Your fictions become history

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Cover illustration: "Your Fictions Become History" — Barbara Kruger, 1982

FURTHER TOWARD
A DECONSTRUCTION
OF PHALLIC
UNIVOCALITY:
DEFERRALS

This essay is the sequel to REMISSIONS: TOWARD A DECONSTRUCTION OF PHALLIC UNIVOCALITY. publ. AGMANZ 17:1, republ. ANTIC 1, and QEII documentation of the Art critics conference (where it was first presented).

It is 37 years since Simone de Beauvoir raised the question "What is woman?"[1] Of course, Freud had already raised the question, answering it with such an expenditure of scientism that the metaphysical presuppositions underlying his argument were obscured.

Women, he said, is determined by her anatomy. Or, more particularly, by what her anatomy LACKS: that organ on which men have invented their pride. Without a penis what can she become and what can she WANT — except that which she has not.[2] And so this envious castrato was relegated by (de)fault to the OTHER side of masculine desire: to serve as prop for man's heroic psychodrama of virility.

Of course Freud was aware that his theory of woman was incomplete, if unconducive to women and anticipated the debate it would raise among women psychoanalysts.[3] But it was de Beauvoir who most effectively transgressed the boundaries of essentialism Freud had built, by refor-

mulating the question:

"one is not born a woman, but rather becomes a woman."[4]

De Beauvoir posed the problem in a different form: namely, how does the (biological) female child become the (acultured) feminine woman? She argued that the facts that man has a penis and woman does not, that woman bears children and man does not, have no intrinsic meanings in themselves, but have acquired cultural meanings.

Throughout history, she argued, the masculine viewpoint has constituted a principle of "sameness" against which woman has been defined as "other" in a system of binary oppositions which privilege the masculine term. This is the socio-historic process by which, she argued:

"it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature."[5]

But the 'woman question' fell back into masculine hands when Lacan re-presented

Freud's argument in a linguistic formulation, in which it was the phallus (rather than the penis) which became the crucial term for determining woman's fate.

Lacan argued that the phallus represents the "Law of the Father" in the Oedipus complex which splits the child's imaginary symbiotic unity with the mother. It marks the child's entry into the "Symbolic Order" of meaning and thus serves as the primary organiser of language. And the unconscious, he argued, is structured like a language.

Lacan concluded that because woman lacks a relation to the phallus, she has no position to speak from. She is "outside the symbolic" which structures the unconscious. As he says,

"there is woman only as excluded by the nature of things, which is the nature of words."[6]

Excluded from language, woman is thus deprived of a subjectivity of her own and a desire of her own. She does not exist in

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relation to herself. She inhabits absence within this phallocentric discourse and is forced into silence. As Lacan says,

"women . . . don't know what they are saying which is the whole difference between them and me."[7]

Lacan allowed a feminine sexual pleasure beyond the phallus. But de did not allow the possibility for women to articulate this pleasure ("jouissance") which is to say (and ALL he allowed sayable) that sexual pleasure could not inscribe itself on women's subjectivity. In Lacan's words,

"there is a jouissance proper to her, to this her which does not exist and which signifies nothing. There is jouissance proper to her and of which she herself may know nothing, except that she experiences it — that much she does know."[8]

It was for the generation of feminist intellectuals working after the May '68 student-worker revolt in Paris to prise open the edifice Lacan had erected under the spectre of the phallus, in order to (re)invent an ideolgical space in which to "speak as women" : to speak of an autonomous sexual pleasure which could inform feminine subjectivity.

That the '68 revolt had a catalytic effect upon French feminists — as it did on other areas of French left-wing thought — is significant if one remembers its catch-call : "liberale parole" (free speaking). Mobilised by the Situationist Movement, intellectuals, writers and artists were no longer satisfied to resign from political intervention. No comparable event has shaken the Anglo world to awaken intellectuals as a group to the ethical commitments of politicised writing.

Julia Kristeva was among the writers who formed 'Tel Quel' the semiotic Marxist/Maoist journal. The university of Vincennes was established in the wake of the revolt as a nucleus for experimental studies. Hélène Cixous was to become professor and initiator of the women's studies programme at Vincennes. Luce Irigaray, held a professorship in psychoanalysis there, until her hasty dismissal having raised the anger of the pater familias by revising Lacan — the reigning head of L'ecole Freudienne at Vincennes — in her, SPECULUM OF THE OTHER WOMAN. (Ironically, Lacan had been dismissed from a more sectarian Freudian school, in 1953 for his revisions of Freud.)

Alright, so these dissident daughters — the New French Feminists — set out with the skills they had learned from the patriarchs, to dismantle the "Law of the Father".

With deconstructive skills learned from Derrida, they embarked on a process of upturning the grand master texts of patriarchal binary thought. As Irigaray says,

"The issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the SUBJECT or the OBJECT but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretensions to the production of a truth and a meaning that are excessively univocal."[9]

Under a deconstructive reading, the theory, literary work or mode of representation in question, is shown to be blind to its own presuppositions and thus to exceed its claims to truth. The project of deconstruction is to expose and dismantle the metaphysical structures which underlie rhetorical surfaces. In feminist deconstructions, the structures in question are the binary oppositions . subject/object, same/other, masculine/feminine, by which men and women (respectively in accordance with these terms) have been defined around the phallus.

Barbara Kruger, 1982

Put is crudely, feminist deconstructions imply that the 2,000 years (or whatever we have endured) of phallocentric systems of thought, are built on sand. They could have been written differently. They are merely fictions. But they are the master fictions which determine our perceptions of 'reality' and of ourselves. As Cixous says,

"Phallocentrism IS. History has never produced or recorded anything but that. Which does not mean that this form is inevitable or natural."[10]

Phallocentrism is all that is available to us. We are formed INSIDE it. So to rewrite its claims, phallocentrism must be turned inside out.

Lacan's structuralist analysis was of enormous value to French feminists, because it located the nature of women's repression in language itself. But Lacan also imposed a closure. He sealed women's fate as an irreversible process. Feminist deconstructions using Derridean methods are POST-structuralist precisely because they demonstrate that the binary oppositional structures which create women's fate, can be displaced and (re)inscribed in a different way.

It is for this reason that Irigaray advocates a "work on language."[11] The most rigorous of the feminist deconstructors, Irigaray engaged in a project of internal readings of the psychoanalytic and philosophic discourses of the West (working backwards from Lacan to Plato, to reveal their presuppositions) in an attempt to overturn their claims to authority. As she says,

"I am trying . . . to go back through the masculine imaginary, to interprete the way it has reduced us to silence, to muteness or mimicry and I am attempting from this starting point, at the same time to rediscover a possible space for the feminine imaginary."[12]

It is through this analytical process of inversions, that Irigaray attempts to speak through the cracks in phallocentrism, in order to allow a new concept of femininity to emerge through its rhetorical surfaces. 'Différance' in this deconstructive usage, is closer to what we call 'deferral' in English. 'Feminine difference' would become that which cannot be understood in either of the terms in the oppositional regime. As Irigaray says,

"They should not put it, then in the form 'What is woman?' but rather repeating interpreting the way in which, within discourse the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency or as imitation and negative image of the subject they should signify that with respect to this logic a DISRUPTIVE EXCESS is possible on the feminine side."[13]

Deconstruction creates a space for (re)building — it allows the possibility of an as-yet unknown and unimaginable conception of woman, not reducible to the old hierarchical terms. Through the displacement of the concept of the phallus and the privilege it bestows, "femininity" (and "masculinity") are unlocked. Both the sexes can be dephallocentrized. No longer fixed terms in opposition, they could take new meanings.

In the reconstructive phase of Irigaray's project, she uses a more poetic formulation to evoke the transitional space (of deferral) in which woman might rediscover herself, in

"a sort of expanding universe to which no limits could be fixed and

which would not be incoherent nevertheless."[14]

Derrida's "hymenal" metaphor demonstrated the value of metaphorics as a textual strategy for creating new fictions, to follow the displacement of phallocentrism. Irigaray's "parler femme" ("speaking as woman"), Cixous' "L'ecriture feminine" ("feminine writing") and Kristeva's semiotic (rhythmic free play, of a pre-referential language, related to the mother-infant communication) are poetic-theoretical formulations in which metaphors, analogies, similies and double entendres are used strategically in inter-textual games, to suggest a position from which woman might speak herself.

These new fictions of femininity must be seen in terms of their theoretical premises: as the inventions of deconstructors. The French femininists do not claim any authoritative truth for their fictions — as the grand patriarchs had for THEIR fictions of phallocentrism. Given that deconstruction puts the referential status of language into question, they make no claim for the ontology of their fictions. Their intention is to demonstrate that the two sexes could be represented in different ways.

It was Nietzsche who said,

"Truths are illusions concerning which we have forgotten that they are just that."[15]

And it was Nietszche who advocated that philosophers turn their attention instead to the "will to truth" to its value for creative living. The precursor to deconstruction, Nietszche was the first philosopher to purposively use fiction as a strategic device. When Nietszche advocated that,

"we have to await the arrival of a new species of philosopher . . . the philosophers of the dangerous 'perhaps' in every sense."[16]

was the old misogynist unwittingly anticipating the advent of feminist deconstructors?

When the French feminists advocate that women (re)write the female body, which man has coded as HIS property (the site of HIS desire) they are treading this dangerous 'perhaps' : creating different fictional-truths, which have instrumental value to women.

They are not returning to the essentialism they denounced — as some Anglo literary critics have assumed.[17] Such misinterpretations can only arise from reading their metaphorics literally (as ontological commitments) which is to read them out of their theoretical context.[18]

French feminisms must be seen as a critical intervention within the grand philosophic and psychoanalytic traditions which dominate the French intellectual milieu. It is precisely through their tactical complicity with phallocentric discourse that they can subvert its pretensions to truth : to have defined woman. In this way they avoid the dangers of gynocentric, theoretical separatism which — quite apart from its dubious premises — can only ever be marginally reformist because it leaves the central core of phallocentrism intact. As Irigaray says,

"the articulation of the reality of my sex is impossible in discourse, and for a structural eidetic reason. My sex is removed, at least as the property of the subject, from the predicative mechanism that assure discursive coherence."[19]

It is precisely for this reason that she advocates a "work at destroying the discursive machinery".[20] There can be no pure realm outside phallocentrism for women to begin from; it is only by working through phallocentrism to invert its claims that women can (re)invent herself.

Nor can French feminisms be read reductively — any more than Barthes might be — because their mode of actual writing, with all its intricacies and inversions is integral to their meanings. Their writing is a critical evocation; theory with a perlocutionary power. Their politics are embedded in their style, in their intention to engage the reader in that mental attitude which motivates deconstruction: to listen 'otherwise', to be alerted to the gaps and silences in phallic logic — to evoke the inarticulatable (feminity).

It is precisely in the experience of reading their complex writing and becoming involved in that mental shift which propels deconstruction that they are of such enormous value, not only to feminist literary criticism and practice, but also to feminist art criticism and practice. What they provide is a "springboard for subversive thought", as Cixous says, which is

"the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures."[20]

Visual language excludes feminine subjectivity through its metaphysical investments, since the meanings of visual signifiers (signs) are based on the binary structures on which phallocentrism is founded. Visual representation is a psycho-social manifestation of subjective experiences which are ideologically determined.

Of course, the great myth of modernist art practice is the so-called "authority of experience". This is the supposed origin of the meanings art is reputed to embody and to which the critic is supposed to attend. But what is this "authority" of experience? According to empirical art criticism and the attendant expressionist myths it has spawned, this "authority" originates from the subjectivity of the artist.

But as Lacan demonstrated, subjectivity is pre-written, through a symbolic order of meaning which excludes women. If, as Lacan argued, woman is excluded from the "nature of words", she is equally excluded from the nature of visual signifiers.

How then can women find a position to speak from in visual language? The parallel in the visual arts to Irigaray's "work on language" would be a work on representation. Following the French feminists' deconstructive strategies such a work on visual representation, would involve a disruption of the supposed claim of any visual signifier to represent a single, coherent meaning.

By upturning the meanings of visual signifiers a displacement (parallel to that Derrida demonstrated in linguistics) would enable new meanings to be reinscribed, into the signifier in question. Duchamp demonstrated how a signifier (an object or image) can be used to mean itself and a different meaning, to simultaneously proffer and defer meaning, in order to engage a duplicit reading. The same principle of allegorical duplicit reading underlies postmodern use of appropriation, image-text juxtaposition, site-specifity and impermanence — as Craig Owens, has argued.[22] In America and Britain feminist artists are using appropriated imagery and image-text juxtapositions to aim at what Michéle Montrelay calls "the ruin of representation." This work has taken cues, in part, from theoretical Anglo feminist film criticism, under the prime agency of Laura Mulvey[23] who was the first to apply Lacanian analysis to film narrative structures.

These feminist artists (Kruger, Sherman, Levine, Kolobowski, Rosler, Kelly, Yates, Lomax and others) are questioning the meanings of visual signifiers to expose their basis in phallocentrism in order to dismantle their given meaning and reinscribe different meanings.

Alright, to return to the New Zealand context where feminist art criticism — as distinct from literary and film criticism — has, to date employed empirical methods, in ignorance of theoretical developments which relate to feminist art issues. In part this is due to the all pervasive predjudice against "intellectualising" which dominates the art context in New Zealand. To repeat the tiresome cliché, I hear so often, from artists (of both sexes): "you just do it, you don't think about it." Which, of course, is an articulation of the old "authority of experience" fallacy.

This determination, not to "think" has reduced the New Zealand art context into a world-unto-itself, removed from other disciplines — which would actually provide arguments to destroy many of its foundation myths. It is corroborated by the infiltration of Rogernomics into the art context. While to its great financial gain this creates a further danger that art practice and criticism could be reduced to the making and promoting of corporate images — unless some "thinking" is begun. 'Art New Zealand' avoids such politicised questioning, and thereby castes critics into the role

of taste-makers to guarantee the investment potential of art.

What would happen if the phallic libidinal and egoistic investments inscribed in the images of mayor profit-making artists, were to be exposed through sub-textual readings? If the angst in the pants of Jeffrey Harris — an angst which puts so much in the bank — were to be questioned?

