

# Preface

... there being no origin save one that is an *invention*, in all senses of the word.  
— *Hubert Damisch, The Origin of Perspective*<sup>1</sup>

... nothing said of Aglaura is true, and yet these accounts create a solid and compact image of a city, whereas the haphazard opinions which might be inferred from living there have less substance. This is the result: the city that they speak of has much of what is needed to exist, whereas the city that exists on its site, exists less.  
— *Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities*<sup>2</sup>

Sometime in the late 1960s Julian Fagan, a fellow student at the University of Auckland, claimed to have written a vast ‘Ode to the Moments,’ encompassing every moment in the history of the West, dignifying each with appropriate couplets. Fagan’s friends were unkind enough to doubt the existence of this monstrous epic, and we used to demand to hear its lines on the most arcane events we could come up with — the confirmation of the Franciscan rule by Pope Honorius, the meeting of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the dream of Constantine on the eve of his battle with Maxentius. Challenged, say, to show what his ‘Ode’ had to offer on the pope’s awarding of the title Count to the fifteenth-century mercenary general and patron of the arts Federigo da Montefeltro, Fagan would climb on to one of the beer crates used as additional seats on crowded Friday nights in the Kiwi Tavern, and immediately declaim some appropriate lines. No challenge ever defeated him.

There were times when the present book seemed like Fagan’s ‘Ode,’ when it seemed to encompass, or to want to encompass, *everything*. It had, over the twenty-two years of its writing, and an almost daily accumulation of thought, become impossibly vast, at least by New Zealand standards. Moreover, I appeared unwittingly to have re-enacted, in my own person, much of the history of Western writing technology. In the early years of its composition, it was written and rewritten by pen. Then came the years of typing and retyping — at first by a hired secretarial service (many of its employees severely limited in vocabulary, who, confronted by an unfamiliar word, blithely substituted something vaguely similar in sound with which they *were* familiar — ache for archaic, frolic for phallic, ricottas for rictus, *The Prime of Vera* for the *Primavera*). Next came a series of my

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1 Trans. John Goodman, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1994, p. 47.

2 Pan Books, London, 1979, p. 55.

own typewriters (each soon covered as if from ceaseless blizzards of Whiteout, with drifts of a thickness that astounded typewriter repairmen — it was as if one had been *painting* a book rather than writing it). Finally, there was a succession of computers (the spellchecks of which were clearly compiled by the same secretarial service I'd employed all those years before), the first of which cost me more than half my annual income.

This book was begun in 1983 as a commissioned sequel to my slim, pink, volume, *Frames on the Land: Early Landscape Painting in New Zealand*, 1983.<sup>3</sup> But, through no fault of my own, that sequel never appeared, and for the next twenty years and more, I was enabled to speak or write on pretty well any topic to do with New Zealand art, and on much of world art too, at a moment's notice, simply by recourse to my manuscript's long-tended words. So, the present book is *not* a collection of previously published essays, as a review of another of my books once teasingly claimed it would have been — *had it ever come out*. If anything, the relation of the present work to my published essays is exactly the reverse of that smiling claim. A number of those essays were ripped from the present book's body: an eye here, a finger here, there a still-pumping heart.

But how *did* the thing take so long? Partly, of course, because there were other things to do in that time. Yet that is insufficient explanation, since none of *them* took so long, though they included the writing of several books, and the curation or co-curation of a number of public gallery exhibitions, one of which, *The 1950s Show*, turned out to be the largest ever mounted at the Auckland City Art Gallery. This, perhaps, is the answer. When my English-owned publisher, quite out of the blue, and without having seen a word of my manuscript, announced it was walking out on its contract to publish *Invention*, undismayed, I continued on my own. Without the disciplines of deadline and size constraints, the thing continued to grow, in a process of seemingly perpetual addition. I justified myself, or tried to. Was not New Zealand art and thought rich enough to warrant a big book? And did not New Zealand high culture typify the ways countries located in the cultural margins responded to the art of the cultural centres? Was it not symptomatic, that is to say, of something larger than itself — a case study at once of an international flow of ideas from the centres outwards to the peripheries, and of localised resistances to them?

