



FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

THE CIVIC LANDSCAPE: Photographing the Urban Malaise

Dr Jamie Holcombe

In the early days of photography, particularly in Europe and Britain, landscape photographs reflected a desire to provide a visual remedy to the new industrialisation of the environment, by offering what theorist Liz Wells refers to as a “*therapeutic view of nature*”.ⁱ By the early to mid 1800s, travel had become a greater reality to more people. In 1853, Maxime du Camp, who was known as a journalist *and* a photographer (interestingly, the term “photojournalist” had yet to be coined) set out to compile a photographic catalogue of what he found in Egypt (Fig. 1). Historian Peter Turner writes of Du Camp’s achievements as transcending the mere topographical, suggesting that his photographs “*translated the wonders of the ancient world into fine images of ruin*”.ⁱⁱ



Fig. 1: *Thebes, Tomb of Ozymandias*, 1850, Maxime du Camp, Calotype Photograph.

Travellers like Du Camp set out to amass information, to observe and to catalogue every outstanding aspect of nature to satisfy a Western appetite to document and classify the world. Robert A. Sobieszek, in his essay in *The Art of Fixing a Shadow* (1989), tells us that the camera had provided the traveller with, what Du Camp called, “*a unique modern advantage... by which the marvels of the material world*

could be captured with unparalleled facticity".ⁱⁱⁱ Clearly for some, however, the camera came with a supercilious advantage for the travelling photographer. It rendered dominance over its subjects, as if it quite literally "captured" them. Turner confirms this arrogance, writing that "*photography and exploration seemed [like] good partners, as did photography and the process of colonization*", however he suggests that the photographers themselves were more interested in selling their photographs to collectors than in colonial conquest.^{iv}

In contrast, if we are to learn from this, the travelling landscape photographer of today needs to approach a subject with humility and respect. Rather than attempting to conquer or possess the places visited, the modern photographer should perhaps render landscapes with a respectful observance, mindful of those who have gone before – not just those who have trodden in the same path as a passing traveller, but those who spent their entire lives *in* these places, living as *part* of the landscape, not just a spectator of it.

Even though serious landscape photographers would consider themselves more than mere tourists, they are nonetheless travellers. They are itinerant to spaces in the natural scenery from which they draw inspiration, seeking their inherent essence. It could be said that these spaces, become *places*, once they have been given some kind of human emotional attachment. Thus the early landscape photographers transformed the spaces they travelled through into places when they started to publish their images to a wider audience.

I too travel to take my photographs, with my recent exhibition in 2015 titled *Civic Malaise* (Figs.2 & 3) incorporating locations across the entire bottom half of mainland Australia. Contrary to the new discoveries of the early explorers, I found the same thing wherever I went: not the same actual subjects, but the same sense of neglect and apathy. It seemed that different places had lost their *difference*, redeveloped with the sameness of other places.



Fig. 2: *Civic Malaise*, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, 2015, Installation Shot 1 (Photo Jamie Holcombe)

The bigger centres, with their growth derived not from prosperity, but migration from those deserting the smaller towns and localities, featured the same chain stores and shopping malls, the same forgotten town centres, and the same suburban sprawl on the outskirts. I did not need to travel to photograph this, because it was everywhere, however there are still subjects that are unique to a particular location, which better confirm the endemic regional nature of our society's malaise.



Fig. 3: *Civic Malaise*, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, 2015, Installation Shot 2 (Photo Jamie Holcombe)

Perhaps the most apt example of this specific location that necessitated travel is my image titled *Nullarbor Whale* (Fig. 4). This is because it is situated virtually in the geographical centre of my travels, and equally in the symbolic heart of my rationale. Halfway across Australia, in the middle of the Nullarbor Plain and overshadowed by

a giant petroleum company's signpost, there sits an artificial whale. The replica whale rather ironically sports a hand-painted warning to "keep off", which is more likely inspired by fear of litigation (should someone be injured climbing on the structure) than any protestation about the ongoing human interference with real whales in their own environment. It was a rare day when there had been a downpour of rain, which filled the fenced-off recess beneath the elevated whale. It struck me that the whale was held aloft above a meagre inland sea, conquered, replicated, and owned, and could only watch as we mindlessly rush past.



Fig. 4: *Nullarbor Whale*, 2015, Jamie Holcombe, Digital Photographic Print, 100x150cms.

Whales aside, a discussion about landscape photography would not be complete without mentioning the *elephant* in the room, caused by the popularity of the genre, which generates a proliferation of derivative, cliché-ridden "pretty pictures" that rest comfortably within a pictorial aesthetic, but struggle to make beautiful representations of already beautiful subjects. Of course it is perfectly viable to make an outstanding depiction of beautiful scenery, which can be a thoroughly successful work of art, as is clearly proved by the likes of Ansel Adams, who is the repeatedly acknowledged 20th Century master of the traditional photographic landscape.

However, to achieve this, the work must offer something else besides the superficial. It needs to offer an aesthetic experience that conveys a kind of spirit of place; not just of natural beauty, but also of the presence or resonance of those who have been there before.

The “pretty picture” landscape, on the other hand, can act just like a pop song. Its appeal is usually immediate, but often short-lived, leaving a void to be filled by the next one that comes along. Cliché subjects and overly saturated colours are like saccharin sweet lyrics, wearing thin from over-use. In deliberate contrast to this, my images, whilst aesthetically considered, need time to be appreciated. They do not just need to be looked at, but also insist on contemplation, which requires an effort from the viewer better facilitated by the gallery wall or the book than the postcard calendar on the refrigerator door. My image titled *Outdoor Australia* (Fig. 5), framing a decrepit billboard as one might compose a beautiful natural scene, elicits this attention. The billboard, with its green coastal fringe and seemingly barren neglected centre, seems specific to Australia as a whole.



Fig. 5: *Outdoor Australia*, 2015, Jamie Holcombe, Digital Photographic Print, 100x150cms.

We hear words like “evocative” and “sublime” thrown around with abandon by patronising would-be critics, but these words on their own remain as superficial as the paper on which the image is printed. Fine art landscape photographers usually need to explain themselves in order to be heard above the clichés, which has become an occupational hazard of working in a popular genre.

Australian born photographer Peter Lik’s image titled *Phantom* (Fig. 6) is controversial because it fans this debate over the perceived artistic merit of landscape photography. Lik claims to have sold the photograph to an undisclosed buyer for US 6.5 million dollars, a record highest price ever paid for a photograph, but there is no documentary evidence outside of Lik’s own press release that this is true.



Fig. 6: *Phantom*, 2014, Peter Lik, large-scale Digital Photographic Print, (actual size undisclosed).

Jonathon Jones, writing for the Guardian in 2014, launched a scathing attack on the *Phantom*, and Lik’s work in general, the critical acclaim for which seems mostly to come from Lik himself. Jones argues that the image is no different from all the others taken by tourists to the same site, namely an underground cavern in the Antelope Canyon in Arizona USA. Many of these, such as *Ancestors* (Fig. 7) taken

by Gavin Hardcastle the year before, can be easily sourced with a simple Google search. Jones claims that Lik's *Phantom* "lazily emulates what others have done before", and adds, "it is a cliché: easy on the eye, easy on the brain, hackneyed and third-hand".^v



Fig. 7: *Ancestors*, 2013, Gavin Hardcastle, Web Sourced Digital Image, (actual size undisclosed).

To put this in terminology expounded by the seminal semiologist Roland Barthes, Jones is saying Lik's *Phantom* lacks a *punctum*, meaning it is without poignancy. Barthes considered that images such as this "provoke only a general... polite interest... invested with... unconcerned desire... and inconsequential taste".^{vi} Since Barthes wrote this, there has arguably been a sharp proliferation of these photographs, which are proportionally aligned to the increasing level of automation in "quality" cameras. Ansel Adams was somewhat prophetic when he made the statement, "The sheer ease with which we can produce a superficial image often leads to creative disaster".^{vii} Compounding Adams' concerns, landscape can be less esoteric than other photographic genres, and practitioners of any ilk can try their hand at embellishment to make their image more "artistic". We only need look at the

popularity of High Dynamic Range (HDR), which, when invariably taken too far, makes the image less realistic, in favour of a more “painterly” effect.

