chat. Just ordinary stuff. Hank told me one day when he dropped by to check out what I was doing, after I started building the yard out of recycled totara, how he used to cut totara trees for fencing, at Pupurangi, the farm down the road. He would ride out to the back of the farm, which was too hilly for vehicles, carrying a crosscut saw and an axe along with his fencing gear. He'd use the axe and saw to drop a totara, splitting it for posts where it fell using wedges and the axe. The timber split so clean, he'd then be able to use it immediately for the fence he was building. Parts of the tree unsuitable for posts could be used as intermediate battens, or left where it lay to rot. My friend Andy who followed him as manager of the farm, says that the remains of some branches and the old stumps still lie there, forty or fifty years later. The fence and posts still track their way up the ridgelines.

Posts used now to divide the land into ever smaller units of ownership are radiata pine, treated with a toxic brew of chemicals to prevent ground rot. They leach poison into the groundwater, and last less time than heart totara. However, grown in plantations all over the country they are a sustainable resource. Totara takes hundreds of years to grow, and the oldest surviving rangatira specimens would probably have been growing since before the birth of Christ.

#### IV

I wanted the locals to comment about the yard, once it was placed down by the road. By the mailboxes one day, Hank and I had a laugh about how they looked good, but were no good for anything much. They asked Hank, because Hank knows most of what's going on. "You know that fence in Pat's paddock. Is it around a graveyard?" He might be Dutch and over eighty, but he hasn't lost his sense of humour. "I don't know," he said.



V.

Robert Frost may proclaim; *Good fences make good neighbors*, and he may even know that good sayings make good poems. There is many a bird and beast to which poetry doesn't hold true, any more than a fence creates ownership. And, for that matter fences weren't necessary once. Even people knew how to share.

VI.

Hank hung some gates for me last autumn. He wouldn't let me pay for it either. Using a hand turned auger, he drilled holes for the gudgeons. Then by eye, he hung the gates, making slight adjustments till the hung level and true. They'll swing true as long as I need gates. Watching Hank work is a bit of a reminder of how much we have lost with passing time, at the same point as we are reminded how far we have to go. Robert M. Pirsig comments on the art of craftsmanship in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*:

...look at a novice workman or a bad workman and compare his expression with that of a craftsman whose work you know is excellent ...he'll be absorbed and attentive to what he's doing even though he doesn't deliberately contrive this. His motions and the machine are in a kind of harmony. He isn't following any set of written instructions because the nature of the material at hand determines his thoughts and motions ...

Hank has that. It is a combination of experience and attention. Without one, the other won't suffice. So much rural work is dangerous, as James Galvin reminds us:

Almost anything Lyle did was hazardous ... he mostly worked alone: felling trees with chainsaws; balancing on the top log of a barn; hewing with an axe so sharp that a couple of fingers or toes wouldn't even slow it down; or just out fencing – old wire can snap under the stretcher and come at you like a snake, or lay open the side of your face like a stiletto.

My son Gareth is a carpenter. Watching him work just a week before his thirty-sixth birthday this year, I saw that he is in Pirsig's craftsman zone. For Gareth, the tools and materials form that harmony, giving access to an art form. He gives total attention to the task, making things that are strong, and beautiful.



## Killing your own meat

I.

Alec Wilson built his home at Purua during the second World War. By milling a totara growing in his paddocks, he acquired sufficient timber to build the three bedroom house that I rented off him during the winter of 1980. By then there was a beehive that had burst through the wall to occupy one room, rats and opossum lived in the ceiling and walls. To occupy the building we had to clear the infestations with a .22 rifle, traps, and poisons.

He was a generous and wise old man, steeped in local experience garnered from the pioneering of a hilly block of land that he turned from bush into a dairy farm. The only words I can remember him saying were, 'if you've got livestock, then you're going to have dead stock'. The truth of his words are vacuous, if viewed by a society who obtains meat from a supermarket counter, and gets the local pest destruction officer to destroy wasp nests, vicious dogs, and any other pesky creature that is out of control. For those few people who still live outside cities, it may not be quite so clear cut.

