Pidgin picturesque

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THE PICTURESQUE has been compared to a language. This paper extends the metaphor to pidgins and creoles to make observations about the intermixing of design languages, namely between the conventions of the picturesque and the indigenous environment of New Zealand. Within the context of landscape architecture, pidgin variations are evident in relation to architecture, topography and plants. The native New Zealand environment, with its unique evergreen flora, colonial adaptations of architecture, and challenging topography, has placed new demands on the picturesque. The campus of Lincoln University demonstrates some of the potential of the pidgin picturesque, and some of the tensions that persist within it. The future of New Zealand landscape design identity lies in the ability to understand both imported and indigenous languages. Only then can a unique language develop, which moves beyond the transitory stage of a pidgin into the 'mother tongue' of a creole.

KEY WORDS

Picturesque

Language metaphor

New Zealand landscape

THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE PICTURESQUE is a language is underlined in the discourse on landscape. Capability Brown was so convinced that the picturesque was a language that 'he compared his art to literary composition' (Stroud 1950, p.199). The picturesque has been referred to as a 'codex' (Calow 1992–93, p.20), a 'formula' (Barbier 1963, p.99) and even 'the art of cooking nature' (Bicknell 1981, p.ix). And the satirical character who William Combe sent in search of the picturesque was none other than Dr *Syntax* (Combe 1881).

Codes, formulae and recipes all depend on a predetermined vocabulary governed by a recognised syntax—they are all types of language. The linguistic metaphor is useful to conceptualise the formulaic nature of the picturesque. However, extending the metaphor to a much broader linguistic context, the picturesque has much in common with English. Both languages were formulated in England, but much of their vocabulary has Latin and Germanic origins. Further, of course, both the English language and the picturesque language were transported to the colonies. In their new environments, these languages have undergone changes ranging in degree from the emergence of an accent to the development of a pidgin language.

A pidgin language emerges 'when two mutually unintelligible speech communities attempt to communicate' (Crystal 1992, p.302) The qualities of pidgin languages are 'a limited vocabulary, a reduced grammatical structure, and a much narrower range of functions, compared to the languages which gave rise to them' (Crystal 1987, p.334). The pidgin picturesque thus shares the qualities of two languages—the imported language of the picturesque and an indigenous language based in the natural environment. This language can be expected to be simplified—like 'New Zild' in New Zealand, which Mitchell (1972, p.181) describes as 'a substitute for speech, a verbal shorthand'.[1]

The interaction of imported conventions with an indigenous environment lies at the very heart of the picturesque. Andrews (1989, p.11) calls this collision 'Parnassus-upon-Thames', referring to the way the classical language was

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incorporated into the English landscape. Hunt (1992, p.11) describes how the introduced classical language interacted with the local English environment, where, 'just as Horace and Homer were required to speak modern English in Pope's translations, so landscapes like Castle Howard . . . felt obliged to honour their indigenous languages of architecture and topography'. Wray Wood at Castle Howard he describes as 'an imitation or representation of nature, but with the full vocabulary and syntax of Renaissance forms mingling with the native, indigenous trees' (Hunt 1992, p.37).

In England, therefore, imported conventions interacted with the three factors of indigenous architecture, topography and trees to create a variation on a language. Following the normal pattern of linguistic development, the variation would have begun as a pidgin and developed into a creole, 'a pidgin language which has become the mother tongue of a community' (Crystal 1987, p.336). Ultimately this variation became what could be called creole classicism, the picturesque. As in language, 'the switch from pidgin to creole involves a major expansion in the structural linguistic resources available—especially in vocabulary, grammar, and style' (ibid).

Current manifestations

New Zealand's pidgin picturesque manifests itself in a variety of locations. For example, Ronda Cooper's (1987) survey of the landscape in New Zealand literature highlights the way in which writing on the landscape reflects the 'great 18th-century archetypes'. She observes (Cooper 1987, p.6) how:

> They may sometimes have taken on particularly kiwi colourings, or they may have evolved into deceptively contemporary forms, but it would be difficult to deny their dependence on the cultural and philosophical structures of 200 years ago.

In Bruce Mason's *The end of the golden weather* (1962, cited in McNaughton 1986, p.23) the characteristics of the picturesque are fused with a scene which is unmistakably New Zealand:

> The beach is fringed with *pohutukawa* trees, single and stunted in the gardens, spreading and noble on the cliffs, and in the empty spaces by the foreshore . . . Pain and age are in these gnarled forms, in bare roots, clutching at the earth, knotting on the cliff-face, in tortured branches, dark against the washed sky.