Ultimately most people in the market for landscapes are predictably more interested in beautiful photographs that don’t challenge them, or create any sense of unease. People are less likely to want more confronting landscape images in their homes, which are *genuinely* evocative, in that they stir poignant emotions about the state of the environment. My image titled *Wave Rock* (Fig. 8), for example, fits this latter concern. Also representing an expanse of natural rock, but depicting a substantially more human and less divine intervention, its social commentary stands it in direct contrast to Lik’s more commercially driven intentions.



Fig. 8: *Wave Rock*, 2015, Jamie Holcombe, Digital Photographic Print, 100x150cms.

Such images invariably cross over into the realm of social documentary, observing the human condition and its impact on the landscape. These photographs can perhaps be defined as what the International Centre of Photography once called, “pictures that say, ‘look at what has been done to this landscape’, rather than, ‘look at what this landscape is’”.^{viii} By recording the people in their circumstance, and the

happenings around them, social documentary photography ultimately archives a *social landscape* of a culture and its environment.

An important document by a 20th century travelling photographer, and an exemplar of social documentary, can be seen in Swiss-born Robert Frank's *The Americans*, published in 1958. *The Americans*, which depicts Frank's famous ten thousand mile road trip across America in the mid 1950s, is a photo-essay that revealed a clearly personal, even idiosyncratic view of America. His photographs of alienated, lonely Americans engaged in banal activities in the most ordinary public settings were essentially glimpses of an American sadness and disenchantment. The renowned curator of photography John Szarkowski once observed: "*This book... was about whole segments of life that nobody had thought [were] the proper concern of art*".^{ix}

Many viewers did not like what they saw because they were reacting to Frank's essentially melancholic interpretation that simply cut too close to the bone, disclosing what they had not wanted to see about themselves. Stripping away the gloss that we tend to perhaps subconsciously apply to our environment can be challenging, as we are exposed to the fine detail of our own space more as it is, than as we'd like it. Frank was an unwelcome witness, and his book challenged the way Americans saw themselves, and depicted a social landscape underpinned by sadness.

In his introduction to *The Americans*, writer Jack Kerouac clearly senses a melancholic tone in the photographs, stating that Frank "*sucked a sad poem right out of America onto film*"^x, which Susan Sontag later described in her seminal text *On Photography* (1977) as "*a mournful vision of loss*".^{xi} One of Frank's images in *The Americans*, titled *Santa Fe, New Mexico* (Fig. 9), speaks fluently to this "mournful vision". It depicts several petrol bowsers of an otherwise unseen service station, with a view that spans across the road to the rural-like landscape beyond. The looming "SAVE" sign is broadcast against the sky, and is far too considered an element of the composition to suggest anything but an irony in Frank's vision.



Fig. 9: *Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1958*, Robert Frank, Silver Gelatin Photograph.

My photograph, titled *Beyond the Bowser* (Fig. 10), presents a lone petrol bowser at a recently defunct service station, which is flanked by an eclectic gathering of related paraphernalia, all poised at the edge of abandonment. As in Frank's *Santa Fe*, the service station itself is not present in the photograph; instead the view looks away to the countryside beyond, and is similarly filtered by man-made artifacts. The presence of this debris of modern civilisation has much in common with writer Jonathon Day's observations of Frank's *Santa Fe*, in that such objects are "*the detritus of civilization*".^{xii} Day submits that such objects create a disharmony with the environment, and may eventually take on a bizarre mystery as to their original purpose, similar to prehistoric monuments like Stonehenge.



Fig. 10: *Beyond the Bowser*, 2015, Jamie Holcombe, Digital Photographic Print, 100x150cms.

These photographs combine social documentary with an account of the artefacts of humankind, thus depicting the man-made environment within the natural environment. They are ultimately urban landscapes, affected by our civic intervention. (The term “civic” here is intended to imply a civilised collective, and importantly, one that might be equally accountable for its failures as for its successes). They also have no people in them, but they nonetheless primarily allude to human presence, and their mark, as in their structures and remnants that sit *on*, rather than *in* the landscape. Just as a traditional landscape often favours beautiful or natural scenery, an urban landscape is inherently comprised of human impact or intervention on the landscape and environment. Thus the urban landscape, by concentrating on cultural events and human-made artefacts, effectively becomes a virtual *civic* landscape.

The compulsion to “SAVE” in Frank’s *Santa Fe* is also present in my *Stop, Revive, Survive* (Fig. 11), which lifts its title from a sign crudely fastened to a desperate-looking tree just outside the mining township of Iron Knob in South Australia. The sign is recommending passing motorists take a break at the nearby roadhouse, but it

takes on additional meaning elucidated by the familiar catch phrase, which in this context becomes an all but defeated plea. The irony here stems from the background, which bears the panoramic scar of 135 years of mining, which reduced the height of Iron Knob by more than 150 metres.^{xiii} With the human-made decimation of the original landscape behind, the decrepit nature of the sign seems appropriate and reflective of our impact.



Fig. 11: *Stop, Revive, Survive*, 2015, Jamie Holcombe, Digital Photographic Print, 100x150cms.

Many mines, including Iron Knob, also produce tailings, which are the leftover materials once the ore has been extracted. Also known as mullock heaps, meaning “worthless material”, these piles of tailings appear to symbolise a natural life-death-life cycle that has been arrested. The cycle becomes a linear process, a life simply brought to a finite conclusion by an interminable death. Even when we put the pros and cons of the mining debate aside, there is something melancholic about a mountain of worthless, dead dirt. This seems especially so when it overlooks an inhabited environment, as is eloquently evidenced by Shaun O’Boyle’s photograph titled *Tailings Pile, Shamokin* (Fig. 12), of a coal-mining town in Pennsylvania USA.



Fig. 12: *Tailings Pile, Shamokin, PA, 2010, Shaun O'Boyle, Digital Photograph.*

The alteration of any urban environment, be it by natural disaster or “progress”, or by vast or relatively small changes, can have an emotional effect on its inhabitants. This is because we develop an emotional attachment to our surroundings, which, returning to the earlier discussion, transforms indifferent spaces into connected places. Urban landscapes become a repository for our social memories, and as Delores Hayden writes in *The Power of Place* (1997), “decades of ‘urban renewal’ and ‘redevelopment’ of a savage kind have taught many communities that when the urban landscape is battered, important collective memories are obliterated.”^{xiv}

Australian academic Glenn Albrecht has developed his own phraseology to create a language of comprehension for our emotional response to these effects on our surrounding environments. His key term for the emotions people experience when their environments are disrupted is *solastalgia*, which is based on the idea that we lose “solace” in our home environments and subsequently suffer anguish through the

“trauma, distress, grief and melancholia connected to environmental change”^{xv}

Albrecht’s terminology applies to the effects on our *own* environments, the places we call home, but could span well beyond our town or region, or even our country. In the case of climate change, for example, or even the Global Financial Crisis, home is the entire world; planet earth. Artist Laura Glusman has more wide-ranging motivations, which explore our insistence on ignoring the forces of nature. She writes, *“the concept of landscape is not an isolated portion of land that exists only to be contemplated, but [is] a being imprinted with the traces of culture, storms, commerce and climate change”^{xvi}*

My photograph titled *Mandurama Storm* (Fig. 13) is underpinned by a similar sentiment. It depicts an anonymous building behind a non-descript façade in the main street of a small town. It is of unknown purpose, but appears to be a former business. There are signs that it may now be inhabited as a residence, such as a garden-style gate over the original front door, and a television antenna protruding from atop the fibro structure behind. A single line still connects the building to the grid via the adjacent power pole, which frames the space above with its web of electrical cables. As a fierce storm approaches, a last shaft of sunlight casts an ominous shadow of a cross, which is mimicked by designs in the façade itself. But it is not of any ethereal origin, and is instead caused by another man-made power pole. This building, which suggests a battening down of the hatches, preparing for the inevitable storm, could be anywhere, and is everywhere in regional Australia.