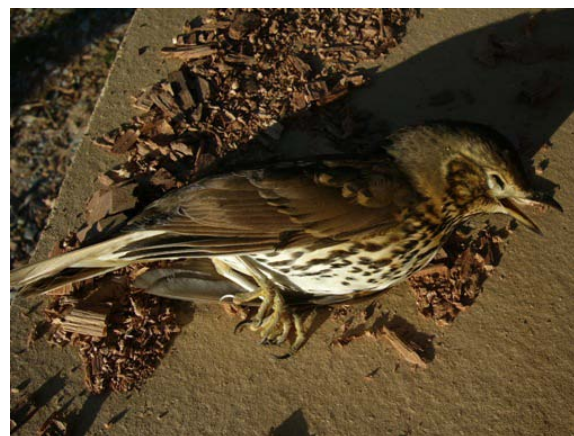
I own a butchering knife, as do my farming friends. We own rifles. They are periodically used for their sole purpose – to kill a living thing. Thinking about this recently, and doing some tallying, it became apparent that killing has been a constant companion

For meat with a knife or rifle; deer, rabbits, from time to time a hare, sheep, pigs, young cockerels, old hens, on occasion a bull or steer, wild fowl, pukeko. All manner of fish, I've caught with net, spear, bait or lure; eels, shark, kahawai, trout, and more besides, flounder, sole, gurnard, herring.





Then there have been the maimed, ill, or just plain pests that have been dealt to; gummy ewes, the cow with a broken leg, cows and ewes at birthing, possums, wasps, magpies, dogs with a taste for blood, feral cats. And then when bush has been felled, or swamp drained, god alone knows what mayhem has been visited on the lives of the many small crawling, swimming, flying things. About now I arrive at Gary Snyder's paraphrasing of the First Buddhist precept, or teaching which directs that we 'commit no unnecessary harm'. It is not compulsory that we all, to paraphrase Roni Horn, set about remaking the place in which we live in 'the image of mankind'. If one is a farmer, or a person on a city street, we have the same choice it seems, to live with awareness of the natural, the animal self.



II.

My widowed grandmother raised five sons while living on a block of a few acres, where they milked some cows, and grew their own fruit and vegetables. She was, to quote a saying of my father's, 'tough as a goat's knee'. The boys, fatherless before the eldest was ten years old, put meat on the table from a variety of sources. An obvious and easy way was wringing the neck of surplus chooks, or young cockerels. They could also be inventive, keeping a straight face as they greeted the local policeman, heading for home with poached trout stuffed down their trouser legs.

There were fish for the taking off shore at Hampden near the Moeraki boulders in those days, and they would use hand lines or nets to bring home flounder, cod, mullet, or anything else they could catch. The trout taken from streams rather than sea, were tickled as often as not. To lean over an old log and feel the pulse of life in a trout that can't be seen, only touched, is primitive food gathering at its most elemental. That smooth snap of movement when fingers slip into the gills and the fish is lifted out of the water, out of reach of flowing water and safety

As they grew older the boys learned to shoot. I once saw my uncle nonchalantly shoot a running rabbit with a .22 single shot rifle. He just stood tracking the rabbit with the barrel and by the time the report had stopped echoing, the rabbit had stopped kicking. He had plenty of practice I guess, living in Otago hill country where rabbits were an infestation of undesirable wildlife, eating farmers off their land in competition with sheep.



The hunting incident I remember best was later;

My father took me out with a shotgun when I was twelve. He had borrowed the gun from a workmate, an old double barreled job, was a slightly loose stock. His own single shot was being repaired. We were hunting pheasant, without a dog, which I learned later was like pie in the sky – and Dad knew it. Surprisingly, as we tracked through Yorkshire fog grass, knee high, and manuka scrub above head high, we did flush a fine cock bird.