Harris' paintings embody the "expressionist fallacy" (see my paper, **'The Simulated Thrust'**). Unlike the German neo-expressionists who at least attempted to address their political situation (though being submerged by it), Harris is an individualist; the privileged, white, male artist romanticising the so-called "primitive" in himself.

The compositional devices in his paintings ensure that the viewer is elicited to identify with HIM, as the supposed originator and central character in a psycho-trajectory, in which the woman character is excluded as an exteriority. The rectangular canvases he favours, create the effect of a cinematic screen on which he can hierarchize his characters. The old binaries of inner vs outer world dictate the positions of the masculine and feminine characters in his visual grammar, to produce this phallicly univocal perspective.

In Harris' imaginary of inner turmoil, the woman character is the OTHER: mother of HIS children (Freudian penis substitute?) and object of HIS desire (fetish object?). But this "dark continent" is also a paradox, she is at once passive (prop for his "ego-libido"?) and dangerous (the Oedipal castration threat?). It is phallocentrism's cultural formations, which speak through Harris's painterly surfaces. This is not "unmediated expression" it is a coded expression of the way men have been formed within phallocentrism; which in turn underlies his recurrent themes.

What can he do, trapped inside his coding? The noose and other signifiers of potential death, haunt his imaginary (Freud's death, "beyond the pleasure principle" that cannot be fixed?). At times it is the woman character's head which is threatened with decapitation. But if she keeps her head, it is only to lose it to silence; which, as Cixous says is the condition under which women keep their heads,

"if masculiniy is culturally ordered by the castration complex, it might be said that the backlash, the return on women of this castration anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution, of woman, as loss of her head."[24]

Harris's paintings, are a rhetorical expression, of the privilege history bestows upon men. It is little wonder that this angst from the deep, damp south of New Zealand gains such capital value on the market-place.

If art criticism were to link art practices to theoretical developments, it would call many mainstream practices on the art market into crisis. But, as Hal Foster suggests,[25] is that not what 'criticism' means?

An understanding of the mechanisms of cultural subjection, is a pre-requisite for any transformation of our position as 'subjects'. That we are all the more subjected by NOT KNOWING how we became subjected (or, in the case of most men, even that they are subjected — if in a different way from women) is a fact empirical criticism can take no account of because it deals with symptoms as though they were original causes. The complexity of the problem women artists are involved in, using a visual language which excludes them from the outset, cannot even be hinted through empirical methods of criticism.

Feminist art criticism in New Zealand has used empirical methods in an attempt to understand the sociological and material obstacles confronting women artists. Its project is pragmatic and reformist : primarily concerned with promoting women artists within the phallic institution of art, while leaving its foundation myths unchanged.

By laying itself at the feet of the phallic edifice, this criticism has enabled a greater number of women artists' work to be shown. But at the cost of allowing women artists to be recuperated as a single, undifferentiated category annexed to masculine art practice. The phallic institution is now, inviting a greater number of women artists to exhibit, to assure its ego that it has done no wrong. And many New Zealand women artists are doing precisely that (witness **'Content/Context'**).

As long as women artists say the things the patriarchy has taught women to think about themselves — that she is the passive to his active, sensuality to his reason, moon to his sun, nature to his culture, earth to his industry, past to his present, magic to his science, witch to his priest, chaos to his logos, dream to his reality — then, of course, they will be accepted into the phallic institutions. Women artists who subordinate themselves within these phallocentric fictions, provide the patriarchy with the greatest confirmation that women are exactly what history has always said she is : slave to his mastery, in other words, HIS cunt.

It is for this reason that I have been — and continue to be — severely critical of fundamentalist feminist art. Such work operates to bolster masculine domination in a more concealed and therefore, more dangerous way than the most blatant piece of misogyny by any male artist, because it confuses the issues of women's repression by resurrecting the insults of phallocentric fictions, under the guise of 'feminism'.

The Chicago-Lippard school of "shared imagery" art, reduplicates the terms of women's repression in phallocentrism. Chicago presented woman as a cunt served up on a plate. Norman Mailer could not have desired a more fitting dinner party than the "prisoner of sex" delivering herself up as an edible dish.

When New Zealand women clone from this essentialist school, twelve years after its inception, in a colonial art context, infinately less critical than the American art-world, they monopolise the perspective on women's art to a greater extent than the entrepreneurial Chicago managed in the metropolis.

When Juliet Batten paints large cunts, or facilitates a walk-in menstrual cunt ('Menstrual Maze') and Vivian Lynn makes a walk-in menstrual Goddess cunt ('The Gates of the Goddess. A Southern Crossing attended by the Goddess.' 1986) they effectively deliver woman up for a gang-bang. The visible vagina, is men's experience of sexuality, not women's. The erogenous labia and clitoris are, after all, invisible to the female subject they belong to. As Irigaray describes with her lips and labia metaphorics, women's sexual pleasure is tactile and diffuse it is multiple and extends through many parts of her body. It is not circumvented to a single organ (in the way men have localised THEIR pleasure).

By privileging sight these women play into the culturally coded unconscious mechanisms of scopophilia, in the way any male pornographic photographer understands when depicting woman. To depict woman as visible-cunt is to interprete her as Freud had : as in want of a penis, which is precisely the interest of the male voyeur. Women need to (re)invent their OWN eroticism not (re)subordinate themselves to man's pornography. An eroticism in which there might be an equal exchange of sexual difference, rather than domination, under phallic terms.

By depicting women as not only cunt, but menstruating cunt, they play into a further Freudian/Lacanian interpretation of woman as representing the castration threat: the bleeding wound. And this plays into the interpretation of woman's body as "disgusting" at a time when we need to re-write our beauty, for ourselves. Patriarchal religions have interpreted the "bleeding wound" as woman's punishment for having tempted man in the "beginning". Rather than upturn these phallocentric definitions which have repressed women for centuries, they resurrect them as monoliths.

As the French feminists demonstrated, the strategic value of the (re)invention of an autonomous feminine sexual pleasure, would be to displace the phallic term. The English translation 'pleasure' only approximates their meaning of 'jouissance'. In French there are two words for 'pleasure': 'plaisir' which is a culturally determined enjoyment of identity (linked to ego) and 'jouissance' which is a shattering enjoyment which dissipates identity. It is this shattering effect of 'jouissance' which is

revolutionising to a phallic libidinal economy — which they link to capitalist gain to emphasise the exchange use women have in phallocentrism.

They provide analytic skills to distinguish this "jouissance" from the masculine libido women have been taught to confuse as their own pleasure. Phallocentrism has decreed that woman prostitute her body to masculine desire, which is privileged to fulfill itself without any regard for woman's existence. (After all, she cannot be heard, she is excluded from language.) Many women internalise their coding so thoroughly that they even have phallic masturbatory fantasies and there are documented cases of women experiencing so-called 'orgasm' while being raped. If woman is defined as the 'passive' to all that man 'is' (as 'active' subject), then she is, of course, symbolically ultimately fulfilled as rape victim. The more common occurrence is the emotional dependency many women develop in relation to men. Man is required as the 'presence' to give her an existence (as object, that is, 'absence'). The age-old question Freud could not answer, "what does woman WANT?" cannot be answered in phallocentric language (as women Freudian psychoanalysts such as Horney and Deutsch demonstrated) UNLESS that language is inverted to provide a displacement in which woman might say what cannot be said in phallic language : what she wants.

When women artists resurrect ancient goddesses and matriarchal symbols and position them in the place of patriarchal symbols, they leave the underlying structures of meaning unchanged. They merely annex an irrelevant past to present structures of meaning. They do not disrupt the process of deification which perpetuates patriarchal modes of self-worship (the God he invented to guarantee His supremacy). Given that these are the religions man conquered, they signify woman's defeat.

When Claudia Pond-Eyley paints self-portraits against female icons she (re)duplicates the same structures men use to represent their self-worship. In 'Self Portrait. Me and Ancient symbols; (May 1981) she stages these symbols against a stained-glass door, which functions to structure the image in the atmosphere of a patriarchal church. The effect is to give no specificity to the female icons in relation to her self-portraiture, because the structuring device of the image is patriarchal and dictates the reading.

Irigaray has denounced returns to alternative matriarchal religions as a "regression", because they remove women further away from the political issue of difference.[26] Her strategy is to always refuse either of the binary terms in phallocentric fictions, in order to create a new meaning.

Marte Szirmay's sculptures, resurrect the underprivileged terms in the binaries which relate to women: the nature, earth, matriarchal identifications. In her 'The Meandering Spiral' (1986) she literally harnesses an alabaster/resin spiral (women = nature) underneath steel straps (man = industry). Vivian Lynn, uses hair to signify woman as the sensuality, nature, matter side of the old binary regime. In 'Caryatid' (1986) she literally polarizes signifiers of sexual difference by using columns, with hair on one and a graphite grid on the other. In her accompanying statement she says,

> "They are the projections of the underlying duality in human psychology and sexuality as well as of nature and culture."[27]

Here is the unquestioned acceptance of the fictions phallocentrism has produced of a polarised universe, in which woman is defined as the (underprivileged) opposite to the masculine term. She continues, by linking the hair column to an ancient Greek column, which was used as a worshipping place by women. She says,

> "this work rehabilitates and re-creates the column."

At a time of cultural transition, when women are just beginning to identify the basis of their repression, and to effect changes in social structures, it is a tactical mistake to "rehabilitate" the terms under which women have been repressed. These are the oppositional terms which need to be displaced and reinscribed, not reimposed.

A further objection I have to these forms of essentialist feminist art, is that they simply fail to aspire to the complexity of meaning in the visual image which is a prerequisite for good art. They operate as one-dimensional, single meaning, visual slogans in the same way as any advertising poster. Nor could they do otherwise, because their content is fundamentalist. The visual signifiers used, do not have the elusiveness or complexity which is required to create different meanings.

There is a tendency among this school to divorce "content" from "style", as Juliet Batten says,

> "It is content that distinguishs Georgia O'Keefe as a grandmother of the women's art movement, while eliminating Helen Frankenthaler. Frankenthaler's major breakthrough was stylistic (the pouring of paint on to raw canvas); of great significance to her male colleagues such as Morris Louis and even to Gretchen Albrecht here in New Zealand, but of little value to women in the 70s who were challenging the content and orientation of contemporary art."[28]

But the only way that women artists will be able to speak themselves in visual language will be through a thorough exploration of the mechanisms by which visual meanings are produced. Art is a 'way' of saying, in which it is visual signifiers that create meanings. In this regard Frankenthaler was not only an infinitely more important artist than O'Keefe, but of more value for study. She made the transition from action painting to stained colour-field, and in so doing attempted to (re)negotiate her own position within a masculine language by (literally) infusing it with her femininity. She was, of course, constrained by a modernist reductivist mode which circumvented the range of readings within the confines of the surface. Nevertheless, she succeeded in creating eloquent visual metaphors, which carry many associations.

Post-modern devices, allow more freedom to upturn given meanings and to (re)inscribe different meanings in their displacement. But it is an error to dismiss the inventiveness of artists such as Frankenthaler or Hesse, simply because they worked in abstraction. As artists, they were intelligent in their use of visual language even if this was not combined with a conscious feminist critique. The fact remains that they were attempting to (re)invent their feminine sensibilities through visual language. While O'Keefe, used a phallocentric expressionist language to resurrect the old terms of the binary oppositions, which defined woman as "lack" (the visible cunt-read as castration).

While there is an increased number of women artists working in New Zealand (as elsewhere), this is no achievement if these artists simply repeat the old phallic fictions. I certainly do not believe the role of the politically committed feminist art critic is to wet nurse this regressive work; but rather to clarify the complexity of issues involved in women's use of visual language. In this context, Barthes' notion of the "myth decipherer"[29] is relevant, namely the critic as de-coder of the ideological commitments inscribed in images.

Helene Cixous, described the historical increase in the number of women writers as,

> "a useless and deceptive fact unless from their species of female writers we do not first deduct the immense majority whose workmanship is in no way different from male writing and which either obscures women or reproduces the classical representations of women (as sensitive — intuitive + dreamy etc)."[30]

Cixous, herself, not only denounced women writers who produce masculine writing but also denounced mainstream feminisms as bourgeois, legalistic and merely reformist. She scandalised the 1979 New York conference, 'The Second Sex — thirty years later', by refusing to take the title 'feminist' in order to distinguish her own subversive strategies.[31] Cixous also, led women members of the 'psychanalyse et politique' through Paris streets on International Women's Day, bearing placards "Down with feminism".

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In the Anglo feminist world there is a tradition of anti-intellectualism (as "male stuff") which is the reverse of the French situation. While activism is vital to any feminist project there are dangers when the underlying psychological structures of women's repression are not analyzed. Juliet Mitchell's important study on Freud and Lacan raised animosity among Anglo-feminists who considered it an act of bad faith to study male theorists. But without an understanding of ideological factors operating through women's subjectivity, there can be little change. As Irigaray says, "women among themselves" can be —

"just copying the society of men among themselves with women remaining once again in the role assigned them." [32]

Rather like the English going to Spain and sitting on the beach to eat fish and chips?

Essentialist feminist art practice in New Zealand has derived from the conjunction of doubly anti-intellectualist predjudices from mainstream feminisms ("the personal is political") and the art world ("authority of experience") — which is hardly a fortuitous conjunction. Given the obstacles to women working in visual language it is vital to analyse the structures of subjectivity, not accept experience blindly as source of "truth and understanding."

English Feminist artist Mary Kelly demonstrated the value of rigorous use of psychoanalytic theory to understand her own experiences of motherhood (in the 'Post Patum Document') and middle-age (in 'Interim'). In both works she has explored her own subjectivity through a dialogue in which she cross-references associative perception with insights gained through psychoanalytic theory and her exploration of visualisation. Through this multiple dialogue she is able to create a number of meaning levels within her visual-textual narrative structures.