Fig. 13: *Mandurama Storm*, 2015, Jamie Holcombe, Digital Photographic Print, 100x150cms.

Such images perhaps imply our relative insignificance to our environment, as if to remind us that man-made climate change will not destroy the planet, only our chances of survival on it. However some of us are not seemingly affected by Albrecht's solastalgia on a holistic or global level, thus what happens in places other than our own locality is distanced as *other* people's environments. This is reflected in the fact that, since Du Camp documented Egypt we have long been captivated by images representing ruin and decay. Naomi Stead writes that this intrigue might be due to the ambiguity of ruins, being part building and part nature, but also "*their unique value as physical manifestations of the destructive effects of time, and thus as representations of history itself*".^{xvii}

We live in a time of rapid change, which in turn manifests a new kind of ruin, one that is not always easy to recognise. This fascination with the ruin now bears witness to a relatively new phenomenon, commonly referred to as the *modern ruin*. Modern ruins can be in a process of decay for numerous reasons, sometimes because structures are built to a price point rather than built to last, sometimes because technology has rendered a purpose-built building obsolete, and sometimes because

economic pressures have forced closure. Arguably the most substantial collection of modern ruins can be found in the US city of Detroit. Indeed the city itself is commonly referred to as a modern ruin, and has become a major attraction for photographers. One of the most accomplished bodies of work depicting the city is *Detroit Disassembled* (2009) by Andrew Moore. His interior photographs, such as *Ballroom, Lee Plaza Hotel* (Fig. 14), are particularly powerful, and give the greatest demonstration of the opulent height from which the city has fallen.

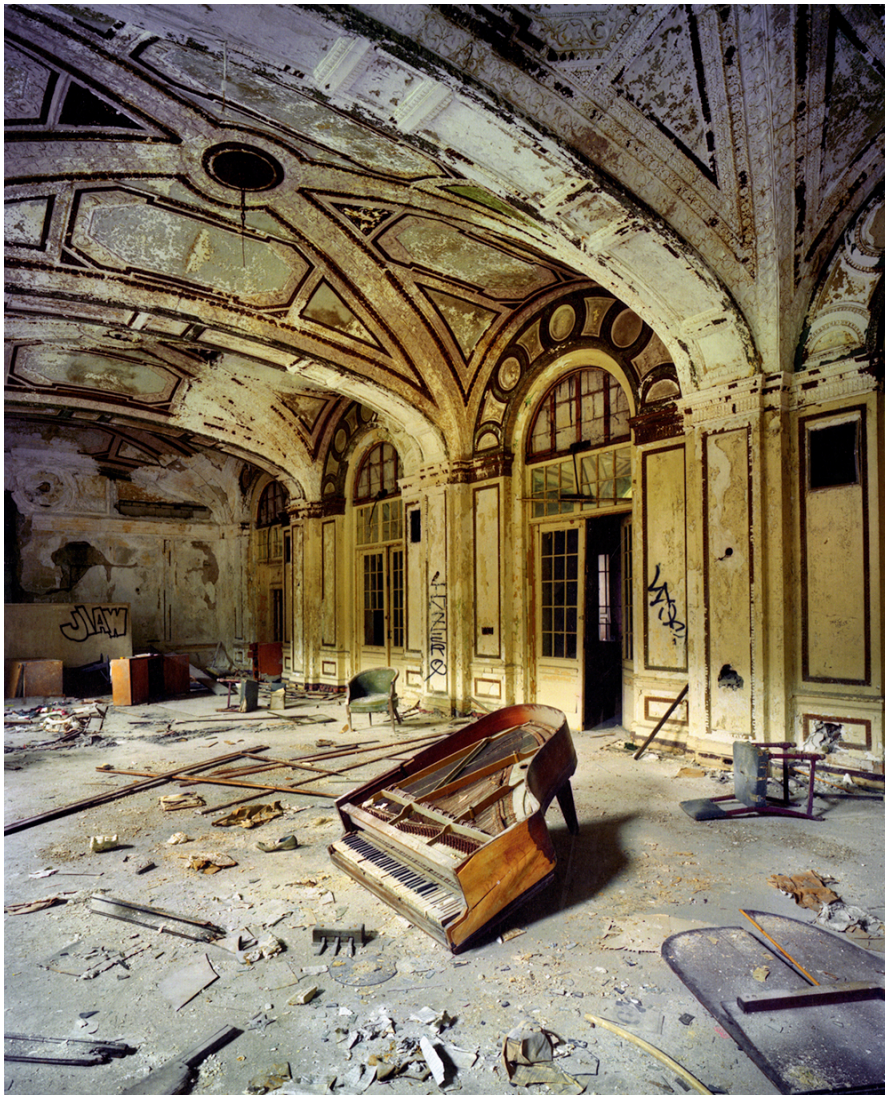


Fig. 14: *Ballroom, Lee Plaza Hotel*, 2009, Andrew Moore, Chromogenic Print, 150x120cms.

Other reasons for a location becoming a modern ruin can be due to cultural and technological changes, as well as economic shifts in the way we access or consume entertainment. The drive-in theatre for example, as seen in *Dubbo Drive In* (Fig. 15),

has become a highly visible modern ruin, which evidences a public display of a culture all but lost within a generation. Huge cacti, now rampant, surround the perimeter's high and equally impenetrable barbed fence. Originally planted to impede access to non-paying viewers, the cacti no longer have anyone to deter. But this image is not simply a historical document, because if we look to other places in the world, such as China, it becomes a glimpse of an equally sad future. Along with the booming urbanisation of China and its sprawling American-style orientation towards the automobile, the drive-in cinema has been resurrected, with the first opening in Beijing in 1998.^{xviii} Numerous others have since opened in China, after virtually the last of them have closed down in countries like Australia and America.



Fig. 15: *Dubbo Drive In*, 2015, Jamie Holcombe, Digital Photographic Print, 100x150cms.

Thus a photograph of a drive-in theatre in China is, arguably, potentially a document of a modern ruin in the making, one that is yet to happen. It seems that some cultural cycles are destined to repeat themselves, with some communities yet to encounter the lessons already learned by others, and to subsequently experience their own solastalgia.

Albrecht's terminology refers to the condition of feeling displaced in our own environment, of feeling sad and powerless in the face of emotionally and physically destructive forces. In essence, it gives a name to the problem, but perhaps more importantly, he also has a word for the solution: *soliphilia*, which he defines as, "*the love of and responsibility for a place, bioregion, planet and the unity of interrelated interests within it*".^{xix}

In the end, Albrecht's neologisms are only words, but they are intended to inspire action, appealing us to work together to protect and maintain our home environments, providing "*a universal motivation to achieve sustainability*".^{xx} My urban landscapes constitute my active contribution to this solution. They express my concern that we live too much in the shadow of fear and helplessness, needing to reclaim our relinquished responsibility for our own condition. Sometimes it takes a moment of melancholy to bring this to the fore, and to realise we are heading towards a demise of our own making. This is metaphorically depicted in *Coffin Bay* (Fig. 16), which suggests that the highway of denial of our ancient rhythms, which carves its way through nature's own warnings, careers relentlessly towards the inevitable edge. But it is ultimately a positive experience, which can help bring balance to a disharmonious world.



Fig. 16: *Coffin Bay*, 2015, Jamie Holcombe, Digital Photographic Print, 100x150cms.

ⁱ Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (USA: Routledge, 2009). p. 305.

ⁱⁱ Peter Turner, *History of Photography* (London: Bison Books, 1987). p. 40.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sarah Greenough, *The Art of Fixing a Shadow: 150 Years of Photography* (USA: Bulfinch Press, 1989). p. 132.

^{iv} Turner, *History of Photography*. p. 39.

^v Jonathon Jones, "The 6.5m Canyon: The Most Expensive Photograph Ever," *The Guardian*, 11th December 2014.

^{vi} Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Great Britain: Fontana, 1984). p. 27.