We'd walked past where he'd been concealed and camouflaged. He'd beaten us with stealth and didn't have to flush, but he did. I'd never heard a pheasant take off in those days, and the whirr of his wings gave me a hell of a fright. We turned and Dad swung up the gun. Tracked the flight. Click! Nothing happened, except the bird gained height and disappeared beyond the canopy of manuka.

I knew my Dad could swear, so it didn't bother me that he let slip about guns that misfired, hunting without a decent dog, bugger bugger bugger...and worse.

Funny thing is he forgot to fire the second barrel, even though he had the bird dead to rights, and plenty of time. I'm grateful he didn't knock it out of the air. I've seen plenty of birds shot since then, but not many better sights than a wily old cock pheasant rising against the angled afternoon sunlight of autumn, absolutely aglow with colour as he wound up against gravity and out of sight.

III.

The first deer I ever shot lay dying. I had my knife out, ready to help her on the way. She looked up. The eyes clouded as I stood there, deciding what to do. Deer have huge soft brown eyes. Their browsing habits decimate the under story of forests, if their population increases too much.

IV.

Dad decided to clean his rifle. Stan Homer was sitting in the sofa chatting to him.

When their ears stopped ringing, and Dad had recovered from the shock of firing a live round in the living room they found the bullet hole.

Neat as a new pin, drilling through the window pane, it must have passed within a couple of inches of Stan's ear.







## Firewood.



I.

Hank planted trees every year he managed the farm.

“If those bloody settlers had chain saws there wouldn’t be a tree left on those hills,” he says again. Pointing a work thickened finger to Blackwod’s hill paddocks where remnant bush has shorthorn cattle grazing beneath it, he tells the story I’ve heard before. I’ve seen land cleared by what is called ‘slash and burn’. He’s right, about the chainsaws.



II.

Each winter he gathers old totara battens and fenceposts, cutting a shed full of firewood from them. Watching Sky television recordings of rugby test matches in the morning, they need a fire to stay warm. They can't afford pay television but their boys pay for it as a birthday present. Hank tells me. "It's as easy to sleep in front of t.v. as it is to go to bed these days."

We know things are okay over the road, when each morning at 6.00 am. smoke lifts into the chill winter dawn from their chimney. As Nellie ages, so Hank spends more time in the kitchen.

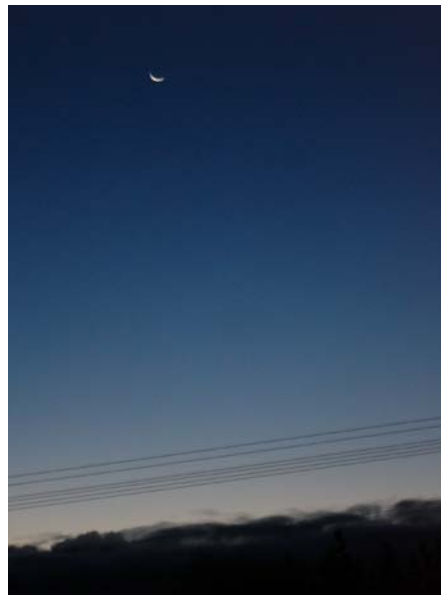
Last thing each late afternoon, he ties up and feeds his huntaway bitch, and the pup. Going to the woodshed he gets firewood, gathering an armful from the carefully stacked rows, ready for that night and next morning.



### **Last word**

“Is it right, that one of those still frost-distilling nights in August last year, you went out for a piss ... and that you were able to reach up, to actually touch a star?”