Mary Kelly "Post-Partum Document"
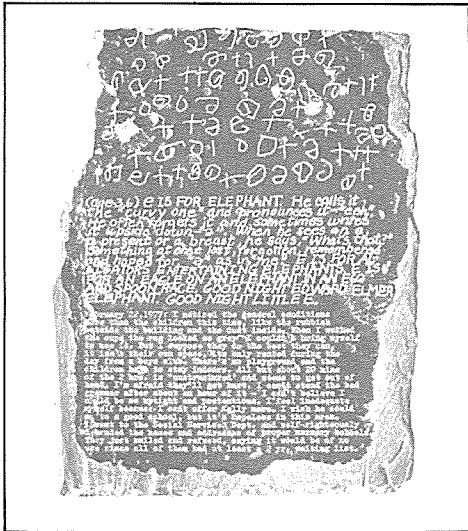
Other feminist artists in Britain and America, are basing work on Lacanian analysis and Derridean deconstruction using image-text devices for deconstructive purposes. Marie Yates in her 'The Missing Woman' invites the viewer to find the missing feminine character in a series of panels of fragmented images and texts, in order to expose the absence of woman in discourse.

Marie Yates "The Missing Women" 1984

Irigaray advocates mimicry ("mimesis") as a deconstructive strategy. She suggests that women work through the role assigned to them without submitting to these roles, in order to reinscribe them.

Cindy Sherman, uses cinematic and advertising structures to stage a mime, to expose the cultural construction of woman, in stereotype.

Barbara Kruger uses mimicry for tactical complicity. She scavenges images and subverts their meanings with an over-text (the overmime, in effect). As she says,

"We loiter outside of trade and speech and are obliged to steal language. We are very good mimics. We replicate certain words and pictures and watch them stray from or coincide with your notions of fact and fiction." [33]

The power of her work, derives from her use of pronouns and linguistic shifters to implicate the viewer in the process by which language determines speaking positions. The enormous size of her work, functions to physically arrest the viewer, to confront them with their subjection within this discursive process. Her work is explicitly concerned with subverting patriarchal meanings in order to disperse the stereotypes of women.

In New Zealand, Merylyn Tweedie has been the first feminist artist to apply deconstructive theory in her work, and as such marks a significant turn from essentialist feminist art practice. Her commitment to writing and speaking on theoretical issues is a stimulating influence. However, her critical study has not been effectively put into practice in her imagery, which is not only conventional drawing and photography but too weak to carry the weight of her textual over-statements. The imagery is

neither complex enough nor confrontational in the least and is too easily dismissed. This is a shame, when the texts are strong. But the images do not work as the underlying contradiction which the text aims to subvert.

From my own position as a feminist art critic interested in the sub-textual meanings which are inscribed in visual signifiers, one of the most interesting 'feminine' uses of visual language in New Zealand, has been put into practice by Christine Hellyar. She works in a number of different mediums (found object sculpture, assemblage, installation, drawing and word-sculpture book art). In all these media she plays with irony and deferred meanings. It is in her refusal to fix a single, stable meaning within any visual signifier that she speaks a feminine sexual difference.

In Hellyar's world, abstract organic shapes made from found, natural materials can become figurative forms, or vice versa. Her sculptural shapes are never quite what they are (their natural origin), and never quite what they are not. Their meanings lie in the in-between of a literal and metaphorical reading. "Different but the same", is a recurrent phrase in her drawings and titles: things are not all they appear to be, when their contexts are displaced.

Found materials are particularly apt, for this allegorical use, in which a second potential meaning is read into a visual signifier. Hellyar plays with the meanings materials have in their original contexts (in the bush, stream, or from wherever she has collected them) and their human meanings: both as matter-of-fact survival resources (for food, shelter, clothing) and as metaphor (for different emotional responses). Their deferred meanings are created through her way of juxtaposing shapes with different tactile and visual qualities.

Many of her works, such as the **"Hunters and Gatherers"** cloak sculptures (1986) and the **"Pacific Tool"** and **"Pacific Food"** apron sculptures (1985) are serial works, in which the structuring device (in this case the cloak or apron form) is repeated, on to which natural objects and materials are assembled. In this way she creates a narrative structure in which the various materials assume different meanings according to the way they are combined and juxtaposed.

An underlying theme in Hellyar's work, is her ecological concern. But she avoids an essentialist woman = nature identification because her work is concerned with the many different meanings which may be read into a shape or combinations of shapes. She draws upon many different cultural interpretations of the interaction between humans and the environment. But the underlying theme of preservationism, maintains the relevance of drawing upon these references at this particular time in New Zealand bi-culture.

In her installation **'People and the Land'**
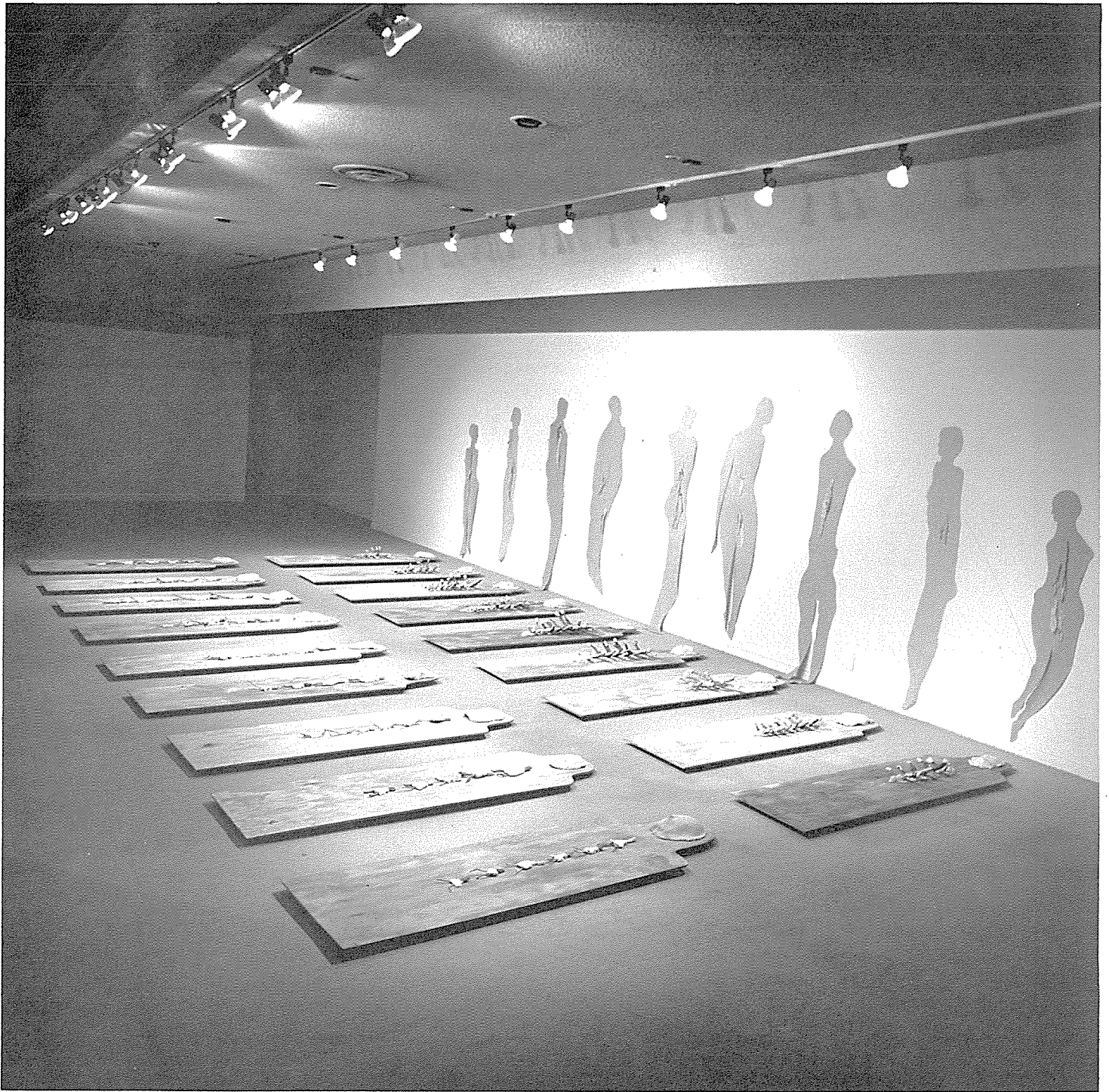
Christine Hellyar "People and the Land" 1986 Photo courtesy Guy Robinson

(1986) Hellyar's sensitivity to spatial qualities was revealed through her use of large suspended felt silhouettes as an elusive presence, against which the viewer felt intimately enclosed, and therefore free to move around the space, exploring the population of tiny clay and driftwood figures assembled on large anthropomorphic shapes, installed on the floor.

Her work elicits a very physical response from the viewer, because she invites a very close inspection of the materials she uses. In this way she creates an intimacy, in which the viewer experiences the tactile qualities in close focus, almost as a pulse. It is the actual corporeal relationship between viewer and materials, which she privileges — rather than sight. In all these qualities her work reveals a feminine imaginary. Though, of course, there is no meta-language to define that (as such). Her work could not have derived from a masculine imaginary (nor from a phallocentrically coded women' imaginary).

What informs the work, and what the receptive viewer experiences in reading it, is an understanding of physical proximity. This is the quality Irigaray suggests through her metaphorics of feminine sexual morphology of self-touching, (the "lips" which speak informed by the labia which is constantly touching — itself). Or is it just that such work could only derive from a woman who is 'in-touch' with her own way of seeing? A way of seeing, which sees in different ways? Which sees the potential for new meanings in existing forms?

The precariousness of the sexual evocativeness of her pairings of shapes is
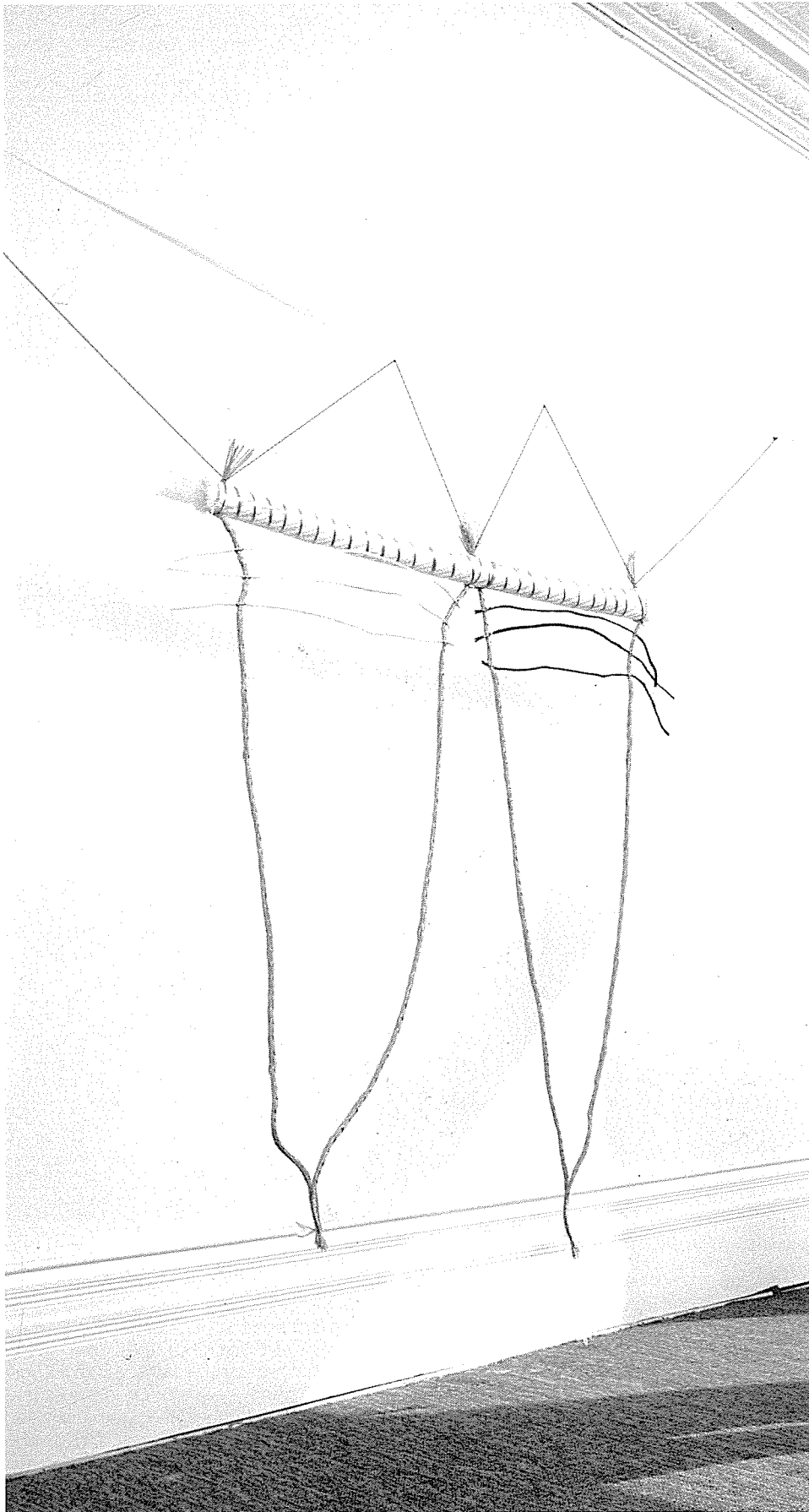
Jacqueline Fraser Untitled 1986. Photo courtesy Guy Robinson

revealing. Since in Hellyar's world masculine and feminine are seen in equal exchange — not opposition or domination — as mutual complementaries. And is that not a world of different sexual meanings?

But it is through the wit which informs her way of using sculptural language that Hellyar dispels any one reading and suggests different readings.

What I am suggesting is a fiction of a different feminine subjectivity, which has a different morphology relating to a (re)invented woman's body. I am not saying that women's bodies have an intrinsic meaning in themselves. Or, that the body can give any 'particular' meaning. That would be essentialist. I am not describing a female geography. Rather, that IF women's bodies are (re)coded through different fictions of (a non-phallic) subjectivity, then that might provide an analogy for the language in which women speak themselves in art practice.

In Hellyar's case it is a feminine subjectivity which also provides different allegories of the relation of humans to nature. And there are other very fine women artists in New Zealand working in comparable ways.