^{vii} Alex Neil and Aron Ridley, *Arguing About Art: Contemporary Philosophical Debates* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

^{viii} Jerry Mason, William L. Broacker, and Michael Mason, *International Centre of Photography Encyclopedia of Photography*, 1 ed. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1984).

^{ix} *Ibid.* p. 210.

^x Robert Frank, *The Americans*, Originally published in 1958, 4th Scalo ed. (Switzerland: Scalo, 2000). p. 9.

^{xi} Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Great Britain: Penguin, 1979). p. 67.

^{xii} Jonathan Day, *Robert Frank's 'the Americans': The Art of Documentary Photography* (Chicago USA: Intellect, 2011). p. 104.

^{xiii} "Iron Knob History," Government of South Australia, <http://www.oca.sa.gov.au/?q=IronKnob>.

^{xiv} Delores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (USA: MIT Press, 1997). p. 9.

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- ^{xv} Glenn Albrecht to Healthearth, 2009, <http://healthearth.blogspot.com.au/search/label/Solastalgia>.
(Accessed 18/11/2014)
- ^{xvi} Rosa Olivares, "Exit: Disasters," *Exit: Image & Culture*, no. 50 (2013). p. 54.
- ^{xvii} Naomi Stead, "The Value of Ruins: Allegories of Destruction in Benjamin and Speer," *Form/Work: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Built Environment*, no. 6 (2003). p. 52.
- ^{xviii} Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China's Urban Revolution* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010). p. 234.
- ^{xix} Glenn Albrecht to Healthearth, 2009, <http://healthearth.blogspot.com.au/search/label/soliphilia>.
(Accessed 18/11/2014)
- ^{xx} *Ibid.*



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LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

**Walking as bodily readying for engagement with natural
Environments**

Dr Peter Simmons

Abstract

Trends to an increase in mediated experiences of nature will create greater distance between humans and nature. This is likely to diminish human commitment to protect natural environments, at a time when we should be improving protection.

Researchers increasingly emphasise the importance of finding new ways of connecting with natural environments that may lead to better human stewardship and protection behaviors. This paper explores underresearched relationships between walking in natural environments and enhanced affiliation with and commitment to protect natural environments. The paper draws on analyses from several disciplines to speculate about this relationship. Among accounts of many types of walking, the interactions between walking, walker and environment are most directly described by Wunderlich's (2008) concept of 'discursive' walking, and Lee and Ingold's (2006) 'embodied experience'. These concepts focus on the bodily experience of walking, where walker consciously and unconsciously engages and interacts with discernible and indiscernible features of the places through which they walk. The interaction is much more than contemplation led by the eyes. Multiple senses are alert, and the feet play an important sensory role. Walking is described as a co-creation, a discourse between internal bodily rhythms and the rhythms and features of place. The paper suggests that in some circumstances walking may help people develop affinity with place, and that in some circumstances people will be acted on through walking and readied for personal change, which may be an enhanced engagement with natural environments more generally. The issues are sufficiently important, and the analysis sufficiently positive, to warrant further exploration of links between walking and connection with nature.

Introduction

In a keynote presentation at the Land Dialogues conference in April 2015, the Senior Curator of People and the Environment at the National Museum of Australia said that his overarching aim for the museum is to advance people's sense of oneness with the environment (Oakman, 2016). Cooke et al (2016) describe a similar holism associated with caring for the environment. This holistic connection requires a breakdown of divisions, boundaries and barriers between humans and nature, and draws attention to the role of the body in our practices and thinking (Cooke, West and Boonstra, 2016).

'This embodied connection positions people as tangible inhabitants of a biosphere that they are actively co-producing as part of a multi-species assemblage' (Cooke et al., 2016, 3).

If our world is to remain habitable it needs larger numbers of humans to place the protection of the environment as a higher priority in their voting and everyday behaviours. Climate change science and social marketing techniques have raised awareness of environmental problems, but resulting policy and behaviour changes often lack the scale and commitment required (Kahan, 2013). Further, focus on upscaling pro-environmental behavior has often relied on mental connections and engagement (mind-shift) that may in fact perpetuate attitudinal separation of human and ecological, where it is more important that they be reconnected (Cooke et al, 2016). It has been suggested that human knowledge and capacity to impact nature has to date mostly given rise to unsustainable practices of impact, and that we should consider new ways of connecting and knowing about nature if we are to 'learn and teach about sustainability' (Cato & Myers, 2011, 56). But as activists and authorities often struggle to engage populations with protection of the environment in sustained ways, human activity is increasingly urban and estranged from natural environments (Tyler, 2015).

This paper examines the potential for one way of knowing about the natural environment that is social and bodily and available to most humans, walking. In

particular, this paper examines the notion that walking in natural environments can influence a walker's relationship with natural environments. It considers the bodily and other processes that may be involved in such a change, and the nature of the relationship with environment.

We need mental engagement with environment that delivers strategy and problem-solving and global perspective, but sole focus on the mental and the global is not enough. The desire to protect environments may come more readily with close experience and attachment. Ingold (2000) said 'the local is not a more limited or narrowly focused apprehension than the global, it is one that rests on an altogether different *mode* of apprehension – one based on an active, perceptual engagement with components of the dwelt-in world, in the practical business of life, rather than on the detached, disinterested observation of a world apart' (Ingold, 2000, 40). Ingold goes on to say that the global perspective is indifferent to place and context, while the local experiential perspective is deeply engaged.

It is argued here that walking as bodily experience may enhance our engagement with land, locale and nature in ways that lead to a greater desire to protect. In particular it explores possible links between bodily experiences of walking and social / attitudinal connection with or sense of attachment to the environment. I'm hoping not to be overly positivist in hypothesising about what arises from walking, and distance hiking in particular, but I suggest that under some circumstances the influence may be profound, and that this deserves further exploration. A strong case can be made for encouraging children to directly and physically experience natural environments. This paper is intended for all, but is written in the main with adults in mind.

The first section discusses concepts of walking, and poses questions about what occurs unconsciously and bodily through walking to connect us – socially and affectively - with the places in which we walk, and the notion that walking may enhance readiness for what can be called stewardship of place (Cato & Myers, 2011). The next section questions the influence of mediated experiences of nature,

and focuses more directly on walking as an unmediated, physical experience of environment. It presents Wunderlich's (2008) account of walking and urban places, and accounts of walking as multisensory interaction of internal and spatial rhythms. It then presents 6 types of walking, focusing on two types, Wunderlich's (2008) discursive walking, and Lee and Ingold's (2006, 72) 'embodied experience', as accounts for enhanced familiarity with and adaptation to the natural while walking.

Beyond destination - (Re)discovering walking

For most people, walking is an everyday act done largely unconsciously and very much taken for granted. Some take an 'aristocratic stroll' (Solnit, 2001, 153) others have no choice but to endure a pedestrian labour. Walking is a means of transport and movement, a way to pass time, a mode of exercise, and for many a means to emotional calming or psychological escape. Walking is often linked to the environment and sustainability because it is a sustainable alternative to energy intensive forms of transport (Afsar et al, 2015), however there is little research connecting walking with environmentalism, or walking with acquiring greater commitment to protecting natural environments. Artists, philosophers, and researchers from anthropology, sociology, civic planning, public health, exercise and natural sciences have carefully examined different dimensions, features, frequencies and experiences of walking. This section reviews some of the ways that writers and researchers have discussed walking.

Walking is generally considered very positively for its benefits to mental and physical health and there has been considerable study of the features of urban environments such as safety, aesthetics and access that encourage and deter people from walking (Makki et al, 2012). Destination type, distance, population density and route variables such as pavement length and block size have been found to predict levels of urban walking (Lee & Moudon, 2006). Urban designers have tended to focus on utilitarian concerns associated with walking such as size, effort required, access, safety and directness of path. There has been much less attention given to varying the experience of walking, or helping people to engage, encounter and enjoy place (Wunderlich, 2008, 137). Some research suggests mental

health benefits of walking are pronounced in green spaces (Barton, Hine & Pretty, 2009) however there is little research on the impact of repeated exposure to the natural environment (Brown et al, 2014).