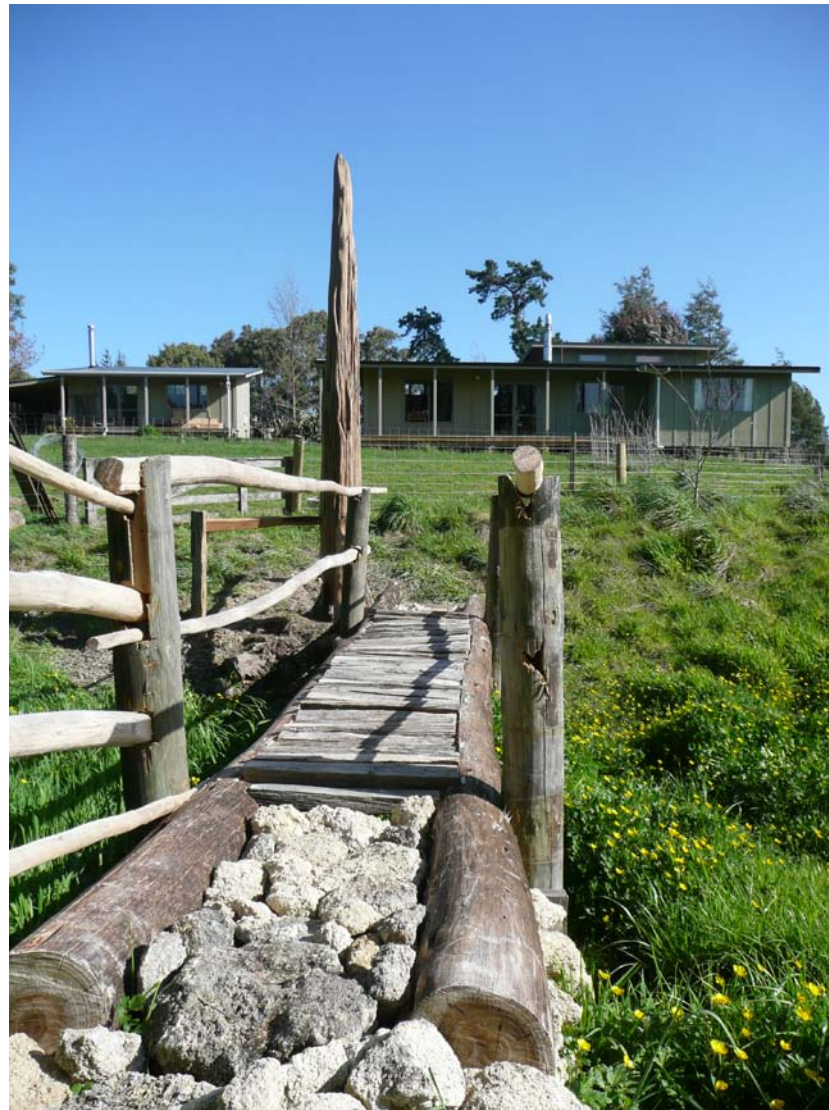
“I’m not sure about that son. Tell you one thing though. Go out on a clear night. Let your eyes have a moment to accept darkness, then look up. What have you got?”



The greatest free show on earth, that’s what.”

## Bibliography

- Berry, Wendell (2002) *The art of the commonplace; the Agrarian essays of Wendell Berry*. Washington, D.C: Shoemaker & Hoard.
- Dillard, Annie (1974) *Pilgrim at Inker Creek*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Galvin, James (1992) *The meadow*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Heidegger, Martin (1971) *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Kwon, Miwon (2004) *One place after another; site specific art and locational identity*. Cambridge, Ms: The MIT Press.
- Leopold, Aldo (1993) *Round River; from the journals of Aldo Leopold*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Low, T. (2003). *The new nature; winners and losers in wild Australia*. Camberwell, Aust.: Penguin.
- Park, Geoff (2006) *Theatre country; essays on landscape and whenua*. Wellington: Victoria University Press.
- Pirsig, Robert (1976) *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance*. London: Corgi
- Snyder, G. (1995) *A place in space; ethics, aesthetics, and watersheds*. Washington: Counterpoint.
- Thoreau, H. D. (1999) *Walden, or Life in the woods, and On the duty of Civil Disobedience*. New York: Penguin.
- Turner, B. (2006) *The sins of our fathers*. p.3 New Zealand Books Vol 16, No. 4, October, 2006.