Pauline Rhodes, for example, whose site-marking sculptural language forms a continuum through which she speaks an allegory of the energy relation between human movement and the natural environment. While she uses a formalist language, she (re)invents herself in this language, through the deferred meanings she creates. Meanings of a close harmony with nature, which she first recognised through an observation of the way Nigerians live in their natural environment. She uses her own experience of long distant running, and daily activity to inform her language of spatial relations.

Jacqueline Fraser's installations and wall sculptures form part of her on-going attempt to find a feminine language which also incorporates her Maori heritage. She (re)negotiates her position in post-object art language by introducing sensitive translations of Maori traditional women's art techniques in her use of materials which have, in the past, been associated with western women's decorating, arranging and craft. In this way she transforms the meanings of these materials.

Like a number of other New Zealand women, these three sculptors are suggesting different allegories of nature. One might think here of Janet Frame, Keri Hulme or of the composer (ex-patriate) Annea Lockwood. Is this, (could it be?) a different way of using language (visual, literary sound) to speak of the way women in the Antipodean see themselves in relation to their natural environment? I emphasise 'in relation to' as distinct form 'identification', I am fully aware that I am treading a tightrope in making this distinction. An allegorical reading of nature differs

Intensums '85 Pauline Rhodes. Auckland City Art Gallery Artist Project, April — May '85

from an essentialist 'identification', by virtue of not pronouncing any 'one' meaning as an essential one, by providing duplicit readings.

In Aotearoa, is it not important that the natural environment is (re)coded through different allegorical readings? That the old Eurocentric narrative of 'mastery' (which colonized the other narrative of nature by Maori culture) is displaced? That we admit the many possible narratives that can be given to nature in relation to ourselves, and select from these, the narratives which are most positive for a bi-culture in which both men and women can be creative?

'Te Maori' has caused a crisis, by exposing the univocality of the Eurocentric view of 'culture' on which the phallic institutions of art have been erected in Aotearoa. To bring that crisis, Maori cultural artefacts had to literally infiltrate the phallic institution of European art. This is tactical complicity, not to be mis-interpreted as laying Maori cultural artefacts at the feet of the dominant culture. By infiltrating its ranks, 'Te Maori' has transformed the phallic institution of art, here. Art galleries can never be seen in the same (Eurocentric) way again.

How vacuous and irrelevant much of the European art in 'Content/Context' looks in relation to 'Te Maori'. 'Content/Context' reveals the "immorality" (as a close friend suggested [34]) of European art practice which divorces itself form its wider culture. We do not need art about its own surfaces. We need art which offers new fictions for creative living.

Humour is, of course, one of the most effective forms of subverting existing meanings. It provides the release which allows an 'otherwise' way of seeing. That 'otherwise' of the dissidents from both sexes who have not been reduced to coded automatons of phallocentric definitions.

Of course men must learn to laugh at themselves — at the way they have been phallicly coded. As Cixous says,

> "man has been given that grotesque and scarcely enviable destiny (just imagine) of being reduced to a single idol with clay balls." [34]

It is, of course, the joke on men which Louise Bourgeois understood with her "Cock and Ball". The biggest joke History has played upon us: that women are supposed to envy (or, worse, not be able to speak) through lack of this idol, and men are supposed to live in fear of losing it.

But to see the joke, we must cease to earnestly cling to the so-called "truths" of history and laugh at what they have made of us . . . . . .

Of course, there is a "jouissance beyond the phallus", that men can speak through language. What would that be? A pederastic femininity? The vagina does not have the teeth man has invented in his-tory, and lived under fear of castration, ever since. Men can (re)invent themselves through

language too. A language which would not demand (to use Spivak's trope) a "scrupulously fake reading" through the phallic fictions of Freud and Lacan. And there are men artists in New Zealand doing that. Could we think, for example, of Andrew Drummond, John Cousins, Warren Viscoe, or perhaps Front Lawn? Men who are (re)inventing a different masculinity through language and also providing different allegories of nature.

A meta-language to describe this art practice by men would have to work through different fictions of masculinity. But on that my "lips" are silent, for the moment. Perhaps a man would like to tell that story?

. . . . . . so what is the moral of this story?

One day Lacan said the unconscious is structured like a language game. But girls can't play. All the toys belong to the boys. But the girls upturned the toys. Made them different. So the boys could not play with the toys without including the girls. The rules of the game changed. Then when the boys asked the girls what they WANT, they can say (as Cyndi Lauper does) "girls just want to have fun."

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Note: Lita Barrie is a freelance art critic who lectures part-time in Continuing Education. She worked as the documentor of the 1984 Women's Art Archive Interview Project and later gained a QEII Arts Council study grant to work toward a book on New Zealand post-modern art practices. She has three degrees in philosophy and journalistic training, but for several years has worked mainly in menial jobs.

C O M P U T E R S
A N D
M U S E U M S

Typical, he thought, my desk is always covered in screeds of paper mentally organised into piles that require "pressing", "more pressing", and "urgent" attention as he ascended into his grade four standard Council issue swivel chair and prepared himself for another day as Museum Registrar at the provincial Museum and Art Gallery. He had been there five years now, so confronting this type of situation each morning was in some way conditioned by the attitude under which he addressed the organisation of his desk upon leaving work the previous day.

The "pressing matters" involved the packing inventories for the move to the new building, now only a year away' the current accessioning backlog which included three major fine-arts pieces; a collection of ninety seven articles of clothing and paraphenalia associated with the local freezing works; a "flying saucer"arcade machine (that not only needed accessioning, but an assessment of storage, conservation and maintenance priorities to its transfer to the storage facility at the other end of the street), the organisation of that transfer utilising the support of other Council departments that seem to con sider being obstructive to the Museum and Art Gallery their main reason for existence; the six boxes of lantern slides depicting "La region des Lacs Haliens" which will all need individual numbering and will take a whole day unto themselves; and the three boxes of bones, fragments and flakes from a site just out of town, which are the compostion for an archaeological assemblage exhibit in the new building.

The "more pressing" might have to wait, he thought, as he shelved the storage file which had grown out of its box file format and was now just an untidy mixture of brochures, booklets, letters, plans and a collection of just as untidy scribbled notes on his thoughts for the design of the new storage facility. I'd love to go back to America to look at storage, he daydreamed remembering the three months that he spent there during the freezing winter of 1983-4. All the Museums and Art Galleries visited had their problems with storage but had solved them with, in some cases, quite innovative storage facilities. "If only I felt innovative at the moment" he thought as he brought out the box file on computerisation from the lundia shelving, quite bulging now with those pieces of collection in need of maintenance, cleaning, polishing and general rust removal, prior to proper collection storage.

His eye caught the now dulled appearance of an ancient copper samovar, and with new found vigour reached for a cloth to wipe off the worst of the dust and grime. No sooner had the cloth exposed the prior glory of the upper casing than a flash of light, a puff of smoke, and a hearty hi-ho-silver rang through the enclosed walls of the registration room.

"I am the genie of old westerns lost" proclaimed the towering figure masked in smoke, "and I can grant you a single wish for releasing me from my prolonged encapsulation".

He thought for a moment and his eyes scanned the desk in front of him moving from the register of unnumbered works to the storage proposal, and then fixing his gaze on the computerisation file. If only he'd given me three wishes as genies are meant to, he thought, I could be rich and famous, healthy and fix the museum's system up. "I'll have", he stammered, knowing that he had at this point had the power to demand anything that he wanted, and yet not wanting to make the wrong choice, or seem greedy, "I would like to computerise the Museum's operations with a program which will fulfil the following functions," he said, quickly, pausing only to take breath and collect his thoughts (the only thing he considered that the Museum hadn't yet accessioned in this year's register), "It will require 65,000 characters per record, 65,000 fields per record, unlimited files per data base, 6,000 files in use concurrently, 9 relational operations, 255 fields per sort, a data dictionary, procedural language, variable-length fields, multiple values in fields, symbolic fields, dynamic joins (in RAM), automatic key index maintenance, multiple field indexing, query of any number of files without indexes," he sighed, gasping for air and continued in a monotone fashion, "External subroutines with variables passing in procedural language, concurrent report writing and stored data by multiple uses on a network. In report writing, access to system data and time, choice of column or row format, accessible tables, unlimited breaks and subtotals." By this stage, the genie was looking somewhat non-plussed, but it should be noted that he was paying careful attention and asked that the Registrar continue.

"Password security, user-definable data entry rules, context sensitive help, utilities to across program files from other databases, access to all DOS commands, application generator, BASIC language compiler and thesaurus, integrated symbolic debugger, run-time module, network version and mainframe communication." He finished the last few additions at a rush, and after a brief consideration of what he had asked for, told the genie that would do for his wish, "as long as you throw in the software and hardware required".

IF ONLY IT WERE THAT EASY.

If seems everywhere now computers are a symbol of organised efficiency, financial agility and common sense. After years of what seemed like computer phobia, even the most sceptical of museum professionals are now beginning to agree. Administrators, registrars, educators and curators alike have crossed a new threshold when it comes to computer use. We have become more practical in our assessment of what computerisation can do for us.

While few computer projects of any scale could be called perfect, the increase in interest and sophistication does represent a positive trend towards the sensible use of a technology that can streamline and simplify many of the processes of museum work. It is clear that computer technology can vastly improve the efficiency of any function involving the acquisition and maintenance of highly detailed information and requiring convenient access to that information in a variety of forms. An automated collection mangement system, for example, reduces the amount of labour-intensive, repetitive work involved in keeping records. The production of forms and reports is faster and more efficient, and it is easier to check on the status of loans, accessions and deaccessions.

Computerisation simplifies a museum's administrative operations, too. Sophisticated accounting and financial management systems are readily available and are a versatile method of storing

and analysing detailed information.

In the past 12 years, computer applications in overseas museums have centred on the development of data bases containing information about every object in the collection. A "queryable data file" can be searched and sorted to provide answers to a variety of questions by staff and researchers. But this kind of system has turned out to be less than ideal. "Having a large file containing all the information concurrently in the manual fields is a fascinating concept which has proved impractical," writes computer consultant Lenore Sarasen. "Even if a museum has the resources to build one, such a file does not effect day-to-day operations as had been hoped."

We all seem to know the drawbacks associated with the automation of museum information. There is no standard system of manual recording; it varies from museum to museum. There is no common language to describe museum objects, although the effort to develop a universally accepted documentation standard continues.[1]

Computerisation of museum information in America, which is New Zealand's closest contact at present, though some contact is now being made with Australian institutions, has a checkered history, because too many museums rushed into computerisation without careful planning. While most museum professionals cannot be called computer literate, there is a discernibly different attitude about the feasibility and the benefits of using — or at least

understanding and aspiring to use — the latest information management technology in Museum operations.

Among most museums here there is an awareness of the potential that computerisation offers in the management of collection information. Unfortunately, the museum profession is lagging woefully behind the private sector in the adoption and use of computers and whilst for some museums computerisation will significantly affect the accessibility into and accountability for the collection, for others the manual systems currently in operation will serve their needs more than adequately at the present time.

If we were to follow the American example, computer use in museums could develop in three very practical directions.

1.   Large computer projects in individual museums, involving major hardware purchases and the development of custom software. These projects usually require extensive planning and lengthy periods of testing and implementation. The system becomes part of the museum's daily operations; every function from budgeting development to tour scheduling is often involved. In collection management, the objective is usually not a "queryable" data file, but a computerised system that produces reports and forms and tracks a wide range of information about the objects in the collection.

2.   Software specifically designed for museums, and software modified for museum use. The marketing of software originally developed for their own institution's use (in American museums such as the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Indianapolis Children's museum market their software packages).

3.   Many smaller, limited applications, often involving microcomputers, in all kinds and sizes of museums. Although difficult to generalise about these applications, their most frequent function is to simplify repetitive tasks and reduce time-consuming record keeping and reporting.

A prime example is collection management, where staff use computers to maintain inventory and catalogue records, record information about accessions and deaccessions, process loans, schedule in-house and travelling exhibitions, keep track of object locations and maintain condition records. One would imagine that in some museums only a few of these activities would be automated; in others, computerisation is more extensive.

At present the National Art Gallery is only one of two which has fallen into one of these developing groups, the other being Manawatu Museum. Using a Data—Base II software system, the National has produced a cataloguing manual (to assist in the standardisation of information) and has completed a computer inventory of its collections up to the end of the 1985 acquisitions under the following fields:

Artist
Artist: dates
Artist: nationality
Title
Medium
Collection
Accession number
Source
Date recommended and by whom
Date approved and by whom
Council minute
Price paid
Credit line

The National Gallery is presently looking at updating their software to a more comprehensive system that will fulfil the total needs of the gallery and are about to purchase an IBM or IBM look-alike possibly utilising Revelation software, this decision in part as a result of the National Museum's purchase of this equip-

ment and the necessity for compatibility between the two institutions. The National Museum photography department is entering original catalogue material on the Burton Brother photographs into their database using the IBM hardware and revelations software package. The National Museum has also recently purchased another IBM machine (and is possibly considering Revelation software) for collection management in the Natural History section of the museum.

The other institution utilising computer time at present is the Manawatu Museum which has so far entered information on 2000 of its 20,000 accession cards onto an Inforex key-to-disk-to-tape device after which the magnetic tape is fed into the Palmerston North City Council NCR V8570 mainframe computer (soon to be replaced by the latest NCR 9800 thereby doubling the computer's processing power). The Manawatu Museum is currently utilising the Council's key punch operators who enter the card information as and when time becomes available at the rate of 5.7 cards per hour after checking (a process that involves the re-typing of the card information for verification). Eventually an online system of input will be done directly from the Museum.

As with numerous other institutions, Waikato Museum of Art and History has spent considerable staff time investigating computer programming and is scheduled to undertake computerisation within the Hamilton City Council computer project some time next year, unless suitable alternatives are promoted and the museum released from a requirement that it be part of the entire Hamilton City Council computerisation package taken up by DATACOM. At the moment the Waikato Museum of Art and History is investigating the IBM/Revelation package which is being worked on in depth by computer consultants with some commercial Art Gallery computerised collection management experience.