It almost seems that Salvator Rosa was there on the beach at Te Parenga.

On our television screens the pidgin picturesque is rampant. With regard to an advertisement for Apple computers, Nick Perry (1994, p.75) summarises the atmosphere created:

> Partly it has to do with lighting, which bounces off European painting canons. Everything is muted, with brown the dominant tone. The pub scene is chiaroscuro, Rembrandt with gumboots,[2] backlit by the late afternoon sun.

The vocabulary of the picturesque is evident in this description. Muted brownness was a key signifier for the picturesque, as Christopher Hussey (1967, p.248) observes:

> A test as to whether a picture is picturesque might be found in the extent to which the colour brown is employed. The eye that appreciated landscape through old masters and poetry definitely loved brown.

Chiaroscuro is also part of the picturesque's visual vocabulary, along with the work of Rembrandt; it was to his view that 'Holland's damp and marshy downs . . . display'd their mellow browns' (Knight 1794, p.69). But in the pidgin picturesque that Perry notes, it's Rembrandt *with gumboots*.

Perry has identified similar imagery elsewhere. For example, in a New Zealand advertisement for Nilverm sheep drench, which attempts to create an atmosphere of 'Australianness', a 'down-under version of a chocolate box aesthetic' is achieved. As Perry points out, it 'might just be read as picturesque' (Perry 1994, p.66). In another example, an advertisement for food manufacturer Watties, parallels are drawn between Constable's *The cornfield* and the visual imagery of a New Zealand farm (Carter and Perry 1987).

Constable on a Kiwi[3] farm, 'Rembrandt with gumboots', 'Wordsworth does the Heaphy Track' (Cooper 1987), and maybe even Rosa in jandals[4] on the beach at Te Parenga—the collisions within these images evoke the pidgin picturesque, highlighting the juxtapositions which occur when the traditional language of the picturesque encounters the indigenous language of the New Zealand landscape. The montage by Leon van den Eijkel and Ian Wedde (figure 1) makes the impact of such collisions quite explicit. The idyllic picturesque imagery of Poussin's *Et in arcadia ego* is given a new context with the addition of the undeniably New Zealand icons of Mount Taranaki and a Maori kowhaiwhai panel.[5] The panel becomes a Kiwi *coulisse*, a surrogate for the tree which is an essential picturesque framing device; whilst the mountain parades itself unashamedly above, providing a picturesque backdrop—a perfect stand-in for those Italian hills. The mingling of Italian and New Zealand imagery is
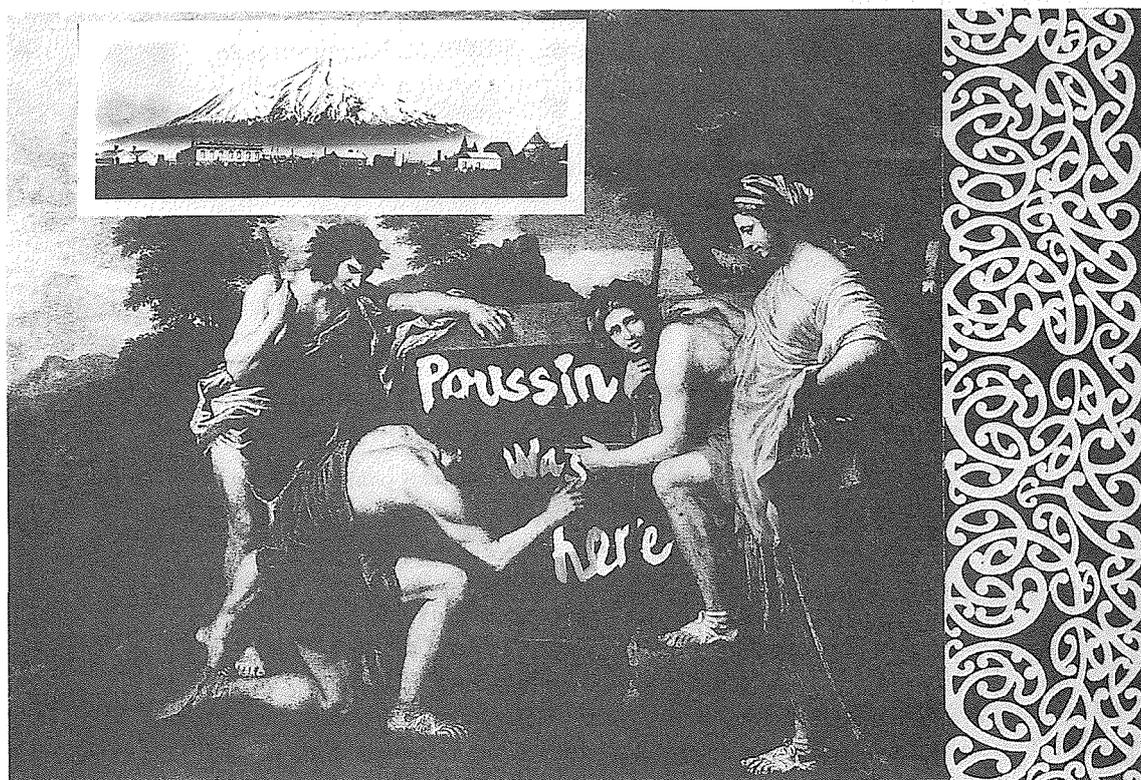