At the same time, I suspected that in their heart of hearts New Zealanders did not believe anything in this place to be of sufficient interest or worth to justify a large study. For example, not one of New Zealand's artists has ever received a *catalogue raisonné*, that pinnacle of a certain kind of art historical scholarship, which devotes a lifetime (forty years seems to be the average), or the successive lifetimes of several scholars (the second being the disciple of the now dead first), to the patient accumulation of facts about every single work

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3 Francis Pound, *Frames on the Land: Early Landscape Painting in New Zealand*, Collins, Auckland, 1983.

produced by a given artist. (Or was it just that the culture lacked the critical mass to generate such things?)

Nor could I take much comfort in the thought of finding readers outside of this country. More and more over the years I had come to understand that to write about New Zealand art was like writing at the heart of a black hole — that no trace of one's words could ever reach a world outside. It seemed there was, after all, *something* in the Nationalist myth of New Zealand as an isolate isle — a myth that it was one of my purposes to demolish. I knew very well that few people beyond these shores are much interested in the art of a place so distant and small. (How, they might not unreasonably ask, can such a location offer anything of quality, anything other than the merely provincial? Even statistically, aren't the chances of quality hopelessly small?) Most non-New Zealanders would agree with the visiting American critic Clement Greenberg, when he tells the Canterbury Society of Arts first that he has 'never heard of New Zealand art', and that: 'In the second place, nobody could expect New Zealand to turn out anything of worth — not major art — because it was too far away from New York, Paris, London, the art centres of the world.'<sup>4</sup> And when, if rarely, there *are* some overseas persons with an interest in the art of so small and so distant a place, *they* want to be the ones making the discoveries, and announcing to the world such curiosities as they find.

Had this book been written instead on twentieth-century American art nationalism (about Jackson Pollock and Clement Greenberg and co.), assuming its writing reached a certain level of competence, not only would there be a large American audience awaiting it, but given the facts of American power, and given the power of the painting itself, it would be read throughout the world. There have been moments, I must admit (vainglorious, no doubt), when I wished this book *were* on American art nationalism, so that it might find an audience and response worthy of a labour of so many years. But here perhaps I do no more than echo again the Nationalists' isolated island complaint — infected by the very rhetoric I had thought detachedly to analyse.

My principle, in the face of such troublesome doubts, has always been to *act* as though New Zealand art and the writing about it was important, as if it bodied forth complex thought, and was worthy of an equally complex analysis — which, in any case, I mostly believe; and to write as if I had out there many an assured addressee, all of whom thought or might be persuaded to think the same. And, somehow, there always does turn out to be a sufficiency of readers, even if hardly the world of them that an American subject might provide.

It is curious, anyway, to think that if Americans *were* to read this book, they would learn something new and never before noted about their own nationalist rhetoric around Abstract Expressionism — a rhetoric which, so I will be suggesting, may have informed New Zealand's critical discourse around its own

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4 Clement Greenberg, as reported in an undated New Zealand newspaper cutting in the author's possession.

painting in the same period. For it was claimed in 1950s American criticism that contemporaneous American painting displays a ‘bluntness’ and ‘rawness’ of mark which distinguishes it from the ‘softness’ and ‘suavity’ — not to say effeteness or effeminacy — of the French tradition, with its regrettably conventional taste for *le bon facture*.<sup>5</sup>

Exactly the same claim of a bluntness, hardness and roughness of stroke compared to the softness and effeteness of European finish is made, we will see, in 1950s New Zealand, in the public utterances of two successive Auckland City Art Gallery directors, Eric Westbrook and Peter Tomory. The artists and critics of both countries, New Zealand and the US, felt they had at once to take account of, to fend off, and to differentiate themselves from the prior power and prestige of European modernist art. Only in this way might a truly American — or truly New Zealand — painting be achieved. And a certain ‘colonial brutalism’ of stroke, in Tomory’s suggestive phrase,<sup>6</sup> was considered an excellent proof of one’s difference from Europe — a proof all the more powerful because it was unconsciously achieved rather than deliberately sought.<sup>7</sup> The New Zealand search for such differences is precisely the subject of the present work.