What can we as museum professionals do to become computer literate? I recommend assigning one or two staff members within the museum (preferably individuals who have already shown an interest in computers) to be the "experts" for your institution. A general background in, and understanding of, computers and available software is needed. Sending a staff member to an introductory computer class, perhaps at a local night school, is a good start. Read about how computers are used in business to perform routine tasks. You might not know how far information management technology has come, how affordable it can be, or how accessible it is to a novice. Talk to those of your colleagues in other museums and art galleries who profess to know something of computerisation, about how they see computers, how they made the decision to automate and what pitfalls they encountered. If you sacrifice careful planning and investigation, you save time, but you run the risk of developing systems with severe limitations; or sytems that fail altogether to meet your needs.

According to Lenore Sarason and A.M. Neuner in **Museum Collections and Computers** (Association of Systematics Collections, 1983), many museums leaped into computerisation without sufficient planning, inadequate project management, and a severe lack of professional expertise. This is an important point to be considered by New Zealand Institutions who on one hand are considering computerisation for the sake of better collection management, and on the other hand have to be aware of the problems that have obviously effected American museums in their attempts to computerise.

For most smaller institutions contemplating computerising, an affordable micro computer can simplify and streamline tasks of collection management. With the dramatic increase in the quality and quantity of software in the last several years, it is difficult to find a machine that cannot run one or more acceptable programs in all standard application areas (word processing, financial management or spread sheets, and data base management). As a caveat, however, there is a world of difference between most MS-DOS software and comparable MacIntosh programs. Although word processing is certainly an important application for small museums, micro computers, because of their power and flexibility, represent a superior investment to word processing.

Micro computers offer perhaps the most immediate benefit to the small museum in the automation of basic administrative tasks. Few professionals in the museum field are unaware of the advantage of word processing over the traditional office typewriter. While not attempting to outline those benefits here, I will re-emphasise that micro computers are capable to handling about all the word processing needs of a museum, including the preparation of letters, memos, lengthy-reports and manuscripts.

The potential application of computers to collection management first attracted the museum field to computers, and this function remains an important concern. Often overlooked, however, is the fact that solutions to collection management are also applicable to any number of basic clerical functions in an office, such as personnel records management, mailing lists and book/catalogue inventory control. For this reason museums and art galleries on a small or limited budget could still in theory consider computerisation on currently available micro computer hardware and software which can now effectively manage large, complex data bases, and systems with capacities of more than 100MB, are not unheard of in some American corporations. For New Zealand museums and art galleries, to successfully join the computer age requires great care. To rely exclusively on the experience of another museum could produce inadequate results. Each institution must examine its own needs and choose the appropriate equipment and software based on its own conclusions. In addition, without at least one staff member adequately familiar with the computer field, it is impossible to evaluate the suggestions made by any number of journal articles or computer salesmen.

Eight Steps to Computerisation.
1. Investigate automation and other museum projects.
   — Invest the necessary time and money to learn how to plan and implement a successful project.
   — Know what the problems are and how other museums have

avoided them. Read about computers in general and about their applications to museums. Talk to other project organisers in museums.

2. Analyse your existing collection management system.
   — Identify the components — files, forms and procedures — of the manual system.
   — Determine how all the components interact to provide information and documentation.
   — Have a sound knowledge of the manual system so those who design and implement the automated system will have solid data to work with.

3. Identify the problems that exist with the manual system and determine whether automation could help solve them.
   — Do the problems stem from the design of the manual system: If so, they will remain if they are simply copied onto a computer.
   — Are the problems procedural? A new documentation system would streamline existing operations and exploit the full power of the computer.

4. Make a list of priorities for automating collection management activites.

5. Ask an outside consultant to evaluate your assessment of problems and needs, and recommend the level of equipment and programs your museum would require and provide a list of hardware and software that could be used.
   — Do not hire a consultant who has experience of only one type of system or who represents a particular manufacturer.

6. Decide whether or not to automate.
   — If the projected cost of setting up the kind of computer system your museum needs is not affordable, don't try and economise. Trying to automate on a shoestring can be unfair to an institution. It is better to postpone the project.
   — Unless there is a pressing need that only automation will answer, most museums would be advised to wait and see how technology develops. Hardware and software are getting cheaper, and collection management software for museums is being developed and will soon be available commercially.

7. If you decide to computerise, start by setting short-term and long-term goals for the project.
   — Develop a master plan for implementation.
   — List steps to accomplish each project goal and a timetable.

8. Begin with a small project.
   — After the hardware and software have been purchased, make the first step a project that can be completed in one or two months — entering a little data on each object in the collection, for example.
   — Use the project to help the staff learn how to use the equipment and how to enter data.
   — The consequences of errors made on a small project are not as serious as errors made on a large one. If you are using commercial software, you can test it to determine the practical limitation and obtain a replacement system if necessary.
   — The satisfaction of completing a small project soon after the computer is installed can have a positive effect on staff and administrative attitudes towards automation.

This information originally appeared as part of an article in the 1984 Longwood program seminar, Vol 16 (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware, 1984).

Note:
There are two notable examples. The J. Paul Getty Trust's Art and Architecture thesaurus is in the early stages of developing a hierarchical thesaurus for the visual arts (architecture, material culture and the Fine Arts) in an effort to standardise cataloguing language. The American Association of State and Local History is working on a second edition of Robert Chanhall's Nomenclature for Museum Cataloguing, based on the experience museums have had with this classification system since it was introduced in 1978.

1986
A SURVEY OF RECENT NEW ZEALAND ART
SHED II
PART TWO: 12 DECEMBER ~ 1 FEBRUARY, 1987

Partners in the Arts
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PART TWO
CONTENT/CONTEXT

T H E
V E R N O N
M U S E U M
S Y S T E M

The Vernon Museum System
BACKGROUND

It is likely to come as a surprise to many readers that a computer system for museums is being speculatively developed in New Zealand for the international market.

I have had almost 20 years experience in systems analysis, design, consultancy and management — mostly with large financial systems. About three years ago, while researching software, I became acquainted with the "Pick" database.

When a version of Pick called "Revelation" was released on the IBM personal computer with the added facilities of a "fourth generation language", which automates program writing. I felt that this combination was ideally suited to allow me as a systems designer to directly build and maintain systems in a fraction of the time and cost of conventional programming.

I acquired the software and hardware, and spent 12 months learning how to use Revelation.

My pilot project was development of software for a dealer art gallery. In a year I had constructed a comprehensive dealer gallery system embracing clientfile, inventory and ledgers, and had developed a competency in the use of Revelation.

Looking for what is known in the software world as "a vertical market", public galleries appeared a logical extension. However, discussions with gallery professionals with a systems interest, and a reading of their research material, soon revealed that galleries are, in systems terms, one facet of a much wider and more complex application area, that of museums in general.

My interest grew to excitement as I realised how difficult and challenging museum systems are. This view is supported by the very limited success to date in applying computers in museums (there have been a number of resounding failures overseas) mostly because the tools and resources have been inadequate to tackle problems of this size and intricacy.

I recognised that Revelation was the type of tool which does have the power, sophistication and flexibility to build and maintain the type of software museums had aspired to for so long.

I decided to take the plunge and set about researching and developing a universal and comprehensive museum system, which is almost ready today for an initial implementation.

Because a project of this scale and specialisation must look to the international market to have a sufficiently large userbase to be economic and to retain a leading edge, we decided to invest in taking the work-in-process software to an expert international audience at the XIV General Conference of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 26 October to 4 November 1986 to obtain an evaluation of its appropriateness and quality.

We obtained an ideal display space, and over the course of three days the system was presented and demonstrated to an audience of several hundreds (including three presentations interpreted into Spanish).

The response was extremely gratifying. People were very impressed with the com-

TE WHARE TAONGA O WAIKATO
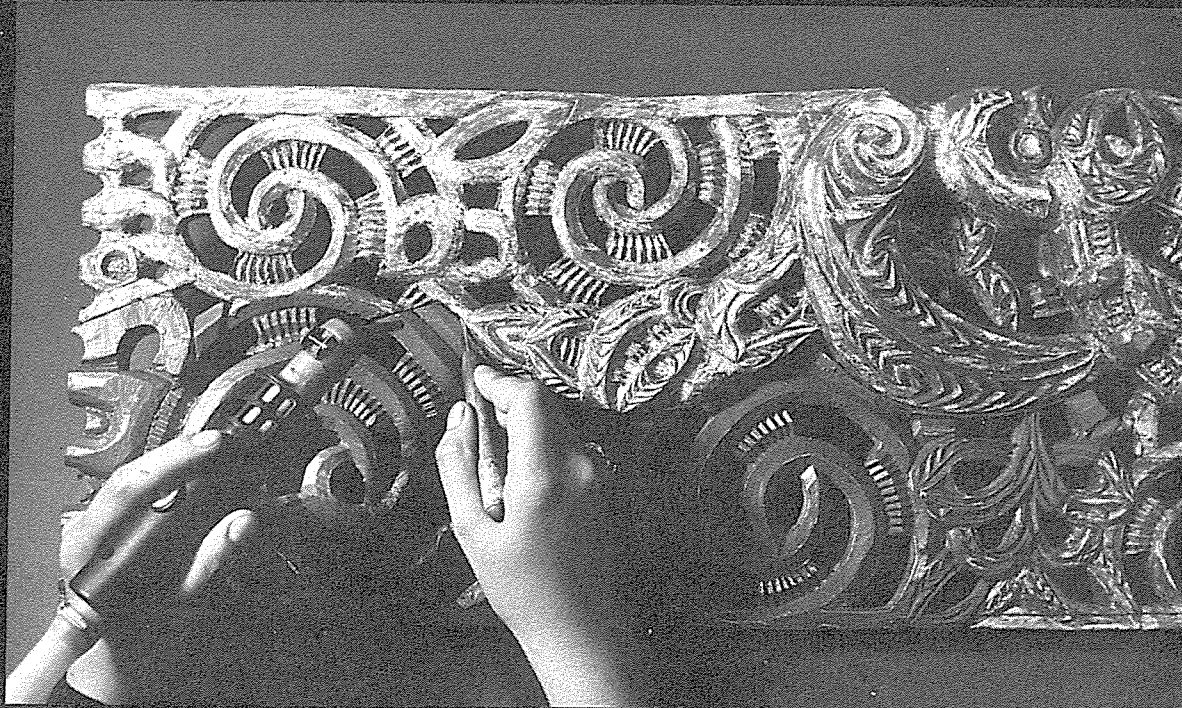# WAIKATO MUSEUM OF ART AND HISTORY

Restoration work on the Taurapa (Stern piece) of the Maori War canoe Te Winika, at the Waikato Museum of Art and History

Koia tenei te whakahoutanga o te Taurapa o te waka taua, a Te Winika, i roto i Te Whare Taonga o Waikato

prehensiveness, universality, flexibility, and ease-of-use of the system.

We learned that many users want images integrated with their data and that there is a need for the system to support multiple languages and scripts within the same file, record and field (eg title in Russian, Arabic and Spanish) with the capability to sort each language according to its conventions including accents, etc.

While most of our audience was from Latin America, we did attract sufficient North Americans and Europeans with competence and experience in museum systems to confirm our hopes that our system's scope, quality and methodology make it an outstanding and unique product.

I wish to express our thanks to AGMANZ and the many museum and gallery professionals who have assisted our project with advice, research materials, sample data and general encouragement and support, without which we would not have (literally) got off the ground.

OVERVIEW
The remainder of this article is an overview of the Vernon Museum System.

INTRODUCTION

THE CONUNDRUM
It is a little wonder that success has eluded many museum computer projects and it is understandable why so many museums have been reluctant to take the plunge into substantial computerisation.

Museum systems need to handle a wide diversity of types of objects from all spheres of knowledge; scientific, artistic, and historic.

Museum data varies greatly in the level of detail required for different objects. A few simple short fields suffice for some objects, while others need dozens of fields with complex structure and large amounts of data storage.

Likewise, highly variable levels and types of documentation are required for diverse purposes such as cataloguing, loan processing, conservation job processing and control, physical inventory, and research.

Museums have limited internal resources (people, money and expertise) which are committed to day-to-day tasks making it difficult to undertake the workload entailed in systems analysis, design and construction of a specific system solution.

There is a shortage of computer specialists who understand the very special qualities and problems of data processing for museums, and who have the ability to devise flexible and sound designs.

Finally there is the daunting task of converting existing records into the computer system, once it is available

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES
Technological advances in the computer field are rapid and accelerating. Computer hardware costs continue to fall while the power and capacity of computers increases.

Dramatic advances have also been made with computer software. Database management software is powerful and affordable. The hitherto expensive, slow and exacting process of developing computer systems has taken a quantum leap forward thanks to highly sophisticated "fourth generation languages" which automate program writing.

The combination of these developments

has brought the computer out of the hi-tech mainframe temple, and places it in the workplace and home for direct personal use.

The Vernon Museum System is the first museum system to fully exploit the fourth generation technology.

FUNCTIONS
The system is comprehensive in scope serving all functional areas:
- Accounting
- Word Processing
- Mailing Lists
- Subscriptions
- Acquisition Control
- Valuation & Insurances
- Physical Inventory Control
- Curatorial Cataloguing & Reporting
- Conservation Recording & Job Control
- Exhibition Selection & Cataloguing
- Loans/Borrowing Documentation & Control
- Public Information Access & Distribution
- Link to External Public & Private Databases

OBJECTIVES

UNIVERSAL
The Vernon Museum System embraces all disciplines in an integrated single system, which is both richer and more flexible because of the need to be universally applicable.

The system handles artworks, literature, film and video, artefacts, fossils, geological and natural history specimens within a common database structure.

The system databases on objects, people, places, events, concepts, materials, processes etc, which are interrelated by the system.

REALTIME
By operating online the system can interact with day-to-day procedures. For example, in controlling physical movements the system can demand authorisation and updating before it prints labels, packingslips or other documentation which then permit and facilitate the movement of the object.

USER-DEFINED
The system attends to the specific needs of individual institutions by being tailored on installation, by allowing users to define their notations, and by providing user-friendly reportwriters.

This approach combines the low cost and risk advantages of a package with the specificity of custom-built software.