Societies use and view walking differently at different times. Historical walks, art walks and various tours today use walking to enable closer engagement with a particular aspect of culture. Some walking has been conceptualised as performance, a deliberate means to exploring self and using space/place to stimulate dialogue.

'Walking offers the individual-who-walks the opportunity to exercise and develop a number of skills, integrating the mind, the body and physical space (environment) into a dynamic unit ... Rather than seeing walking as a spatial practice, I see it as a subjective, environmental and unfolding practice or as a performance of self in spatio-temporal terms' (Sotelo, 2010, 61).

Sotelo (2010) organized a walk for a day where Ecuadoran Indigenous peoples in the past had been forced to be slaves, as a way of starting cross cultural dialogue. The unconscious was valued and acknowledged, and cultural and historic insights were sought. For this walking the destination was irrelevant compared to the act of the journey.

People in many western countries are finding new purposes and reasons for walking. For example the *Girltrek* movement in the United States is using walking as a focus to bring women together for a range of individual and collective benefits. Located in 17 states, *Girltrek* is aiming for a million members:

'It's more than a walk! It's a health revival. A stress protest. A community resurrection. An opportunity to meet a new friend, work up a sweat, and have someone cheer you on. Come out to a trek near you!' (<http://www.girltrek.org/>).

Since the 1980s there has been a large increase in the number of people, mostly from western countries, who choose a long and often arduous pilgrim walk known as

the *Camino* to the city of Santiago in Spain. Hundreds of thousands walk hundreds of kilometres annually for a range of religious and cultural reasons (Pilgrim's Office, 2016), although for many the reason is not religious at all (Egan 2010). In 'Walking back to happiness', Egan (2010) explains the Camino as multisensory, experiential, bodily, intrapersonal, and spiritual, but also profoundly shared and social. Largely because of its trials, the Camino walk is understood as an experience leading to insight and personal transformation. Most would agree that 'the goal is the way itself', not reaching Santiago. According to Egan: 'In the past, people found God on the route: these days they are more likely to find nature or themselves' (2010, 115). After hiking more than 3200 kilometres on the Appalachian Trail in the USA Bahnson (2015) wrote a thesis about personal learning and change among hikers. He reported that long distance hikers commonly experienced enhanced feelings of altruism, minimalism, patriotism and environmentalism. More research is needed to assess feelings and changes that endure, and the features of nature hiking experiences – the parsimony of rucksack life, immersion in less and untamed environments, camaraderie or solitude, removal from the everyday, walking - that may be most influential.

Walking as physical, unmediated experience of the environment

It is often lamented that experience of the natural world in childhood and beyond has been diminished in modern times. Living in concrete cityscapes, our experiences of natural environments are increasingly mediated in various ways. Cato and Meyers (2010) regret that even environmental science curriculum relies overly on understanding through mediated and other transmission of information and thinking, underutilising understanding and 'knowledge as a process acquired through practice (experiential learning)' (52). They ask '...how might knowledge conveyed through an abstract system of writing differ from knowledge derived through a community of song, as is the case with the Aboriginal songlines?' (53). They suggest that knowledge of the world acquired through writing may 'have impaired our ability to directly experience it, and hence to feel an affinity which may be the precursor to a sustainable stewardship approach' (Cato & Myers, 2011). Further, the quality of the language we use has been diminished as a means to describing the natural

environment in detail. Tyler (2015) speculates that as we become less familiar with natural environments we lose the need for precise vocabulary to describe and explain complex ecosystems. When we use general terms such as 'greenfield site' and even 'countryside', the natural becomes estranged, more to be feared or controlled than protected. 'The more you simplify and homogenise the system the more susceptible to attack it becomes' (Tyler, 2015, 4). Experiences of nature are increasingly mediated by language, and our language is becoming less oriented to dealing with the complexity of environment.

'Walking connects us to earth; walking is a persistent characteristic of the human' (Jacks, 2002, 7). Across many generations walking has helped to connect humans with nature, but how might this work? What occurs to, for, and within us in relation to our surrounds when we walk? We know that walking is a practical and physical activity in which heart rate quickens, body temperature rises and other bodily changes occur (Sotelo, 2010). Yet there remain important and fundamental gaps concerning what occurs in and from the act of walking in relation to where we walk. For example, attempts at training navigation and orientation skills in laboratories using virtual reality techniques show that when people walk physically in the world they orient to their walking environment in ways that are superior to virtual training, in bodily and sensory ways that they are not aware of, and are difficult to replicate (Ruddle 2013). There is a gap between the skill acquired or knowledge that occurs when we walk, and the learning that can be simulated with virtual training technology. This gap is perhaps closely related to the concept focus of this paper.

Researchers who have explored bodily connection with place or environment have described various concepts and different levels of consciousness and deliberation in perception of, or interaction with, environment. The slow pace of walking or strolling has been associated with greater opportunity to contemplate and focus on the detail of countryside and nature, an experience which is often less available in modern times of urban living and vehicular transport (Lee and Ingold, 2006). Think for a moment about a tree flashing past as seen through a car window. Now consider a tree growing ever taller and vivid as it is approached on foot, a complex of colour,

shade and branches viewed first from one side, then merging with an evolving view, and yet another if one turns back to regard the tree just passed.

But this connection with place is more than deliberate contemplation of what we see, walking itself helps us to experience and know most directly the environment we are in. Step after step we push our feet out ahead, necessitating 'contact with the ground and, often, a state of being attuned to the environment' (Lee and Ingold, 2006, 68). We tend not to associate the foot with expression and perception, but non-western societies commonly refer to 'footfall as knowledge', an idea that knowledge comes not just when walking, but through the act of walking, 'it is itself the means of knowing' (Macfarlane, 2012, 27). Cato and Myers (2011) refer to slow, reciprocal absorption of body and environment, with perceptions as part of experience 'suggesting active engagement, creation and recreation (emergence) of self in relation with others (objects and people) and our environment (our 'situated' and 'social' learning)' (55). They give examples of a rural English town encouraging slow meditative walk, or walking with eyes closed to deepen community bonds and 'learn a new reality in relationship with nature', and Indigenous Australian performative interpretation of surrounds through songs and symbols (63). There is a body of research related to storing of knowledge in societies without contact with writing, such as the role Aboriginal songlines have played in aiding memory of hundreds of details about plants. Nungarrayi (in Kelly, 2015) explains walking and singing through country as a mnemonic, '.. the country tells you and you tell the country. Every rock and undulation and your position in space and time creates your part in the story and your connection with the Dreaming' (in Kelly, 2015, xv). These links between the physical experience of walking and place and enduring connection or 'knowledge' are similar to the central concepts of interest to this paper.

Walking is an experience that stimulates multiple senses, as we walk we hear the sound of birds or wind, smell the damp in a forest, see wide vistas and picturesque hills, touch the cool air, and even taste fruits and nuts along our way. The senses interact and complement (Rodaway, 2002) but the inter-relationship of the senses is not well understood. Wunderlich (2008) examines various dimensions of the sense

of touch involved in walking – reaching, general sense of being, moving, imagined - and collects associations and ideas that various scholars have used to help articulate walking as experience. She connects the bodily with the social in several ways. She says that constantly touching the ground we participate in our spatial environment in a way that generates feelings of engagement and affinity, and refers to Rodaway's (1994) belonging. As we move we generate senses of perspective on distance and size and direction. We emote as we walk, and develop attachments to place and associations with emotions:

'...perception through walking nurtures senses of place. Senses of place emerge and are sustained by bodily sensual and socially meaningful experiences originating from the perception of the environment whilst in motion... Through exercising global and reach-touch, we enhance our haptic relationship to place, and enrich this perception with multiple other sensual impressions... Sensual interaction and social impressions generated by the experience of walking nurture emotional judgement and thought for places.' (Wunderlich, 2008, 130).