Figure 1: Montage by Leon van den Eijkel and Ian Wedde

underscored by the supplanting of Poussin's original tomb inscription, 'Et in arcadia ego', with the graffiti, 'Poussin was here'.

Similar collisions occur, of course, in landscape design. On the topic of the gardens of Tauranga, Rod Barnett (1994) comments:

> Oaks, lawns and orchards take us straight back to the colonial era. But although this garden is a European transplant it still manages to reflect something of this region. The ancient bunyabunya, for instance, is not something you'd find in a Constable painting. More likely—in one of his nightmares.

Constable's work is a repository of picturesque cliché, as emphasised by Perry in comparing it with the Watties advertisement; it has the vocabulary and syntax of the familiar and comfortable. It is into this cosy language that Barnett injects the bunyabunya: an unfamiliar utterance within a familiar syntax, a phrase of pidgin picturesque.

The beginnings of pidgin picturesque in New Zealand

When the 'mother tongue' of the picturesque was transported to the colonies, it was the three unfamiliar languages of the indigenous architecture, topography and vegetation that caused variations in the language. The indigenous architecture of New Zealand was immediately subjected to an aesthetic judgement. In 1853, Adams (p.49) remarked, 'The "warries"[6] look picturesque at a distance, but do not improve on a nearer inspection'. That the whare did not stand up to close scrutiny illustrates the boundaries of the picturesque language. Within language, to remain comprehensible the vocabulary and syntax can only be altered to a degree. As a language of the distant view, the syntax of the picturesque could not incorporate Adams's 'nearer inspection'.

The buildings of the settlers also entered the visual vocabulary of the picturesque. In England, stately homes added rustic buildings to their picturesque landscapes. In the pidgin picturesque of New Zealand, the settlers lived in rustic buildings, and added stately homes. On many country estates today, the original settlers' buildings are retained as garden follies, museums and school rooms.

Topography is the second indigenous language with which the language of the picturesque has attempted to communicate. Appleton (1986) suggests that topography is particularly important for the picturesque, going so far as to posit a theory of geological (and subsequently topographical) determinism. He suggests that the upland areas of Britain have terrain more suited to the picturesque. For example, at the home of picturesque theorist Richard Payne Knight at Downton Castle, 'nature had provided within the estate a rich store of most of the paraphernalia of the picturesque' (p.284). Pevsner underlined this geological bonus: 'the Teme valley is indeed wild and rugged, and all he had to do was leave it alone. This he did' (cited in ibid).

Topographical determinism coloured early judgments of the New Zealand landscape. This effect is highlighted in responses to the Port Hills and the Canterbury Plains on the east coast of the South Island, close together but in marked contrast topographically. When Adams (1853, p.25) arrived in Lyttelton he noted, 'There are few prettier towns than Lyttelton as seen from the sea, situated in a small but picturesque bay, it is, as it were, framed in the bold and rugged hills, by which it is on three sides surrounded'. The man who gave his

name to this town, Lord Lyttelton, highlighted the paucity of picturesque qualities on the plains, 'for emigrants of a complaining turn of mind, and fond of the picturesque, [the Canterbury Plains] . . . at first sight seemed exceedingly repulsive' (cited in Strongman 1984, p.12). Adams (1853, p.33) agreed with this observation, but added that it was 'a good situation in point of utility, which must always be the main consideration in the establishment of colonial towns'. The language of utility has often interjected in the dialogue between the picturesque and the indigenous environment.