Because of this book’s very tardiness, there is another oddity of its history which may still leave some trace: a certain multiplicity of tone — as if various night spirits had picked up the pen while the purported author slept. *The Invention of New Zealand* was begun in the same polemical mode as my *Frames on the Land*, as a critique of the prevailing Nationalist myths in New Zealand art criticism and art history. However, by the time it reached its first drafts, the ideas it attacked had comprehensively fallen from power, and another kind of art and writing had come to replace them. In other words, what I will here be calling the Nationalist period had turned into history while I wrote. And one does not engage in polemics with the dead, unless their ideas are still alive and oppressive.

Also, perhaps it could be said of this study what the curator Robert Leonard once wrote of my earlier writing on Nationalist art and theory: it had fallen in love with what it set out to attack. Which is to say, I suppose, that it found itself increasingly impressed with the richness, internal coherence and inventiveness of the very claims with which it had wanted to dispute. It had turned into something like ‘a study in the history of New Zealand ideas’ — a phrasing I instantly rejected as a subtitle, fearing it would sound oxymoronic. What had at first appeared a mere series of errors now seemed more like the proliferation of an imaginative life admirable at once in its profusion, its cohesion, and its intricacy.

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5 Clement Greenberg, ‘Symposium: Is the French Avant-Garde Overrated?’, *Art Digest*, 15 September 1953, reprinted as ‘Contribution to a Symposium’, in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, Clement Greenberg, Beacon Press, Boston, 1989, p. 124. (Note the pugacity, confidence and competitiveness of Greenberg’s title. Greenberg’s answer to its query is of course: Yes.)

6 Peter Tomory, ‘The Visual Arts’, in *Distance Looks Our Way: The Effects of Remoteness on New Zealand*, ed. Keith Sinclair, Paul’s Book Arcade for the University of Auckland, Auckland, 1961, p. 76.

7 Peter Tomory, ‘What’s Different About New Zealand Art?’, *NZ Listener*, 30 October 1964, p. 3.

I see little point in outlining in the manner expected of introductions to 'serious' texts, chapter by chapter, in ponderous order, the subjects treated in the pages to come ('In Chapter 1, I will treat monism; in Chapter 2, dualism; in Chapter 3, notions of the triune god . . .'); nor will I perform that giving away of the plot which, though strictly forbidden to the introductions to thrillers, is expected of academic works. What is to come, in these pages as in life, the reader will know soon enough. Instead, it may be more instructive to reverse the convention and briefly touch on the topics that are *no longer* here, surgically excised as it were, for one reason or another, from the body of the book. In so seeing what the book is *not*, we may begin to see what it is.

Gone, for instance is a chapter entitled 'The Invention of a Market', dealing with structures of the New Zealand Academy, the arts societies and the independent groups, as well as private and public galleries. This was meant to show how Nationalist artists and critics had more or less daily complained, in a rhetoric lasting from c. 1930 to c. 1970, that the invention of New Zealand, and of a New Zealand culture, would not be possible until a market had been invented — until, that is to say, the instruments of invention were bought, and a life of full-time painting was made possible. Only then, it was felt, would there be sufficient painting time for the invention of a country. (Some faint echoes of the public gallery material in this deleted chapter survive in Chapter IX: 2).

Gone, too, is a subchapter entitled '*Chinoiserie* and *Japonisme* in Nationalist Art'. Though recourse to Chinese and Japanese art can be seen as Nationalist, in that it seeks *Pacific* rather than the usual European exemplars, somehow this failed to gel into much more than a chronological listing of 'influences'. (A few fragments of it survive in discussions of Rita Angus, Christopher Perkins and Colin McCahon.) Then there was the subchapter entitled 'Counter-voices', which ushered in the book's end, and showed some seemingly anti-Nationalist moments among the Nationalists themselves: abrupt gestures of recoil, when Nationalism is seen by its protagonists as perhaps but a temporary (if necessary) stage — a mere step on the way to *something else*,<sup>8</sup> moments of exhaustion and nausea at the Nationalist task; moments of sensing the advancing shadow of Nationalism's end, and even of longing for that end. This part of the text was motivated in part by a certain paranoia, intended as it was to counter a critical claim that I knew was certain to come: that this book ignores those moments when the Nationalists are seemingly *not* Nationalists; that it stacks the evidence, in other words. In the end, the sheer preponderance of Nationalist thought throughout the archive emboldened me to eliminate this section as well, though the attentive reader may find that one or two of these moments have survived.

