

## REVIEW

### ***Shifting Nature*, photographs by Wayne Barrar with an essay by Geoff Park**

(Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2001)

By Di Halstead

*Shifting Nature* aims to change our thinking about the genre of landscape by interrogating the way human presence alters it. Both text and image explain the ways in which the landscape image is mediated. Our training to see the picturesque and the scenic as systems of representation in the landscape has determined the way we view the land through the photographic lens. Barrar and Park enable us to see the traces of human intervention. They replace elements which have been expunged from tropes such as the souvenir. Barrar reminds us of the things we would rather hide, in the same way that we hide our bodily functions.

This book is an extended version of the catalogue *Shifting Nature*, enhanced by the printing of each photograph into ink production for publication by Martin Schnäzel of *Ink and Silver* fame<sup>1</sup>, which was published by Photoforum with quality photographs and print publication to obtain the standard of production deserved by photographic practice. This new text includes a range of photographic projects dating from between 1985 and 2000: *Landscape of Change*, *Nauru Portfolio*, *Saltworks*, *The Processed Landscape*, the eponymous *Shifting Nature*, *Mason Bay: A Natural Succession*, *From Waikato Te Awa: The People and the River*,

*Restoring Ground*, *Herschel's Blue*, and *An Immortal Double*.

The images are discussed by ecologist and historian Geoff Park. His text moves between his personal response to the New Zealand landscape and readings of Barrar's photographic style and images. The reader gains a rich understanding of 'other' spaces within the landscape category. .

The souvenir uses the scenic and picturesque to sell, to colonise and commodify our land. To do this it often disregards parts of the scene in its framing of it. Through the souvenir's influence we have learned to perceive the picturesque and scenic as a particularly authentic representation of the land. Barrar's framing of the landscape in his photographic projects show a keen eye for the less 'authentic'. His images are interrupted, honest and thought provoking with their discomfiting reminders of our intervention in the landscape; the edges of abandoned technology; and human action that has and hasn't worked. The acknowledgement of the result of failed technological intervention enables us to identify mistakes in our so-called 'progress' and the power of nature to change these. He thus presents us with a visual conundrum or irony.

This is the first full-scale study of Wayne Barrar's work. From a photographer's point of view this book is extremely valuable. The quality of the images is almost that of the actual photographic print and therefore an understanding of the photographer's craft is enabled. The texts make academic issues accessible for the general reader without diminishing their impact. The images are relevant to an ecological study of New Zealand; and postcolonial uses of the landscape are referenced both in respect to New Zealand's situation and to that of Nauru. In all, this is an extremely good compendium

of Wayne Barrar's practice over a decade and with the accompanying essay it is a rich investigation that will be useful for future artists and also for discussions on ecological issues.

I would have appreciated a more dynamic cover and I have reservations about the use of same-page titling. While this serves to locate the works, it prevents them from being seen as more generic examples. I would also have found a bibliography useful.

Nonetheless Geoff Park's accompanying essay and Wayne Barrar's photographs work together to create a compelling book. While it is scholarly, it should also be on everyone's coffee table as a reminder of our intrusive actions as we commodify land and promote its scenic presence.

- 1 John B Turner (ed.), *Ink and Silver* (Auckland, Photoforum, 1995).

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