Many of Wunderlich's city-focused assertions are pertinent to the discussion of more natural environments in this paper because her central concern is for understanding connections and interactions between walker, walking and space or place. The connection between walker and environment is even more direct in the countryside than in urban areas (Lee and Ingold, 2006). Footfall in the countryside leaves a print or mark or some other dislocation that is a record of passing, and on paths has an accretive effect that marks the way for others in the future. The sense of place referred to by Wunderlich (2008) is an arising or becoming or oneness that occurs through the experience of walking. The next section examines two different approaches to categorizing walking articulated by urban planner Wunderlich (2008) and ethnographers Lee and Ingold (2006). Each approach distinguishes 3 categories, and each identifies one category that emphasises the importance of unconscious interaction (synchronization, co-production) between body and place, and is suggestive of Egan's (2010) notion of the body and mind being readied or acted on by the experience of walking.

Six types of walking

Walking is not always the same, so how should the experience of walking be dimensionalised? Egan (2010) referred to Camino pilgrims being acted on through walking and readied for religion or some other personal change. Cato and Myers (2010) emphasised strategies for unmediated connection with place. This section considers different types of walking and interaction with the environment, with a special interest in walking that is likely to enhance affinity with and respect for natural environments. Wunderlich (2008) distinguishes three types of walking, 'purposive', 'conceptual', and the main focus for this paper on walking and affinity with place, 'discursive walking'. Lee and Ingold (2006) described three modes of interaction with the environment they gleaned from walkers – 'looking outward' 'reflecting inward', and 'embodied experience'.

We begin with Lee and Ingold (2006). They describe 'looking around' walking in contrast to driving, where people are separated from the environment by a vehicle, and focused on the road ahead. At slow walking speeds people perceive more detail in their surrounds and turn in all directions to enjoy a wider vista. This outward focus is contrasted with an inward focus where walking is used as 'time for thinking', about anything, from the spiritual to practical problem solving to idea generation or 'emotional release' (71). They describe a third mode as 'embodied experience', connecting the body with place (72-73) and give two examples. The first example of embodied walking emphasises the body perceiving - the wind, the scents, sounds and ground underfoot. For this walker the eyes are secondary to feet, ears and skin in terms of perceiving the environment. They describe the 'co-production of a walking experience between environment and person, both of which are in flux' (72). 'The boundaries between the body and the environment are blurred by the movements of both' (72). The second example of embodied walking illustrates the importance of place, differentiating the structured constraints on walking and movement that occur inside a building, from the freedom of movement and walking outside, and 'a feeling of moving at an appropriate pace for the environment' (73). Further, the weather and other conditions act on the body to stimulate excitement, pleasure, fear or other

states. One of these three modes is likely to dominate but they can occur simultaneously or separately in the course of a single walk.

'Purposive' walking is characterised by passing from A to B (Wunderlich, 2008). With a purpose in reaching a destination people tend to maintain a steady and rapid pace through their longing to arrive. People often disengage from the bodily automaticity of the walking act by listening to music or talking on a phone. 'Conceptual' walking is thoughtful and reflective. It intends interpretation and information seeking, in the manner of thinking beforehand and planning to become acquainted with a place. Conceptual walking might be done by an urban planner, artist or landscaper with a view to gleaning insight, uncovering what often goes unnoticed (Wunderlich, 2008). Walking is more 'discursive' when 'the journey is *more* important than the destination' (Wunderlich, 2008, 132). Discursive walking is characterised by participation through half-conscious exploration, sensorial experience and engagement;

'It is discursive because its pace and rhythm are synchronized with the walker's own internal bodily rhythms (biological and psychological) whilst experiencing and swinging along with the place's own moving rhythms, and being sensitive to external paces and temporalities ...' (Wunderlich, 2008, 132).

The meeting and alignment of personal and spatial rhythms is central to the concept of discursive walking. Walkers bring their own internal rhythms which interact voluntarily or necessarily with the institutional and material rhythms of places (Edensor, 2010). According to Wunderlich (2008) people not only adjust the speed towards alignment with the speed of those walking around them, but also to 'social, spatial or natural character' and rhythms of place (134). Purposive walking is more habitual and disengaged, while conceptual walking is more consciously engaged with place. This paper is more concerned with bodily/place affinity arising from discursive walking, what occurs less consciously when we walk in a place, especially a non-urban place, and the idea that people adapt to some extent to the place through which they walk.

There are many ways to dimensionalise walking. This section has presented 6 types from two sources, and found two that are similar. They suggest both conscious and unconscious connection and co-creation arising from walker and place. The destination is not important. The experience is bodily and multisensory, the body acts and is acted upon through the journey.

Conclusion

The paper has drawn from analyses of walking across several disciplines to articulate an original account of walking as a multisensory experience of immediate locale, and a coproduction between body and place. The role of the foot as sensor and perceiver has been emphasised, but so too have sensory interactions that occur unconsciously, and possibly beyond our comprehension, to date without category or label.

The context for this paper is a world where many are concerned that we need much greater commitment by humans to protecting the natural environment, and that protection may be enhanced by holistic sense of connection. This paper has explored the idea that a more holistic connection to the natural environment may be influenced by the experience of walking. The paper has associated notions of holistic attachment to ecologies and natural environments with physical, bodily experiences, as distinct from mediated experiences of nature through screen and word images. Not everyone can walk, but most are able. The paper makes no claims to aiding widespread uptake of walking, but provides a conceptual analysis suggesting that such a goal is worthwhile.

The interactions that can occur between walking, walker and environment are best captured by Wunderlich's (2008) concept of discursive walking, and Lee and Ingold's (2006) 'embodied experience'. These concepts focus on the body experience of walking, where walker engages and interacts with discernible and indiscernible features of the places through which we walk. It's much more than contemplation led

by the eyes, multiple senses are alert, and the feet play an important sensory role. Walking is described as a co-creation, a discourse between internal bodily rhythms (Wunderlich, 2008) and the rhythms of place.

The focus of this paper has been quite distinctly western, but significantly enriched by the non-western notions of the foot as sensor and perceiver, and an introduction to Aboriginal songlines. The Aboriginal experience of songlines, walking and singing through country, co-creating memories of images and actions (not words), and a detailed knowledge of the environment required for survival, is conceptually very similar to the focus of this paper. As is so often is the case, the old Aboriginal ways offer a profound and elegant insight into the needs of the day. Do people find through walking what is needed in their lives? These notions of connection and meaning may defy experimental methods but need to be explored.

Walking is necessarily local to the physical act. This paper suggests that the slow pace of walking can facilitate engagement, absorption, an absent-minded immersion in the natural environment. Walking on its own does not automatically stimulate any particular response to the locale. But as Egan (2010) suggests, in some circumstances and perhaps at some points in life, the experience of walking opens people to being acted upon, and this may be by the places in which we walk.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Communicating Fire: working with land and designing for country.

Dr Jacqueline Gothe

I acknowledge the Wiradjuri people as the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which this paper was first presented at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga NSW Australia on 14 April 2016. I pay my respect to their Elders both past and present and to all Elders past and present that I have worked with since 1995. I express my gratitude for the experiences I have had during my participation in Indigenous led projects in Cobar, Cape York, Fregon in South Australia and Northern NSW as a participant designer and design researcher. In particular I acknowledge Dr Tommy George Senior KukuThaypan Elder from Cape York, and Victor Steffensen with whom I have worked with since 2004, the Firesticks network and my collaboration with Oliver Costello and Jason De Santolo.

Working in dialogue with land as a visual communication designer and researcher in contemporary Australia is a project of recognition. A recognition of the lived experiences, culture and knowledge of generations of Aboriginal people and the recognition that representation of landscape is a collective act of will in which practices of collaboration and co-creation are central to the materialisation of transcultural and transdisciplinary knowledges. My research through information and communication design projects is concerned with the maintenance of the health of the land, the well being of the people and the process of representing an Indigenous-led initiative. The discussion in this paper of the theoretical and the designerly perspectives alongside the shared Indigenous understanding reveals new and inventive ways to rethink the role of the designer in a contemporary context. I have come to know that in these acts of designerly transrepresentation, matters of relationship, responsibility, respect and recognition are disclosed in the decisions and choices of the designer.