There is the added dimension that such an inherently flexible approach can cope automatically with changes and future growth.

MULTIUSER
The system runs securely on networks, with passwords, audit trails, and access limita-

tions ensuring data integrity and confidentiality.

The system can operate as a gateway to external users of the same system, or to foreign databases via communication networks.

UNCONSTRAINED DATA

The system has variable length fields and records which can be up to 64,000 characters in length, but only consume as much disk and memory space as the data actually uses.

The Vernon Museum System offers you hundreds of fields to choose from. This would be prohibitively expensive with a fixed length system. It also allows fields to be multi-valued; that is to accept any number of separate entries into the same field, for example you can define as many media as many media types for the one artworks as needed. There is virtually no limit to the numbers of files, records or fields in any system.

DICTIONARIES

Each database consists of a file containing records divided into fields whose meaning is defined in a dictionary associated with the database.

The dictionary definition for each field includes a natural language name eg 'SURNAME', input validation rules, output formatting and operator help.

The dictionary can also define fields which only exist in concept and internal logic but not in data stored (although they often use true data in their calculations) eg. age derived from birthdate, date of death, and current date. These symbolic fields are available to the user as though they actually exist on file.

The dictionary provides the developer and user with a dynamic interface with the database. Extension and modification are achieved by updating the dictionary without recompiling the programmes and without restructuring the data.

RESEARCH

The application design has been based on a wide and detailed reading of published material on museum and gallery systems, as well as discussions with professionals engaged in the curating, registration, conservation, administration and management of museums.

The validity of the design has been demonstrated by pilot implementations of applications in ornithology, entomology, botany and fine arts.

The system therefore has the flexibility to satisfy any institution.

DATABASE STRUCTURE

The system's major databases are:

OBJECT (be it artwork, artefact, geological or natural history specimen, book, recording, sheet music, film, video, fossil, etc.)

PERSON (people past and present, bodies corporate etc.)

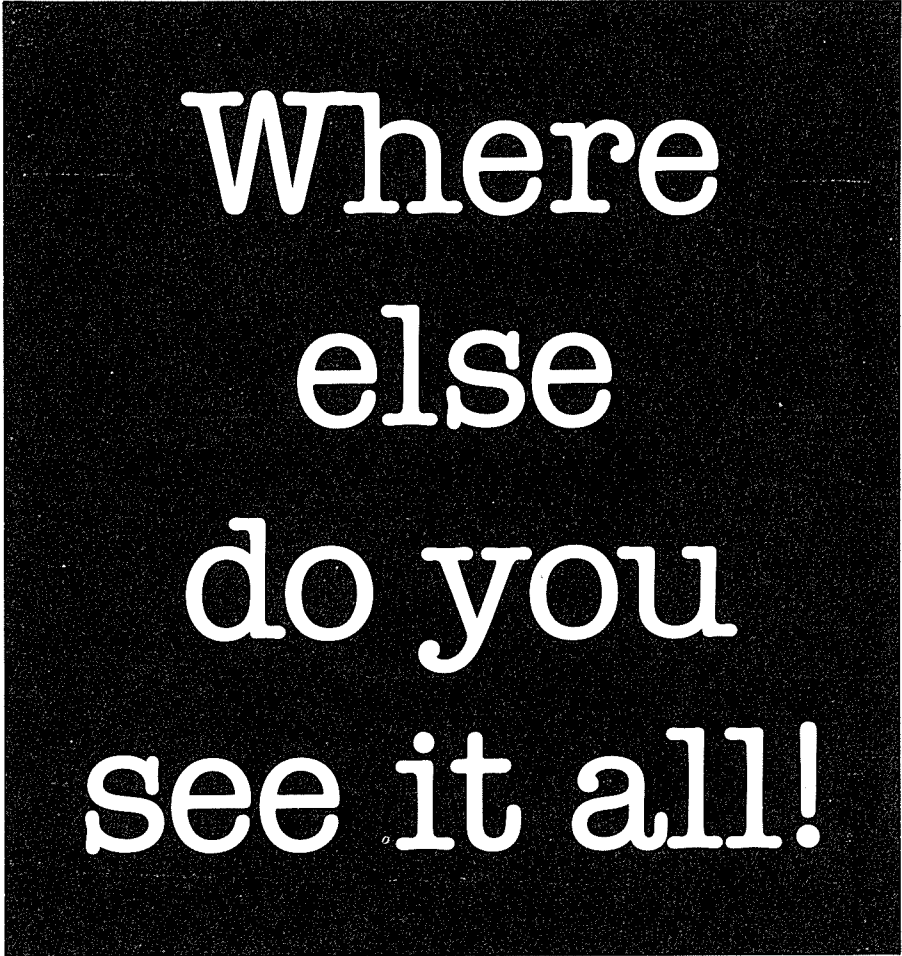PLACE (of any sort, from galaxies to archaelogical sites).

PARAMETER FILES

These major files are supported by over 30 ancilliary or parameter files which define a controlled vocabulary of codes and notations built up by the user to describe facets including:

object classifications

subject classifications

media/materials

processes (eg lithography, electroplating, wood kiln firing)

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culture/school (eg Maori, Abstract, Art Deco)

languages

decoration (colour/pattern/decorative motif)

events (eg Battle of Hastings, Performances)

concepts (eg Freedom)

constraints and permissions

units of measure

dimensions

exhibitions

expeditions

storage location

ledger accounting

associations and references

These parameter files have the same full database capabilities as the larger files, and may be freely extended as required.

RELATIONAL DATABASES

All databases in the system are 'Relational'. This allows information from any record to be related to any other records in this or other files.

For example, when a painting is being catalogued the artist may be entered on the record simply by specifying the identity of the record on the PERSON file which describes the artist. The artist details are stored only once in a single record.

When reporting the details of the painting the system will automatically get from the PERSON file record all the artist details it needs for that purpose.

MORE FOR LESS

This method yields considerable savings in:
• entering data. The artist details are entered once only on the person file. To link

the painting to that artist only requires the recording of the artist identity code on the painting record.

• storing data. The artist biographical details are held once only, not duplicated in multiple painting records.

• maintaining data. When the artist data needs updating (eg upon death), only one person record needs changing to make all the painting records show the new information.

• accessing the data. Because the artist is identified by a unique code, this avoids any ambiguity which may arise through spelling or naming variations and thereby ensures consistency of identification throughout the system.

• accessing the reciprocal data. It is not only possible to view the artist data when looking at a painting. The system automatically maintains cross-reference indeces which also make it possible when looking at the artist record on the PERSON file, to see all the relevant paintings held on the OBJECT file.

These principles apply throughout the system. Data from any record can be related to any other: eg people to places, specimens to expeditions, expeditions to people, expeditions to places, and so on.

TAILORING

The system is not a standard software package. It is designed and built as components which can be easily, quickly and inexpensively assembled by Vernon Systems to satisfy individual user needs. The system has been described as "Computer Lego for museums"

Screens, menus, forms and reports are modified or quickly built to the specification of the user, and likewise can be changed, extended and enhanced as the institution grows and changes.

IMPLEMENTATION

We place great emphasis on making the system an administrative workhorse. It can be made (almost) immediately productive by attending to the day-to-day processes of:

acquisition/accessioning
administration, eg. valuations, insurance
cataloguing/documenting
conservation documentation and job control
inwards and outwards loan processing
exhibition selection, cataloguing
physical inventory
disposals

This approach is appropriate where a museum has a large or poorly-documented collection and lacks resources to tackle a large backlog. By installing the system to handle clerical and administrative work, the user can immediately enjoy benefits which justify its costs.

In addition, you get the bonus of arresting the documentation backlog. The system ensures all transactions are properly recorded. The database is built as a by-product of useful work.

The backlog can be taken on as time and resources permit. It is often better to initially record a little about a lot, rather than a lot about a little.

USING THE SYSTEM

The system has been designed to be operated directly by the originator of the data — the person who is primarily responsible for its completeness and accuracy.

We believe this approach to be ideal because:

• It ensures the user is familiar with the system and enhances their understanding and commitment to its success. A good understanding of the system means users are better able to exploit its potential.

• Direct user entry is generally the most cost-effective, eliminating transcription, secondary keying and verification, and originator checking.

• It is easy for museum professionals to directly use the system because:

• It is menu-driven (but can also be command-driven)

• It is interactive. The system prompts for each field in turn, checking each entry as it is submitted, re-prompting for data when an error has been detected.

• It tightly validates the data submitted. The system exercises disciplines over users to

ensure all mandatory fields are completed, and can be tailored to include any validation which can be reduced to logically consistent rules. Furthermore, users see on screen the results of their input and can sight-check as they go.

• It has context-sensitive help at the user's command by hitting the 'Help' key, which will bring up any amount of tailored instructions for any field.

• It makes extensive use of codes rather than the full textual data. Codes are more compressed, and less subject to error than straight typing.

• Codes are user-defined through the parameter files. You determine the philosophy and the standards, allocate the codes, and define what they mean and how they are to be used.

• Cross references also allow the user to look up codes which they cannot recall by simply typing the textual data eg. "Trafalgar Square" is often easier than EU/UK/EN/LO/WE/TS.

• Because it is tailored it uses the terminology with which the user is familiar. Files and their fields can be addressed with the natural language names used everyday in the museum, e.g. LIST PERSON SURNAME FIRST NAME ADDRESS PHONE would list the people on the PERSON file showing the detail asked for.

• A word processor is integrated with the system. This allows users to format, copy and merge textual data in a sophisticated and efficient manner.

SUPPORT

DEVELOPMENT
The system has been built in New Zealand. Its future development will remain in New Zealand.

SITE SUPERVISOR
At each implementation site there is the need for at least one person, and preferably more, to be familiar with the overall operation of the system and to be competent to develop new reports and bind those into user menus. We estimate that three to five days training would be sufficient for staff with the necessary aptitude.

UPGRADES
It is intended that the base software will be continuously developed, extended and enhanced. All users will be periodically (eg annually) offered new releases of the software incorporating new and improved features.

BENEFITS

DATABASE
The greatest benefits of the system accrue

from the 'snowballing' of the museum database, an asset of immense and growing value for administrative, curatorial, research and conservation purposes.

The system will save time, and cost. To process a typical transaction such as a loan requires less effort on the system than would be entailed in manually completing a form. The computer system will not only generate the form, but will also capture the added data and retain it for future use.

The system's ability to relate one piece of information to another enriches both parts, while saving input, storage, processing, searching, and confusion.

Similarly, data from different functional sources can be pooled. The biographical details of, say, George Washington can be shared between diverse disciplines such as history, geography, botany, ethnology, art, and each may invest their contribution to the database, increasing its value for all. Once recorded in the database the information can be used time and time again for diverse or repetitive purposes.

The integration and interrelating of data defies the laws of economics. The database user enjoys increasing marginal returns for diminishing marginal effort.

Building the database starts slowly as everything is new. But as the data snowballs, the user increasingly finds that the system already knows much of what is needed to add, say, a painting where artist, media types, processes, place made, and so on are already defined, so all that is needed is to relate these to the object (and the system will automatically relate the object to these).

ACCESSIBILITY AND SECURITY
Information is accessible and distributable in ways that are inconceivable under manual systems. Access can be widened yet security enhanced as original records are not exposed to loss, damage, or unauthorised disclosure. Access to data can be denied, or permitted with or without the right to update all or some fields.

Hardcopy printed reports and microfiche provide inexpensive means of widely distributing snapshots of information held.

External computer users can be allowed controlled access through public and private communications networks.

SECURITY
The system's security controls to assist ensuring data integrity include:

• password control for any program

• field view/update restrictions

• validation of input as required

• audit trailing of record updating including timestamp

• periodic backup, count controls.

While such controls are not infallible, they can and should be implemented to provide a higher standard of security than is feasible and justifiable under manual systems.

ADAPTABILITY
A database is only as good as the tools and programs which allow the user access to it.

Because the Vernon Muesum System has been built with a fourth generation language, it can be easily and inexpensively extended and enhanced in accordance with your changing needs. Ad-hoc processing requests can usually be immediately satisfied by the ordinary user, without resorting to computer specialists.

A WEALTH OF OPTIONS
The application software base has been designed to be comprehensive and universal. It comprises a wealth of detailed dictionaries and programs. These are the components assembled to form tailored systems.

Most needs have been catered for in the base software. To implement a new user requirement will usually simply entail activating the feature by incorporating it into the tailored system.

However, the user is not confined to the base software. If what you want is not in the system it can be readily built.

PROFESSIONAL
The system provides an environment which allows Museum Professionals to meet their responsibility to present and future clients to document and manage their collections in accordance with today's standards an methodologies.

SUMMARY
The system yields considerable savings in time and effort, and opens up new ways of assisting with the operating, reporting, documenting and managing of museums.

William Vernon

Note: Bill Vernon may be contacted through the editor

INTERVIEW: JULIAN MOUNTER

I went to talk with Julian Mounter, Director-General of BCNZ. I had hoped to discuss some of the implementations of the findings from the Royal Commission, but release of that document didn't coincide with deadlines for this magazine.

A Mr. Mounter, you were appointed because of your excellent skills in cross-cultural communication — when you first arrived much happened for which you were loudly applauded. I would like to talk with you about further changes. I gather there are many, but predominently around the area of the way we perceive ourselves as I believe there are many parallels between Television and Art Galleries and Museums. Media colonisation by Britain and America is now a further danger, with increasing technology of individual satellites, which would make transmission open slather. How do you propose to counter this?

JM You are right, and in some respects New Zealand has become a mirrored image of Britain and America. One way for a country to have a clear cultural identity is to use TV properly. The drift is towards a uniform world broadcast set-up. In 15-20 years time there will be world broadcasters. The barriers in Europe are being broken down, and at the moment there are 15 channels currently available to all European countries. In the not too distant future, you will be able to watch Packer Vision, Murdoch Vision etc by owning your own small dish. The implications are obvious. Young people in this country who watch will have no feeling of themselves, and no identity with which to associate, and they will want to associate with where 'that' comes from. You see that with the Maori problem — there is almost no on-screen presence, and therefore their view of themselves as seen through the media is not as it should be. It is a microcosm of the problem, and what I'm here to solve.