The third indigenous language, the vegetation, was not easily coerced into the pidgin picturesque. There was a tendency to attempt to apply the syntax of the picturesque directly to the visual vocabulary of the native vegetation. This was clearly evident in the paintings by early colonists, as Minson (1993, p.8) observes, 'Particularly noticeable is the conversion of the New Zealand bush into English park; with emphasis on controlled and controllable beauty, not on the ugly; on light, not on darkness'. However, when crossing the boundary from landscape painting into landscape design, the differences between New Zealand natives and British trees quickly became apparent. An early settler noticed the difference between the two floras: 'It must be confessed that, owing I suppose to most of the trees being evergreen, there is a certain stiffness in the appearance of a New Zealand forest, which contrasts unfavourably with the fresh tender green of an English wood' (cited in McNaughton 1986, p.203). Seasonality was important in the picturesque language, as indicated in Knight's comments (1794, p.54) on the value of the oak:

> Tints, that still vary with the varying year,
> And with new beauties ev'ry month appear;
> From the bright green of the first vernal bloom,
> To the deep brown of autumn's solemn gloom.

Pioneer Charlotte Godley recorded another characteristic of New Zealand natives that precludes them from being direct analogues of British trees. Visiting a garden at Otaki in about 1850 she noted how native trees left exposed 'generally die of their own accord when they lose the protection of the trees around' (cited in Challenger 1974, p.60). Stiffness, lack of seasonality, and the inability to exist as individuals meant the New Zealand flora made new demands on the picturesque. These and other challenges provided by the vegetation, the topography and the unique architectural variations have all combined to produce an indigenous form of the picturesque. The landscape of the Lincoln University campus captures something of this unique blend of imported elements and indigenous factors.

Lincoln University's pidgin picturesque

At Lincoln, it is again within the three components of architecture, topography and vegetation that the variations in the language of the picturesque occur. Architecturally, the most distinctive element of the Lincoln campus is Ivey Hall. Built in 1878 for Canterbury College's School of Agriculture, early photographs show Ivey Hall within an informal, arcadian landscape surrounded by groups of sheep (figure 2). The building itself is emphatically picturesque. It fits well with Hussey's definition (1967, p.187) of picturesque architecture as 'building and design conceived in relation to landscape, whether as a setting, or as the

Figure 2: Ivey Hall in the early twentieth century

source of certain qualities and features reflected in the architecture'. Ivey Hall has been labelled 'Dutch Colonial' (Stacpoole, cited in Burns 1977, p.16), a description perfectly in keeping with a landscape setting that is strongly reminiscent of the Netherlands. The styles of Elizabethan, Flemish and Jacobean have also been ascribed to Ivey Hall, reflecting the eclecticism which makes it so picturesque. Shaw (1991, p.36) describes how '[t]he emphasis is on variety', another key word in the picturesque vocabulary, such that '[e]ven the disposition of rooms . . . was irregular within its L-shaped plan'. Furthermore, the design exhibits qualities of nostalgia, another sign of the picturesque. The silhouette of Ivey Hall was particularly picturesque, and it is unfortunate that this has been eroded through the removal of the chimneys, some after an earthquake in the 1960s, and the remainder in 1971. The residual picturesque quality of the Ivey Hall roofline, with its quirky Dutch gables, is now obliterated from many angles by the three storey extension added in the early 1990s.

In 1953 Hudson Hall was completed and, with its terracotta tiled roof and plastered walls, brought a Mediterranean air to the campus. The Elizabethan–Dutch Colonial Ivey Hall and the Mediterranean Hudson Hall stood like follies in an eighteenth century English picturesque garden. Then, in 1968, the addition of the Hilgendorf wing saw the Lincoln campus speak picturesque with a new accent. Modelled closely on the buildings of Swiss architect, Le Corbusier, Hilgendorf, and in 1976 the Burns wing as well, reflected his desire to place simple tower blocks within picturesque landscape. He felt 'the proximity of geometrical forms with picturesque vegetation produces a much-needed and satisfying combination in our urban scene' (Le Corbusier 1971, p.236). Le Corbusier's buildings stood up on pilotis so the picturesque landscape could

flow through beneath them. However, at Lincoln the language of utility triumphed over the language of the picturesque, and almost as soon as it was built the bottom of Hilgendorf was bricked in to provide space for a post office, telephone centre, and offices.