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8 Thus, for instance, Curnow goes so far as to wonder if an assertive regionalism is merely a provisional stage, when he writes in 1945: 'Perhaps, returning so often to . . . the particular theme of this land and this people, some poets are making a home for the imagination, so that more personal and universal impulses may be set at liberty' (Allen Curnow, Introduction, *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923–45*, Caxton Press, Christchurch, 1945, p. 18.)

‘I like the explicit Foucault’, my friend Laurence Simmons once said of an early version of the manuscript. Alas, that too has largely gone — Michel Foucault as my companion and guide, holding aloft on poles various instructively inscribed placards as we wandered together, fascinated students, through sundry tumultuous Nationalist scenes. Apart from some quotes in its last chapter, and a few archaeological metaphors, this book now has to get on without Foucault as best it can.<sup>9</sup> However, recently it came to me with the kind of sudden force usually reserved for revelations of the sort where you are thrown from your horse and find by the time you hit the ground that you have turned Christian (or where, if you are already numbered among the elect, you are led, in obedience to God’s voice, to axe your entire family to death) — it came to me, as I say, that the real influence on this book was not Foucault at all, but art historian Erwin Panofsky.

This was the Panofsky I had read as an art history student many years before; the Panofsky most particularly of *Early Netherlandish Painting*,<sup>10</sup> who so brilliantly distinguishes the characteristics of fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting from those of contemporaneous Italian painting; the Panofsky, too, of *Renaissance and Renascences*,<sup>11</sup> who convincingly defends the reality of the Renaissance against a school of thought that would deny its existence, and persuasively differentiates it from several allegedly Renaissance-like earlier occasions — tasks not dissimilar to my own here; and the Panofsky, moreover, of an entirely enviable genius for discovering (*inventing*, some would say) patterns in overwhelming masses of materials. Also, of course (one could now say ‘of course’), there was Panofsky’s constant use of literary and theological texts to elucidate the meanings of contemporaneous works of art. Not to mention that no one describes as well as he the sheer *look* of works of art — the passionate array of their gestures, the sheen of their fabrics and furs, the exquisite tracteries of their blood, the glisten of their tears — those qualities intrinsic to painting itself.

Nor even are Panofsky’s subjects beside the point of a book on New Zealand art. To take just one example, Dürer’s conception of the artist as a suffering, Christ-like, quasi-divine being is, it will be seen, closely akin to the New Zealand Nationalist conception of the artist, and especially to Colin McCahon’s idea of himself. Furthermore, the fifteenth-century Flemish and the fifteenth-century Italians will be seen as important to a great deal of New Zealand art in a surprising number of ways, only one of which — the device of setting biblical stories into the landscapes of one’s own time and place — has been noticed in print before.<sup>12</sup>

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9 At one particularly Foucaultian point the book was even subtitled *An Archaeology of Nationalist Art and Letters*, in reference to the discipline of archaeology as proclaimed, with great rhetorical splendour, in Foucault’s *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Tavistock Publications, London, 1971; a translation of *Les Mots et les Choses*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1966) and *An Archaeology of Knowledge* (trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, Tavistock Publications, London, 1985).

10 Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*, Icon Editions, Harper and Row, New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London, 1971.

11 Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, Icon Editions, Harper and Row, New York, 1972.

12 Not to mention Panofsky’s footnotes, my favourite in art historiography: intricate, unbelievably learned, often essay-like disquisitions, not without a certain droll wit.

If the subtitle of this book kept changing during the writing, along with pretty well everything else, the title proper held firm throughout. Why this one item of stability? The answer lies in the importance of the word ‘invent’ to Nationalist thought itself — in its sheer inextricability from the Nationalist endeavour. The trope of the invention of New Zealand is uttered in two significant moments, by two (some would say *the* two) major figures in Nationalist New Zealand culture: first, in a moment of heroic anticipation, not so far from the beginning of the Nationalist period; and second, in a moment of gratified retrospection, very near to its end. The first of these utterances is by Allen Curnow, poet, anthologist, and the major theorist of a New Zealand Nationalism; and the second is by Colin McCahon, painter, curator, art historian, and writer.<sup>13</sup>