A transdisciplinary dialogue between designer and landscape is determined by three interconnected elements: firstly, the affective dimension of the designer; secondly, the urge to effect change in the social context; and thirdly, the experience of place and the recognition of place as an active agent in the dialogue. Central to any discussion of the transdisciplinary are the acknowledgement of the affective

dimension of the individual (Kagan 2011; Nicolescu 2008; Nicolescu et al 1994) and the influence of the affective or emotional dimensions of the individual designer in the establishment of position and values. The affect of sharing experiences and knowledge with Elders and community members in Indigenous-led projects in land management contexts heightens the capacity for the designer to effect change in attitudes and actions, bringing into visibility the agency of the designer as advocate and participant rather than service provider. Finally, most importantly, the recognition of the shared experience with people on country provides an opening to the third element – the experience of place and the recognition of place as an active agent in the dialogue.

Dialogue is a social practice concerned with relational understanding through and across individual, social, disciplinary, material and cultural perspectives (Bohm 1996). In this paper I describe a designerly perspective on working with land and designing for country through the dynamic experiences of designing a video and poster for the Indigenous-led network Firesticks. My description of the designerly process of representation and communication in the making of these two communication designs is informed by a methodological critical reflexivity drawing on anecdotalisation (Michael 2012), transdisciplinarity (Gothe 2016; Nicolescu 2008; Kagan 2011), ecofeminism (Boehnert 2012; Spretnak 1993, 1997, 1999) and the project of decolonisation (Smith 1998), alongside literature and practitioner awareness of designerly knowledge (Cross 2007), participatory design, co-creation and collaboration (Sanders & Stappers 2014; Poggenpohl & Sato 2009; Bammer 2008).

As a designer working in Indigenous-led information and communication design practice I find myself continually challenged by the taken-for-granted actions that constitute design practice. These include the assumption that the designer directs the process, understands what the outcome should be and determines when it will be complete. This paper investigates how the imaginings of design, when constructed in dialogue with land or place and, more specifically, country in an

Indigenous led project, provide a reframing of the approach of contemporary designers to the processes of meaning making and visual structuring. Key to the investigation in this research are my experiences in Indigenous-led projects in which the qualities of listening and visual communication design practice become inescapably linked. Graphic designer Sheila de Bretteville (1998) describes a consciousness and a commitment to listening that she understands as an openness through listening, rather than antagonism and argument. Fiumara (1990) describes listening as nascent or an emerging skill and points to listening as the antithesis of the dominant culture of saying and expression. For a visual communication designer, although engaged in the production of a visual expression, a specific quality of listening is required. I describe this quality of listening as *visual hearing*. This listening materialises as a visual interpretation of the information or knowledge that is co-created. This act of visual hearing is a performative and relational process translated into a transcultural image as a transrepresentation. The process and the materialising mediation disclose the possibility of emergence alongside unintended and unforeseen erasure. A loss of fidelity alongside invention inheres in the process as a quality of the mediated representation that is connected to what is represented yet separate - simultaneously similar and different.



Figure 1. Firesticks Poster. Communicating Fire: Building Relationships and Creating Change, 2011. (digital print, 841 x 1189mm).

Research Approach – Critical reflexivity and anecdotalisation

Reflection and reflexivity are qualitative research approaches. In my research the specificity and uniqueness of experience are examined with ‘an openness on the part of the researcher in sharing this experience of practice and a recognition of plurality, openness, complexity and uncertainty as a necessity’ (Hannula 2009, pp.4-6). Critical reflexivity (Malpass 2014; Ledwith & Springett 2010; Bolton 2009; Steier 1991) is a reflective practice simultaneously turned inwards, towards self as the recognition of the construction of identity, and outwards, as a keen critical interrogation of the process and outcome. In order to focus the analysis in this paper through a strategy of critical reflexivity I turn to description and reflections of experience and the anecdote (Michael 2014). Michael describes the anecdote or ‘anecdotalising’ as bringing together ‘what might once have seemed distant and disconnected: past episodes that are marginal and trivial illuminate contemporary moments of critical reflection and reorientation’ (Michael 2012, p.33)

Working in contexts of complexity - the designer in cross cultural and interdisciplinary contexts

Place | country

In my practice the complex of designerly translation and interpretation characteristic of the interstitial space between design, science in natural resource management contexts and Indigenous perspectives is focused through the recognition of the importance and significance of land in Indigenous culture.

No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland... A different tradition leaves us tongueless and earless towards this world of meaning and significance.

(W.E.H. Stanner 1968)

For Aboriginal people connection to place and country is an issue of health and well being not only for the land but also for the people. The recognition of this connection to land not only brings responsibility for the land but also acknowledges that the

country needs the movement and sound of the stories, the songs, the dances and the life of people in an interconnection that recognises the agency of place.

For a non-Indigenous visual designer, opening to the Indigenous perspective on the primacy of place is challenging. My awakening to the *yet to be disclosed* significance of place contributes to my comprehension of the power of the agency of place. In opening to the power of place my commitment to attention, listening and advocacy is central. Not only am I *tongueless* and *earless*, I am also sightless in the face of the power of the specificity, complexity, diversity and sustainability of the interconnection between the cultural practices of Indigenous people and their homelands for thousands of years (Pascoe 2014; Gammage 2011).

The writing of philosopher Edward S. Casey (1997, 2002, 2008) reflects the resurgence of interest in place in Western philosophy in the late twentieth century and provides a bridge between my understandings of Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives on place. Casey claims that place is much more than locator; rather, 'place belongs to the very concept of existence' (Casey 1993, p.15). Place, according to Casey, is somewhere. It is a particular part of space that also holds what Casey refers to as the return to place, a philosophic conception of the primacy of place. Place is brought into being through a physical and perceptive apprehension and contains the functional, the visual and the symbolic (Scazzosi 2011). The European Landscape Convention (2000) refers to the physical and material value of landscape and highlights the importance of perceptual engagement, the visual and perceptive quality, cultural significance and the role of landscape in the formation of local cultures and identity. Place quality is considered to be the expression of the specificity of places, a factor in the identity of populations and essential to individual and social well being (including in the physiological, the psychological and the intellectual senses). A cultural dimension is attributed to the entire territory, which includes the social perception that people have of their living

places and historical and cultural perceptions. An important connection is made in the Convention between the necessity for the maintenance of these characteristics and individual and social enrichment.

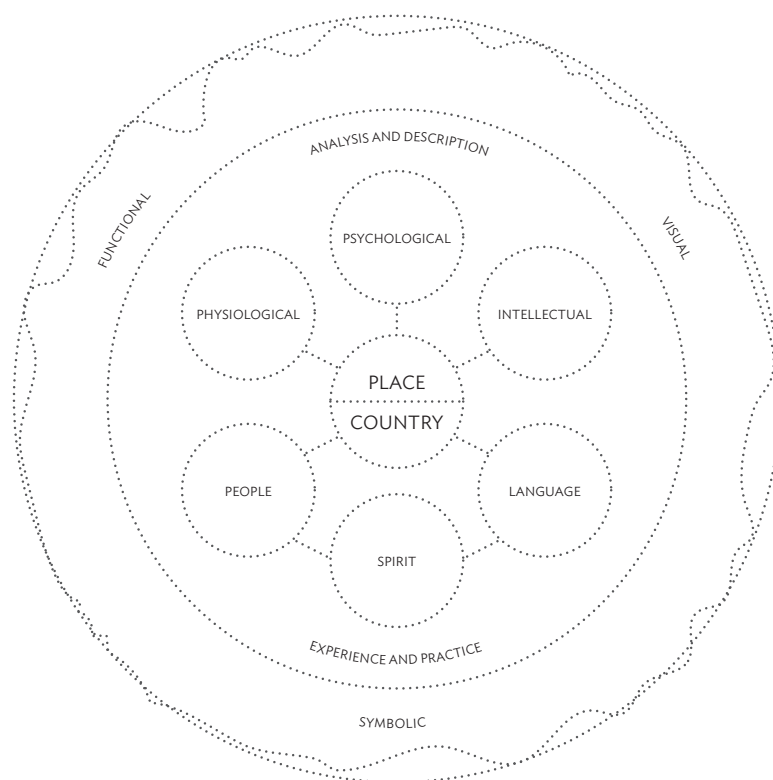


Figure 2. place | country.