As regards topography, what little variation there was on the Lincoln campus was quickly filled in or flattened off, reinforcing the parallel between the flat landscape of the Canterbury Plains and that of Holland.[7] From Appleton's topographical determinism, supported by Lord Lyttelton's despairing comment, it might be suggested that the landscape at Lincoln was ill suited to the picturesque. However, if the pidgin picturesque acquires a Dutch accent, it is clear that Lincoln's landscape can indeed be picturesque. The phrase 'Rembrandt with gumboots', which seems peculiarly suited to the image of the Dutch Colonial Ivey Hall standing in a field of sheep, hints at the Dutch influence on the picturesque. Whilst Claude, Poussin and Rosa infused the picturesque with images of the golden age, the component of 'roughness, muddy lanes and thatched cottages' (Bicknell 1981, p.xi) in the picturesque derives from painters like Ruysdael, Van Goyen, Hobbema, Ostade—and, of course, Rembrandt. These artists established a range of objects that were suitable for picturesque painting, and the list illustrates some of the ways in which the Lincoln campus could be picturesque: 'old gnarled trees, sandy banks, water and windmills, rough heaths, rustic bridges, stumps, logs, ruts, hovels, unkempt persons, and shaggy animals' (Hussey 1967, p.11).

The planting of the Lincoln campus is the third way in which an adaptation of the picturesque is evident. The planting demonstrates the ways in which the vocabulary of a language without the syntax quickly becomes meaningless and confused. The early image of a simple rural idyll at Lincoln has been fractured and abbreviated into incomprehensible phrases. Informality still dominates the planting configurations, yet there is a spottiness and lack of conviction that prevents a clear message being communicated. This garbled picturesque planting is what Hunt (1993, p.140) calls 'a dedication to the thin end of that particular cult'. It is so near, yet so far, from the Corbusian vision (1971, p.237) that could have been the Lincoln landscape:

> Out of the earth sprung up the shrubs and foliage, the lawns stretch away into the distance, and the beds of flowering plants. A ring of geometrical forms encloses this charming and picturesque scene, and the silhouette seen against the sky is an architectural one.

Conclusion

It is evident that the metaphor of language facilitates insights into the migration of design conventions. Language embodies vocabulary and syntax, which are arguably concepts shared by design. Extending the metaphor to pidgins and creoles, and the process of transition between them, is also useful. Further, design shares with language the sorts of judgments that are made in relation to some ideal or pure form. For example, Mitchell (1972, p.181) comments that 'Elocution teachers sometimes say that New Zild is only lazy speech'. Similar derisory comments are made about New Zealand landscape design, where the differences encountered in this country were seen as demanding compromises rather than offering opportunities. Lessons can be learnt from language. Crystal

(1987, p.33) argues that pidgins should be viewed not as corruptions, but as 'demonstrably creative adaptations of natural languages, with a structure and rules of their own'.

But while Crystal emphasises the creative potential of pidgins, some degree of discord is unavoidable because they are transitional, and emerging from two different languages. Moreover, as the landscape of the Lincoln campus illustrates, this critical transitional period is not eased by interjections from a third language. The language of utility, necessarily adopted by the pioneers, has also sought to communicate with the indigenous environment, often at the expense of the picturesque. At Lincoln, filling in gullies, closing in the base of Hilgendorf, removing all of Ivey Hall's chimneys, and obliterating the picturesque roofline, are all manifestations of the utilitarian in conflict with the picturesque. The two languages are old sparring partners; as Robinson (1991, p.95) put it, the picturesque 'distorts commonsense demands for comfort and utility'.

The jumbled vocabularies and syntaxes of this transitional period may seem less like a comprehensible design language than the ramblings of a madman. Yet it is within these very ramblings that the emerging design language is concealed. Hidden amongst the gibberish are the creative examples of pidgin that signal the way forward for New Zealand landscape design. Through embracing difference in architecture, topography and vegetation, and making a commitment to languages such as the picturesque, New Zealand landscape design can gain an identity. Once there are native speakers of the pidgin picturesque, who understand the vocabulary and syntax of *both* imported and indigenous languages, we may at last hear the unique language of a Kiwi creole.

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NOTES
[1] New Zild is 'New Z'l'd', referring to the way the New Zealanders speak, 'never [using] two syllables when one will do, either eliding sounds or contracting words' (Mitchell 1972, p.181).

[2] 'Gumboots' are rubber boots ('wellingtons').

[3] Kiwi, a native bird, is also the popular term to describe someone or something from New Zealand.

[4] Jandals are rubber sandals, commonly worn on the beach in New Zealand. They are also known as 'thongs' or 'flip-flops'.

[5] Kowhaiwhai panels are painted decorations traditionally used on house rafters or canoe hulls. They are usually decorated with scroll ornamentation.

[6] 'Warries' refers to 'whare', the Maori word for house. As there is no 's' in the Maori language it is correct to use 'whare' for the plural as well.

[7] Interestingly, the Lincoln campus even sported a windmill for pumping water during its early years.

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