In the *First Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*, 1945, Curnow notably puts it that: ‘[S]trictly speaking New Zealand doesn’t exist yet, though some possible New Zealands glimmer in some poems and in some canvases. It remains to be created — should I say *invented* — by writers, musicians, artists, architects, publishers.’<sup>14</sup> Just as notably, in his *Landfall* essay of 1966, ‘Beginnings’, McCahon, looking back over some three decades of his work, recalls that his largest endeavour had been to convey to New Zealanders a vision of ‘something . . . belonging to the land and not yet to its people. Not yet understood or communicated, not even really yet *invented*. My work has largely been to communicate this vision, and invent the way to see it. This vision or discovery . . .’<sup>15</sup>

These two texts are the key pre-texts of the present work, and they echo through it like a refrain. Their implications repeatedly shift, as they pass through the various chapters, encountering in each as they go a different constellation of Nationalist ideas. Note that they come from the *First Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*, and from an essay entitled *Beginnings*. Both are part of a rhetoric of inauguration that begins in the 1930s — a discourse that will always remain inaugural, even when, as in McCahon’s essay, it is looking back. We might notice, too, that McCahon the painter writes in *Landfall*, a largely literary site — the prime literary site of its period, in fact — while Curnow, the literary figure, writes in a *Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*, a site more given to art than to literature. Let this stand, for the moment, for the inextricability of the literary and the painterly endeavour in what I will be calling here the Nationalist time — an inextricability that the following pages will everywhere confirm.

But what does it mean — what *can* it mean — when twentieth-century artists and writers say they want to *invent* New Zealand, or when it is claimed of them that they have done so? Surely, in any common-sense view, New Zealand exists *before* poets and painters come to it. It might seem, then, that Curnow and McCahon

13 It is of biographical interest, perhaps, but of no structural importance whether McCahon consciously echoes Curnow.

14 Allen Curnow, in Curnow and Ngaio Marsh, ‘A Dialogue by Way of Introduction’, *First Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*, H.H. Tombs, Wellington, 1945, p. 2. My italics.

15 Colin McCahon, ‘Beginnings’, *Landfall*, vol. 20, no. 4, December 1966, p. 364. My italics.

must be speaking of inventing not so much a country as a *culture* — a high culture peculiar to New Zealand, in which the real and pre-existent New Zealand might come properly to be seen. McCahon does, after all, speak of ‘something . . . belonging to the land, and not yet to its people’, as though the land had preceded his view of it, and as though his art were that which, in truly reflecting the land, would make it belong at last to its inhabitants.

If we were to attempt a preliminary definition, Nationalist New Zealand art might be defined as that body of art and letters which, between c. 1930 and c. 1970, set out to uncover the essence of New Zealand, and, in so doing, to invent a specifically New Zealand high culture. But such a definition would be premature. For one thing, the word ‘vision’ in McCahon’s foundational myth quoted from above is radically ambiguous, since it can mean either the seeing of actual, material things in the world, or the seeing of things whose existence is only in the mind. Such ambiguities will hardly provide the certainties required for a definition, let alone for establishing a solid foundation for a country and culture to come.

The trope of ‘invention’ used by Curnow and McCahon operates in as paradoxical a fashion. To work out what it might mean in its Nationalist usage, it may help to recall an old usage in which ‘invention’ means ‘discovery’. Piero della Francesca’s famous fresco cycle at Arezzo, for instance, is today called ‘The *Discovery* and Proof of the True Cross’ (the cross on which Christ died), but in the older writings in English on Piero it is called ‘The *Invention* and Proof of the True Cross’. (My italics.) To invent is to create a new thing, and, contradictorily, to discover is to find — or uncover — something already there. Yet, I think, both contradictory senses of ‘invent’ subsist whenever the trope of the ‘invention of New Zealand’ is deployed. It is no accident that in the McCahon quote above, the artist calls his epiphany in the New Zealand landscape a ‘vision *or* discovery’. (My italics.) He is alert to the difference, even as he cannot choose between the two.

McCahon is hardly alone in this indecision. Nationalist thought constantly oscillates from one side to the other of the slash between ‘invention’ and ‘discovery’. We should not see this as a fault, which a more exacting concentration or a finer logic might redress. Rather, it is out of this perpetual vacillation, it is by energising and directing it, and by taking advantage of its very doubleness and uncertainty, that a Nationalist culture comes into being. The whole of Nationalist art and literature might be said to exist in the space of a play on the word ‘invention’, and especially on these two meanings: the old meaning, which was to discover, to find something which was already there before you; and today’s meaning, which is to create something new, or even to concoct it, to make up a fictitious story.