A How are you proposing to change this?

JM What we would like to do is increase local programming from 30 percent to 40 or 50 percent, but at present the licence fee doesn't allow that. To be a properly based public broadcast system, we need $180.00 as the fee — this is a major inhibiting factor as today 90 percent of funding is from commercial advertisements; that makes us a commercial station and drives us away from being a public broadcast system. The second problem is the third channel, which would drive up our costs, reduce the amount of talent available, and, in my opinion, it will cause a situation where there is a clear reduction in the amount of local programming. We need to change the emphasis on why people watch TV, and we must endeavour to cater for all minorities as well as the majority.

A Does that include women?

JM Most certainly that includes women, but I don't see them as a minority.

A They aren't in numbers, but certainly in the way they are viewed.

Eyewitness being my current phobia — news for men by men.

JM I would have to personally agree that some programmes treat women as second-class citizens. This is my first year and I and my Director colleagues have tried to impose changes upon the organisation, but this takes time. I'm trying to see what this organisation can produce out of its own resources, but if it doesn't want to change then 'we'll bloody well change it'. I've been nagging about more women in senior jobs, and more Maori presence on screen — we intend to change all that. In all fairness, I believe the organisation is willing to change.

A When you are talking about change for Maori broadcast, what form would that take?

JM I see it coming from all channels and all areas of programming, and not be limited to our Maori programmes department which is a departure from the way in which it has traditionally been handled. The indigenous background of this country must be reflected. We are forging new links as a Pacific nation, and I see this as a very exciting time for New Zealand, and we must concentrate on this more.

A TVNZ has proposed to counter the Packer package for the Pacific — are we moving quickly enough?

JM We have run into financial difficulties with that, although I think we can resolve them. We have to find the funding at a time when we are very short for our own, but I have no doubt that it is a very high priority for the corporation and TVNZ individually to be part of what is going to become the international game in our own area. The ramifications are extraordinary.

A Could news be more broad based in approach. For instance, why not one or two minutes arts coverage to balance sports coverage?

JM I don't agree with labelling sections of the news in that sense — it is the wrong way of assembling news. However, as part of the way of enhancing our culture is to increase the amount of arts programmes in the broadcast sense. Unfortunately this sort of programme rates badly and is expensive to make. I want to do it, but who will pay for it.

A I could bring in the numbers game but I don't want to do that — for instance I think Te Maori was abysmally covered.

JM I would dispute that, I'm not saying we don't want to do it, we do. Somebody in Parliament has to understand that the situation TVNZ is put in, is that they are mitigating against us doing what we want to do for the arts and the minorities — I'm in the situation now when I am considering having to make cuts because of financial difficulties. Those cuts will, if taken out of revenue-earning areas precipitate new cuts. So it forces you in to having to cut those things you least want to remove. So if we want a service that is as good as Britain for instance, then we must pay for it — we must ultimately pay more per person than a country the same size but with a larger population would pay.

A Isn't it question of quality as opposed to quantity?

JM Absolutely.

A Let's look specifically at the arts. A little unfair to quote someone else at you, but Peter Coates said earlier in the year, 'We don't want expert opinions' yet art is innovation, artists are explorers and ever operating on new frontiers, frequently beyong the taste horizons of the community. Isn't that a very anti-intellectual attitude not to support these people properly?

JM I think there is a measure of truth in that, but the difficulty is this — it's not exclusive, we do want some expert opinions in covering art, but we also want a range of art which is not to our definition of whether it is good, but to the definition of the artist. I

agree that a TV service must not be the arbiter, but that is not to say that it doesn't need some critics, because some of the audience looks for guidance in criticism. It does say, however, that we must be accessible to a whole range of 'Art'. This needs to be done by more varied arts programmes, a bigger investment in news and current affairs, access radio. I am 100 percent behind it, and if I get the funds I promise we will do it.

A For any event other than the most accessible, the reporting is in the form of laughter, inadequate, uniformed reporting which becomes an intrenching tool for prejudice, therefore not allowing the artist to form new attitudes in the viewer's mind.

JM Agreed.

A But sports coverage is afforded specialist treatment — why not the Arts?

JM This is confusion of terms. If you are saying that reporters are cynical about the extremities of what is accepted art culture, then you are right. What we must do is educate our journalists to look deeper than their natural instincts, and that we can and will do. If, on the other hand you are saying that in-house we don't have enlightened critics, that's another matter, I believe we have some but not enough.

A That's assuming all can be done in-house. Why doesn't TV use the expert and diverse opinion from outside more readily?

JM We will and do. We have initiated an independent productions commissioning process who will call on outsiders to make programmes.

A A very serious commitment from you then to independent film makers?

JM Absolutely.

A What about artists making their own programme?

JM Again it is through the commissioning editor, and I would be the first to welcome that sort of approach.

A I think the arts have low rating because, although a little rough to say, but they are presented from a neutral and unproblematic stance. Consequently it is safe, but dull, and the result being people switch channels. I feel if the Country Calendar or Close Up team were put in there the ratings would change.

JM You can't have it both ways. My view is that we have a duty to build the totality of what is New Zealand in the public mind. Our job however, is really a no-win situation, but we must endeavour to make it easier to win. I must, with my colleagues, convince the powers to be that we need more funding because TVNZ should be a public service entity and currently it is very much a commercial entity.

A How could the community at large strengthen your argument and be a support to you?

JM By building connections with our producers, and by approaching heads of departments — the doors are always open for discussion of valid ideas. Under my period as Director-General, I care very, very much about the indigenous culture of New Zealand, the need to have more art and more minority coverage.

A Do you see a link up with Art Galleries and Museums as one of those resources from outside?

JM I do, but it is not instantly achievable. I would hope that once we have sorted out the funding, we can open new areas in the arts with that extra funding, then the natural source of information and expertise from schools, art galleries and museums, individual artists, experts and non-experts will flow.

A In the light of user pays Government proposed spending 179 million dollars on a new cultural complex. Close Up looked at the

issue, but little else has been done, I would have thought it an excellent time for Kaleidoscope to look at the philosophy behind this concept.

JM Everything must be balanced, and it's not for TV to run campaigns. We will not take a political view nor will we take a partisan view.

A But you are not neutral.

JM It is impossible for anybody to be neutral. Even if you are centre of the road you are still in a position and all we can do is provide a balance in one programme or cover a topic over two or three.

A Can you explain why TV promised Maori Broadcasting support and then withdrew?

JM You would need to address that question to the corporation and not to TV. A personal view is that there should be a Maori language station in New Zealand. I am utterly convinced that the best thing that ever happened to Welsh broadcasting was the introduction of a wholly Welsh channel. After all New Zealand is the most go-ahead country I've ever been to in the world. It is the most talented and the most energetic but it has only 3½ million people and it's talking about three channels — absolutely unrealistic. Why aren't we endeavouring to make the two existing channels better by putting in more resources. However in relation to the Maori channel I think the only thing that changed was that we could not afford it. I think most of us would welcome it.

A How are you preparing to align yourselves with both the oral history and the film archive who are working in areas that really overlap with TVNZ?

JM I think archives are immeasurably important, but again it comes back to funding.

A Do you receive for transmission only?

JM Predominently yes. We don't have unlimited showing rights in most of our programmes. When we make a drama we either have to pay the actors for one, two or multiple showings and we can't afford to do that.

A That doesn't really allow anyway of looking back at ourselves.

JM I gather in some countries they are trying to keep all that is local and indigenous. We transmit 9,000 hours — 3,000 of which is locally made. To store or copy that quantity is expensive, and we don't have the funds available. What I have said is that we will support them to get extra funds and anything I can do within our funding I will do. My first priority is to make programmes as what we are in danger of losing is the original make — it is the original make which is so desperately important — what we hand on to our followers will be nothing if we lose the ability to make local programmes and reflect local culture.

A If TVNZ doesn't move on this issue of archives that much material, particularly Maori material will be stored privately and won't ever be accessible?

JM TVNZ is currently undertaking a project to place on tape for archives, the thoughts and memories fo Maori elders. It is a major project and one which will take us to the majority of maraes in this country.

A Shouldn't preservation be built into the budget so that you are able to re-screen — it seems some countries are making a fortune doing this?

JM In broad terms, we should be doing more to preserve our culture. Give me the funds and I'll do it!!!

Jan Bieringa

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S W E D E N

A conference organised by A'jtte (Swedish Mountain and Saami Musuem) in cooperation with the Swedish Commission for UNESCO and ICOM (Inernational Council of Museums) was held in Jokkmokk from June 23-27, 1986. The theme of the conference was: "Museums and the cultural continuity and identity of indigenous people." The number of participants were 63. There were indigenous representatives from around the world. The conference was officially opened by the Director General of UNESCO, Mr Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow and the Swedish Minister of Culture and Education, Mr Bengt Goransson.

Twenty five lectures were given during the conference, of which 17 were from indigenous people either working in museums or connected with them.

The conference was held at the Saami Folk School in Jokkmokk. I arrived in Stockholm on 20th June at 6am and then flew to Lulea a little distance from Jokkmokk. A first experience for me was the 24 hours sunlight or Midsummer Day. The Midnight Sun is really something to experience.

The 'tangata whenua', the Saami or Lapps (a word not liked by the Saami) are a most humble people. Most Saami youngsters speak three languages, usually Swedish, French and their own language. The older people speak about five tongues, Swedish, French, German and at least two Saami languages. Unlike the Maori, each Saami tribe has its own unique language. Like the Maori, many Saami have married other races and their descendants very strongly retain their identity as Saami.

At the conference I found the Saami women to be much stronger in approaching matters than the men.

It seemed to me that although we as Maori people have our own concerns about Maori taonga and museums, we are actually in a better position than most other native people. At the conference I presented a paper which was in three sections. The first, dealing with recent statistics conerning Maori people — their numbers, employment, housing etc, largely in relation to government policies, and their position in New Zealand society. Secondly, a Maori ideal of a museum and thirdly, Taonga Maori — an interpretation of the word 'taonga' and Maori spiritual concepts.

It was a most well-organised conference in which we all learned from one another, shared each others' problems. It gave us all a better understanding of what is and what isn't happening in our museums today.

At the conclusion of the conference several of us broke into a little group and wrote up recommendations which formed part of the final report for UNESCO. A copy of that report is to be published in their magazine.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who made it possible for me to travel to the conference:
Swedish Commission for UNESCO
Swedish Mountain and Saami Musuem
ICOM — International Council for Museums
Maori Purposes Trust Fund
Maori Education Foundation
Auckland Institute and Museum Council

The five point recommendation is described as follows:
The cultures of the Indigenous Peoples are part of the cultural heritage of all mankind. Indigenous cultures, like all cultures, deserve dignified treatment and proper respect of all peoples of the world.

As new musuems presenting indigenous cultures are created and as existing museums continue to deal with indigenous cultures, we must address the concern for providing the dignified treatment and proper respect of the indigenous cultures. The following points are some of the guidelines which are essential considerations for museums and indigneous peoples as we form partnerships for the appropriate treatment of indigenous cultures.

1) Cultural museums should have the indigenous peoples upon whose cultures these museums will be based, in control of the museums physical design, development of management policy, definition of primary and secondary audiences, and in control of personnel policy. Where cultural museums already exist, these museums should integrate the indigenous peoples into these areas of responsibilty as soon as possible.

2) Cultural museums should make every effort to intergrate the indigenous peoples into all levels of their institutions. Where it is found that indigneous peoples are not trained to carry out responsibilties in certain areas, an affirmative program of training and educations should be started to overcome this problem. In intergrating indigenous peoples, caution should be taken not merely to take any indigenous individual but that the indigenous individual carries with him/her the appropriate indigenous attitude and proper reverence for his/her indigenous culture.

3) In presenting indigenous cultures, exhibitons should be done in an honest, dignified and accurate manner.

i) Exhibitions should present the true situation of the idigenous culture and not attempt to glorify or castigate one or another aspect of indigenous culture.

ii) Exhibitions should present the reality of people's physical and spiritual conditions of every day life.

iii) The use of modern technology to present a display should not modify or compromise the display itself but should be used only to aid in the accurate presentation of the display.

iv) The selection of objects to be displayed should be made by the indigenous peoples; their decision that certain objects which are culturally sensitive and not appropriate for display must be respected.

v) Every effort must be made to assure that all primary texts be fully understandable to all those in the indigenous populations, preferably in the indigenous languages.

4) Museums must begin a campaign to return sensitive spiritual and cultural matters, including human remains, to the indigenous peoples from whom these materials came. Furthermore, museums and their associated specialised fields of study should abide by a code of responsibility which will curtail the indiscriminate taking of further sensitive spiritual and cultural matters from indigenous peoples.

5) Museums and their associated specialised fields of study must develop a new standard of responsibilty in their work with peoples. Before any further study in indigenous communities are conducted, the indigenous people should be consulted and must have approved of such further study. Such study must be carried out and completed with the understanding that the primary beneficiaries of such studies are the indigenous peoples. The completed studies of indigenous peoples should be made readily available to the indigenous community (preferably in the indigenous language). Appropriate credit of authorship should be given to the indigenous community or informant who provided the original material.

Te Warena Taua
Assistant Ethnologist,
Auckland Institute and Museum.

WELLINGTON

1986 Exhibition Officers Seminar
Wellington City Art Gallery
17-19 September, 1986

The annual get-together of this branch of the Art Gallery and Museum profession was held this year in the City Library Lecture Theatre (a smaller National Museum Theatrette).

While the term 'get-together' is rather a well worn one, it does point to an important function of such things. Beyond AGMANZ workshops we do not get as many opportunities as we should to see and hear about what other isolated chapters are up to.

In consideration of the virtues of such seminars, one would have to say that the opportunity to see what others are doing, to hear of achievements and concerns, and to spend time thinking a bit about what we are doing is, to my mind, sufficient reason why they should occur and why the means to attend should be given.

The programme this year included a trip to the lighting studio of the School of Architecture where, among other things, we had our suspicions about butcher shop windows confirmed and there, before our very eyes, we saw how akin TL27 fluorescents and incandescents were. While fascinating, I'm not sure that much fresh light was thrown on the subject; systems and environments for most of us remain less than ideal. The future, of course, looks bright — or not — as the case may be.