## **Index:**

artisan	17, 39, 40
Ashton, Edwina	35
Berry, Wendell 1934 –	8, 16, 76
Bourriaud, Nicolas 1965 -	19, 24, 40, 45
butchering	25, 27, 36, 66
Carterton	11, 13, 45
common sense	17, 23, 40
craft	17, 18, 27, 34, 64
Cresswell, Tim	16, 17, 21, 33, 40, 45
dam	22-3, 31, 53-5, 57
de Certeau, Michel 1925 -	17-21, 32, 39, 45
Denver, John (H.J.Deutschendorf, Jr) 1943 – 1997	10, 45
Doherty, Claire	19, 24, 38, 45
Dunn, Pte J. R.	44
dwel, dwelling	12, 15, 17, 20, 22, 24, 30, 39-41
Emerson, Ralph Waldo 1803 – 1882	16, 35, 45
farm	10, 12, 22-3, 28, 31, 34, 36, 41, 51, 57, 62, 66, 73

Fearon, Kevin	13, 45, 48
fencing	18, 22, 28-30, 34, 42, 57, 61-4
Flaubert, Gustave 1821 - 1880	
food	4, 9, 24, 35-40, 68
friends	10, 22, 32, 36, 38, 50, 62
Frost, Robert Lee 1874 – 1963	30, 45, 64
Galvin, James 1951 -	50, 64, 76
Gladstone	6, 11-15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 41, 45, 47-8
Hampden	12, 68
Heidegger, Martin 1889 – 1976	15-17, 30, 32, 45-6, 50-1, 76
Horn, Roni 1955 -	13, 23, 26-7, 37, 42, 45
house	6, 8, 9, 11, 15, 18, 22-3, 26, 38, 59, 66
Jones, Morgan 1934 -	22, 45
knack	18, 39
know how	17-20, 29, 34, 39, 40
Kregar, Gregor 1972 –	35
Leach, Bernard 1887 – 1979	34, 46
lifestyle	30
lights	26, 27
Leopold, Aldo 1887 – 1948	58, 76

livestock	35, 36, 42, 66
Low, Tim	46, 57
Maori	12-14, 44
material	17, 29, 32-3, 38, 41, 64
meat	15, 25, 35-9, 57, 66, 68
Memorial	11, 31, 33-4, 44
Miss, Mary 1944 -	23, 28, 41, 46
natural	18, 23, 30, 36-8, 46, 57-8, 67
nature	25, 33, 38-42, 46, 49-51, 64, 76
performance	23, 24, 35, 38-40
photograph	26, 27, 49, 57
place, sense of	7, 8, 10, 16-18, 23-7, 33-4, 40-1, 44, 49
Pollan, Michael 1955 -	9, 24, 29, 35-8, 41
process	19, 23, 26, 35, 38, 40, 43, 49
resistance	33
sculptural	38, 39
shearing	18
sheep	22-3, 26, 28-9, 35,-6, 38, 57, 66, 68
Snyder, Gary 1930 -	37, 67, 76
space	7, 12, 13, 15, 20, 22-4, 38-9, 41-2, 46, 57, 76

spinning	18
Stegner, Wallace Earle 1909 – 1993	8, 16,46
Stilgoe, John R 1949 –	11, 46
Thoreau, Henry David 1817 -1862	41, 76
travelling	11, 15
totara	29, 31, 33-4, 62-3, 66, 74
trees	11, 22, 27, 29, 31, 35, 57-8, 62, 64, 73
vernacular	9, 15, 17, 19-21, 29, 33, 35, 51
viewing platform	26-7, 53
Wairarapa	6, 9-12, 31, 33, 44, 53
Whakataki	13, 14
Whareama	14
wool	35, 40
Yeats, William Butler 1865 – 1939	7, 46
Yanagi, Soetsu 1889 – 1961	34, 46