Poet and *Landfall* editor Charles Brasch, to give another instance, might seem to want to have it both ways when he tells us that the new New Zealand artist ‘is in the true sense a discoverer *and* creator’.<sup>16</sup> (My italics.) However, the relation

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16 Charles Brasch, ‘Notes’, *Landfall*, vol. 10, no. 3, September 1956, p. 176.

between 'discovery' (as of something already there) and 'creation' (as if out of a void) remains for him in a perpetually fertile state of ambiguity. So, though for Brasch, '[t]he best contemporary painting (and literature, and music) is in fact *creating* New Zealand as a world of the imagination' (his italics), the creation comes as 'an undiscovered world',<sup>17</sup> as if it had been, after all, *not* created, but simply awaiting, already complete, and ready to be found. A similar indecision troubles Brasch when he writes of the Australia so enviably manifest in Sidney Nolan's painting. It is, he says, 'partly observed and partly invented, more real than in any realist painting because more powerfully evocative, recreated with great intensity as a clearly defined, visionary country of the imagination.'<sup>18</sup> Here again, he seems to want, as the saying used to go, to have a bob each way. Be as that may, it is something along the lines of Nolan's 'partly observed and partly invented' country that Brasch hopes to find 'invented' in New Zealand too.

McCahon speaks of his art as an 'invention' which is also a 'vision or discovery' of a country.<sup>19</sup> (You are not, I think, meant to ask *which*.) On the other hand, Auckland City Art Gallery director Peter Tomory summarises the three centuries of New Zealand's European art history under the title 'Imaginary Reefs and Floating Islands',<sup>20</sup> as though the history he treats were no more than that: the mirages of some Pacific voyager's reverie. Clearly, *he* leans to the visionary pole of the invention/discovery topos, even as he alludes to the historical fact of the great voyages of discovery.

And what about Curnow, in his Introduction to the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, 1960? As we will see, he makes every effort throughout to provide a firm ground for the invented New Zealand, and to root the new country firmly there. Yet, at the same time, with an irony deeply undermining of his own cause, he offers this epigraph from Swift: '[T]he reader can hardly conceive my Astonishment, to behold an Island in the Air, inhabited by Men, who were able (as it should seem) to raise, or sink, or put it into a progressive Motion, as they pleased.' It is as though, despite his best efforts, all were arbitrary in the invention, all unreal. Earlier, in the Introduction to his Caxton anthology of 1945, Curnow had admitted just as radical an uncertainty as to the reality of the discovered country, when he made an epigraph of some lines from Blake's 'Jerusalem':

*Shadowy to those who dwell not in them, mere  
possibilities,  
But to those who dwell in them they seem the only  
substances.*

17 Charles Brasch, *A Private Collection of New Zealand Painting: Thirty Seven New Zealand Paintings from the Collection of Charles Brasch and Rodney Kennedy*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1958, p. 6.

18 [Charles Brasch], 'Notes', *Landfall*, vol. 11, no. 4, December 1957, p. 275.

19 McCahon, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

20 Peter Tomory, 'Imaginary Reefs and Floating Islands', *Ascent*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 1968, pp. 5-19.

Alas, this Nationalist indecision as to the nature of the invented country bears with it an unavoidable contagion. I might have wished with this book to master Nationalist high culture, to sum up, in some splendid order, all of its vivid life, to uncover, with masterful precision, every rule of its operation. But, inescapably, Nationalist culture's own indecision as to what it is infects all commentary about it. Try as I might, I will 'always have to renew, reproduce, and reinstate into the formalizing economy of my tale . . . the very indecision which I was trying to reduce.'<sup>21</sup> I can only hope that at least some small part of the fruitfulness of this uncertainty for my predecessors may persist in the following pages.

Finally, on the matter of the apparently excessive time taken in completing this book, there is the seldom acknowledged fact of the sheer happiness of writing. Writing this work was, for all those years, simply what I did with my days and my nights. In some way, it justified me — or, at least, removed all uncertainty about what to do in the hours remaining in a day or a life. Already, it has been many books. Why ever, then, bring it to an end?

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21 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1987, p. 2.