There was a good session of slides, exotic catalogues and further insight into the workings of the AGDC with emphasis on the important Australian connection, stimulation of palates and hats off to Susan Foster.

A talk on the mixed blessing of corporate sponsorship — a pound of whose flesh? General agreement that it should remain the icing on the cake of funding and never a substitute for it.

As always the slide session was good value, the Waikato Museum of Art and History is shaping into a very handsome affair. Good little videos done by the Wellington City Art Gallery of their artist's projects. Good to see slides of exhibitions from the likes of the Eastern Southland and Upper Hutt Community Galleries.

A potentially interesting discussion on the environmental problems of Shed II and, among the fare of openings, that of Content/Context Part 1 in the very same.

The three days allowed for a fair amount of gallery and museum visiting, the storage area/treasure trove at the Dowse and the Porirua Museum being among the highlights for me.

Friday morning and the stimulus of a discussion with Rob Taylor, good value for

your money here I reckon.

General discussion and wrap up followed, and the decision made to investigate the merits of an Association of Exhibitions Officers being formed; among the intentions for which would be the raising of the political voice and status of same.

A questionnaire on aspects of this year's seminar reinforced the need for a more active stance from Exhibitions Officers. There was also a strong indication of the desire for we generally, as a profession, to seek a range of other perspectives on what it is we are doing, readings from the gospel according to the visitors book at staff meetings perhaps.

Commendable expressions of the need to look at such things as staff burn out, stress management and the lineaments of our "industrial health" to borrow a phrase. Communication, management techniques, "our health and sanity". Interesting indications of problems glossed over in the rush.

A farewell lunch, the thinking of Auld Lang Syne, next year Auckland, try and get to it.

Exhibitions Officers, more strength to their arms.

Peter Ireland
Exhibitions Officer
National Library of New Zealand

LEICESTER

Museum Studies course at Leicester

Having spent the last year in the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, I thought it might be useful for other museum people in New Zealand to know a little about the programme there from a student's point of view.

The department is one of the largest and most respected of its kind in the world, and each year accepts a total of 24 students (including 10 from overseas) from total applications of around 550 — mostly from Britain.

Courses offered are a one year Graduate Certificate; a two year M.A.(with the second year in full-time employment while working on a dissertation); and untaught research programmes leading to MPhil and PhD degrees. Most of the research students are from overseas.

The taught course runs from October to June, with most of the work in the winter and spring terms (October to March). Exams begin in late May.

In addition to the usual coursework requirements (essays, practical projects, seminars, etc.) each student is expected to complete eight weeks work in approved museums of their choice. Unfortunately these attachment periods are timetables for vacation periods (pariculary frustrating for Europe-hungry overseas students), although the opportunity to work at some of the great museums is a real bonus.

There are almost no restrictions as to where a student can go on attachment so, as well as the famous London museums, students in my year went on attachments all over Britain and Northern Ireland; Germany; Switzerland; and Colonial Williamsburg in the U.S.A. These attachments are particularly useful for students to get a range of experiences in different types of museum and in different aspects of museum work.

There are also many class trips to museum cities all over England, and these proved a great way to see the English countryside. Highlights include the Oxbridge museums; York; and the outdoor museums of Styal and Ironbridge (where the feast put on belies the precarious financial position of such "independent" musuems!).

There are four sections to the course proper: Museum Context; Museum Management; Collection Management; and Museum Services. Each section is taught as a seperate unit and each has its own coursework and exams. The range of topics covered is wide. From the history of the museum idea to the psychology of museum education, to practicalities such as lighting,

environmental control, and exhibition design, the course attempts to deal with all aspects of museum work — some at a shallow level, others at more depth.

In addition, each student chooses an "option" discipline such as archaeology, social history, education or natural history (not complete list), into which deeper study is undertaken. The purpose of these "options" is not to make the student a better *archaeologist,* for example, rather it is to make the student a better *museum* archaeologist.

Students all have undergraduate and practical backgrounds in their option disciplines, so the option work introduces .the curatorial aspects to existing expertise. These smaller groups are particularly good for promoting informal discussion, and are generally very useful.

The staff of the department is large by New Zealand standards — five lecturers, two administation staff, and one technician for the 24 students. In addition there are visiting lecturers at least once a week for the entire ten month period.

The lecturers all have museum backgrounds and their expertise relates directly to the option disciplines available. The Head of Department is Geoffrey Lewis, President of ICOM.

Staff-student relations are generally good and quite informal, although it was noticed that the overseas students tended towards a much greater degree of informality than the British.

The major drawback of the course is the cost of tuition in a country where foreign students are openly regarded as an easily exploited source of overseas exchange. In 1985-86 basic tuition fee was 3310 and this rises every year, as does the number of overseas students! Accomodation and general living costs in Leicester are much the same, if not less, than in New Zealand.

To summarise, the Leicester course is an ideal initiation into the museum world for people with only a little previous museum experience. It is a qualification which carries a good deal of weight in Britain and abroad and in this respect the fees expenditure may be seen as a good investment.

The course is not suited to people with more than a few years experience however, as a high ranking Australian curator in my year quickly discovered! The alternative for senior professionals are the MPhil and PhD programmes which are also very popular — especially with overseas students.

I would certainly recommend the course to people wanting to enter the profession, and a year studying museums in Europe can't be bad for anyone. The British Council may be able to help with fees, but there are really not many sources of funding available.

I would be happy to supply more detailed information if anyone needs it, or you can write directly to:

Department of Museum Studies
University of Leicester
105 Princess Road East
Leicester LE1 7LG
UNITED KINGDOM

Greg McManus
Curator Manawatu Museum

DR WILLIAM TRAMPOSCH FULLBRIGHT '86

The following recommendations were taken from a report written during a six-month Fulbright Fellowship to New Zealand, April to October, 1986. The general conditions of the award stipulated that, aside from teaching, the "appointee could undertake a specific research project of (his/her) own choice to be covered within the term." The topic chosen was museum studies, specifically a review of the Diploma Programme of the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand (AGMANZ), and recommendations for the enhancement of the programme.

It is a convenient time to review the progress of this diploma programme, as it is now in its seventh year. Today, it accommodates ninety-three students in addition to having graduated seven individuals who now hold either the Certificate or the Diploma in Museum Studies. A thorough description of the programme appears in part two of this report. Suffice to say, however, that the Diploma Programme offers an in-service credential to members of the museum field as well as those people in related endeavours .such as government agencies, libraries and universities. The programme is administered by the AGMANZ Museum Studies Committee convened by Professor Keith W. Thomson.

Staff support is supplied by AGMANZ through the offices of its Executive Secretary, Ms. Valerie Harris.

The recommendations contained in this report are based upon three factors: (1) a close review of the entire programme through interviews and research; (2) the writer's ten years experience in the field of museum studies (including in-depth graduate studies of the programmes in America and Britain); and (3) extensive readings in the field of manangement training, especially on the topic of museum management. Relevant readings for this particular project were begun under the tutelage of Mr. Keith Lathrope of the Oxford Centre for Management Studies, Templeton College, Oxford University, England.

This thesis addresses the following aspects of professional training for musuem workers in New Zealand: the administrative structure of the Diploma Programme; its location; faculty; course offerings and course structure; availability of resources; support from the field; and possible liaisons with other fields sharing similar concerns.

Recommendations

A. That the current education officers have their title changed to 'advisors', and that their responsibilities be amended to include a larger spectrum of learners.

This change in title would allow them to work hours which are more compatible to those of their museum colleagues. It may also afford the Department of Education the opportunity to 'weed-out' those individuals who are making no contribution to the field, thus making room for more enthusiastic and effective teachers.

B. That the Department of Education create a liaison position between the large and influential museum community and itself, similar to the position that currently exists between the conservation-related agencies and the Department (held by Beverly Abbott). A description of this proposed position is attached.

Although I understand that the individual currently charged with the oversight of the Musuem Education Service does well under his demanding circumstances, a person with both the experience in the field and the time to serve the field is now necessary. This person should have as his/her chief responsibilty the development of the Museum Education Service and should be very availably to those in the field as well as present at important meetings of MEANZ. My experience here leads me to believe that this need is not being met.

Futhermore, it is astonishing to me (having had ten years of experience in the field of museum education) that the entire oversight of the Museum Education Service is laid upon the shoulders of one who has not had any formal experience in the field. It is a far too developed area of study for such casual handling. And, when compared to the initial energy that was invested in the Service, the present administrative oversight of it serves as an ironic and sad commentary on the role of museums in New Zealand education.

C. Planning is required immediately. I suggest that the newly-appointed liaison person be given the responsibility of developing a long-range strategy for the Service and that this plan be the result of lengthy and reasoned discussions between members of the museum community and

the senior administrators in the Department of Education. This strategy would delineate ways to 'catch-up' with the rapidly increasing public interest in museums and education in them. It would also suggest future development of the Service in directions that were sensitive to the demographic and economic trends.

D. Finally, I suggest that a strong and effective training programme for education officers be put into place immediately. This training programme would include both preliminary and in-service components. Attendance would be mandatory. Only a minority of the country's education officers appeared at the recent MEANZ Conference. This, coupled with the fact that the liaison officer for the Department was neither able to come nor send a substitute, sends some rather unfortunate messages to the participants about the relative importance of the Service to its colleagues and sponsors, alike.

Conclusion
Benjamin Franklin once said that "the only thing more expensive than education is ignorance". Being well aware of economic restraints I offer the above recommendations which, if enacted, will lead to vast returns at a minimum of expenditure. It is a Minister's dream: increased public awareness of museums as educational institutions through a refinement and nuturing of the present system. For it, I advise the hiring of one liaison officer solely charged with the responsibilty for making New Zealand's Museum Education Service once again second to none. Beyond this position, planning and coordination are the key (and inexpensive) factors. By the way, the 50th anniversary of the Service (1988) will provide a propitious time to begin such reenvigorated efforts.

Note: This report is available from the Editor

GENERAL

Conference — Wood & Water
A. WOOD
- historic wooden arhitecture and structural systems
- wood preservation
- preservation of the weathered wooden surface
- preservation of ethnographic wooden objects and structures
- the impact of changed use of wooden buildings and solutions to preservation
- the impact of cultural tourism on wooden buildings
- codes and costs in the preservation of wooden buildings
- landscape preservation

B. WATER
- water damage and conservation
- conservation of marine and inter-tidal buildings and structures
- conservation of underwater objects *in situ*
- conservation and restoration of historic boats and ships

C. PHILOSOPHY
- ethics versus tecnology
- scrape or anti-scrape
- handcrafted to machine-made — a review of issues arising out of APT '86, Austin
- standards and guidelines for historic preservation — how useful are they?

D. REGIONAL
- preservation issues in the Pacific Northwest

September 17-20 1987

If you wish to present a paper please submit an abstract by **January 15, 1987** and include your resume. Prospective speakers may submit more than one abstract, all material submitted will be considered by APT for future publication.

ENQUIRIES
Alastair Kerr, Program Chairperson

APT '87, Conference Office
University of Victoria
PO Box 1700,
Victoria, B.C., Canada
V8W 2Y2

An invitation to all composers, musicians, sound sculptors, and other artists who work with sound.

31 October 1987, sees the return of the Sonic Circus

Commissioned by the NZ Symphony Orchestra to mark their 40th Anniversary, the event will celebrate NZ Music and NZ Musicians

Details of programming will be coordinated by Jack Body.

The venue will be: The Michael Fowler complex, the Wellington Town Hall and Concert Chamber and related spaces such as foyers etc.
Outdoor events might also be considered weather permitting.
Total duration may be up to eight hours.
This is a call for proposals, works which might be performed, events which might be organised, as a part of this Sonic Circus. Although there might be one or two especially commissioned works, most of the available funding will be used to cover fees for performers and production costs, such as part copying, hire of equipment etc. Extra funding may be available for travel costs for participating composers and artists from outside of Wellington.
Please send ideas, proposals, scores etc to:
Jack Body
Music Department
Victoria University of Wellington
Private Bag
Wellington

Possible categories:

Music for orchestra, chamber ensembles, brass band, military band (brass and woodwind), choir, piano, solo instruments, voice etc.

Technology — synthesisers, computers, lasers etc.

Dance and movement with music/sound.

Sound sculpture, sound installations, newly invented musical instruments etc.

Film, video.

Any combination of the above etc. etc.

Deadline for proposals: 31 May 1987.
The final selection will be made by 30 June.

Special consideration will be given to younger composers/artists, and to proposals of a more innovative "forward-looking" character.

Recent arrivals in the Museum Bookshop

Collins Guide to Mammals of New Zealand Mike Daniel and Alan Baker. $29.95 A complete guide to all species of land and marine animals.

Salmon: A Field Guide to NZ Native Trees. Reed Methuen. $32.95

Te Toi Whakairo : The Art of Maori Carving Sidney Moko Mead. Reed Methuen $27.95.

Gretchen Albrecht : After Nature Sarjeant Art Gallery. $27.95

New Zealand Women Artists Anne Kirker. Reed Methuen. $45.00

Face to Face : A Survey of Artists Prints National Art Gallery. $18.00

Museums, Magic and Children Association Science and Technology Centres, Washington D.C. $59.95

The Postmodern Condition Jean Francois Lyotard. Minnesota Press. $24.95 Going fast — re-ordered

Between Victor Burgin. ICA. $46.28 Expected December — January

Sekula **Photography Against the Grain**

Wallis **Art After Modernism : Essays in Rethinking Representation**

Burgin **The End of Art Theory**

Elizabeth Eastmond & Merimeri Penfold **Women and the Arts in NZ 40 works 1936—1986** Penguin $32.99

Advertising for Agmanz Journal

Copy rates for 1987 will be:

Full page	3 7 5
Half page	2 2 0
Quarter page	1 0 0
Eighth page	

These are full commercial rates. Agmanz members less 25 percent.

My thanks to those who at short notice were able to contribute ads for December issue.
Note prices are inclusive of GST

The Editor wishes you a very restful summer and hopes 1987 will see many provocative and energetic contributions.

Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand (Inc.)