I use the typographic glyph placelcountry in my discussion as a means of recognising the First Australians' connection to place and their use of the term 'country' to denote connections between people, language and spirit, alongside a western perspective on place and landscape.

thinking country speaking

I am standing in the Boree Valley in 1980 in Yengo National Park, New South Wales, with a baby on my hip. I am watching a bulldozer dig a large hole in the floor of the valley for a dam. I can hear a scream. Is it my scream? I cannot hear it out loud but it is in my mind. I am confused. This silent scream heard in my head as my own is confused with the noise of the machine and the need of the baby. I turn to the men around me. Speaking over the noise of the bulldozer and the screaming in my mind I ask whether it is really necessary to dig up the floor of the valley? They reply with certainty. It is a good thing. We will have water.

Is this experience a first sign of awakening to country speaking?

Since that moment, my recognition of the environment, and more specifically of place or country as participant, with agency, has become strong. From an Indigenous perspective the connection between place and people is very clear and I am learning about the power of place through sharing in Indigenous-led projects. My learning is supported by an emerging recognition of this perspective in non-Indigenous Australia (Rose & et al 2002; Laudine, 2009; Suchet-Pearson et al 2011; Suchet 2002; Gammage 2011). Christopher Tilley, a phenomenological archaeologist working in Britain, also acknowledges the potential of a dialogic relation between person and place:

Experiencing the landscape allows insights to be gained through the subject's immersion in that landscape. This is to claim that landscapes have agency in relation to persons. They have a profound effect on our thoughts and interpretations because of the manner in which they are perceived and sensed through our carnal bodies ... This is to accept that there is a dialogic relationship between person and landscape. (Tilley 2008, p.271)

This understanding is significant for me as a designer in the co-creation of a transformed perspective on the representation of the environment. This sense of

connection between place and self has been heightened through experiences on country with Traditional Owners.

One is water. One is the tree. A group of people is a people mob. A group of trees is a tree mob. There is real kinship here and deep identification. Here Bob is talking about a primary conception of unity that is not familiar in non-Indigenous Australia. It might be said that it indicates that all things are primarily conceived of in terms of their unity (whilst difference is fully acknowledged it is not emphasised) and that this unitary association is understood to be very deep so that when it is successfully internalised then the person's self-image incorporates a view of country as intimately linked with self.

(Laudine 2009, p.158, interpreting Bob Randall)

My perspective on the relationships between place and people is also informed by a Western understanding of landscape as a complex dynamic artefact (Janz 2005; Scazzozzi 2011, p.10). Landscape is understood to hold cultural meaning that is produced by the intersection of the experience of people and the knowledge of place in place. However, the Indigenous view describes connectedness that does not position the landscape outside self as artefact, but resonates with the emergence of an understanding of connection between place and self. I have come to call this conjunction of identity - emplacement. Emplacement provides a ground for the designer to make decisions and take action. Central to this is the notion of the 'ecological self' informed by the deep ecology movement and eco psychology: [T]he ecological ego matures towards a sense of ethical responsibility toward the planet that is vividly experienced as our ethical responsibility to other people.

(Spretnak 1997 p.76, quoting Roszak 1992, p.321)

To be emplaced as a designer initiates an orientation towards place and requires two things. Firstly, it requires an understanding of the relational qualities of place as the intersecting ecologies of the social, the biophysical and the artificial, understood as people, knowledge and experience. Secondly, it requires the recognition of place as

an active participant with agency. These perceptions for the designer allow a turning away from design and the designed object as central to the designer's appreciation of their role. Instead, the focus becomes an expanded framing of responsibility for the designer, where place, as an entity, requires attention, listening, advocacy and representation (Figure 3). This relational understanding of emplacement or ecological embeddedness produces a:

profound reorientation of self in relation to the environment and ecological identity emerges from a process of learning to perceive connections and relations with natural processes.

(Boehnert 2012, p.124)

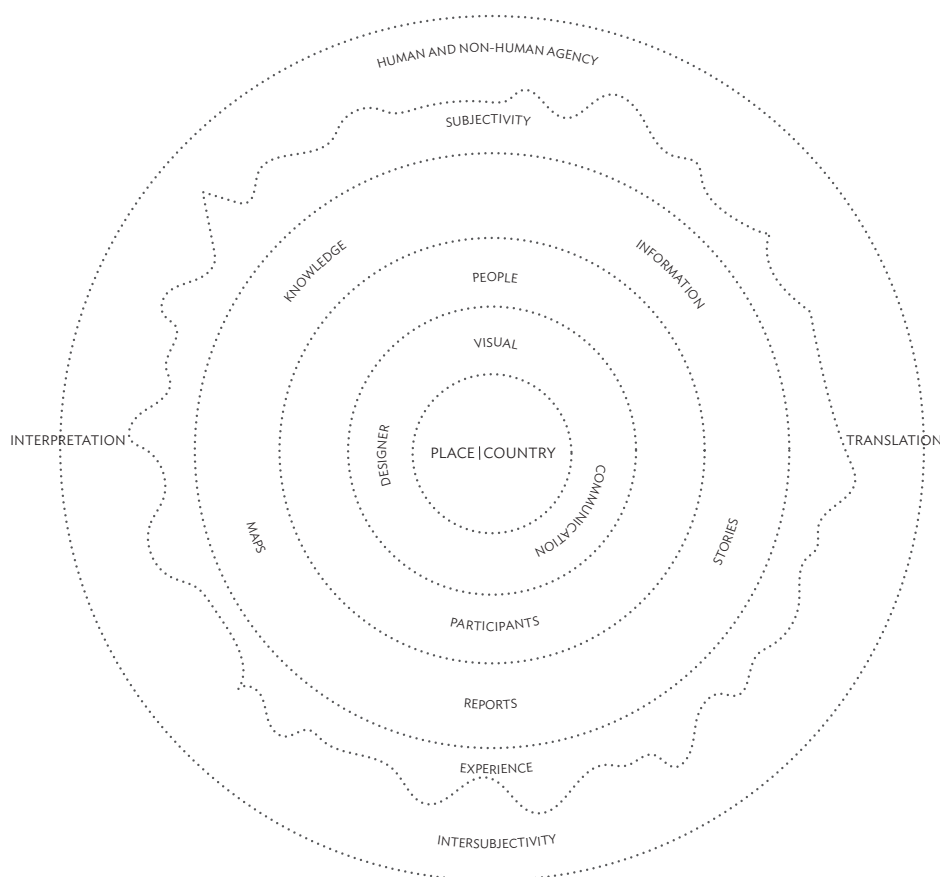


Figure 3. The emplaced designer.

Experiencing communicating fire

My experience in dialogue with placelcountry is a line of exchange and collaboration that demands consideration of responsibility. The cross cultural and interdisciplinary contexts of the environmental communication design projects materialise as the video (<https://vimeo.com/61313379>) and poster 'Communicating Fire: Building Relationships and Creating Change' (Figure 1) in which Indigenous and scientific perspectives turn together towards a recognition of the connection between health and well being of land, people, and spirit. My knowledge and ways of understanding place and country through experiences, people, stories and knowledge are augmented through knowledge artefacts and mediated representations such as books, documents, maps, reports, photographs, videos drawings and diagrams.

The video and poster discussed in this paper constitute a presentation that stands at this intersection of science, design and Indigenous perspectives on ecological knowledge, created through design in a collaboration concerned with making explicit and advocating for Indigenous understandings of fire in a scientific context of contemporary land management. As a critical designer and a participant in the Indigenous led Firesticks network, the visual representation of the communication design and the quality of the representation of the message are not the results of individual action; rather, they are a collaborative participatory acts of co-creation. My responsibility in this process of co-creation is to materialise the perspectives in an artefact that gives voice to the values and knowledge of the participants and can communicate to scientists and mainstream audiences.

The conventional and professional role of the visual communication designer is to critically hear the project outline or brief and respond to a particular set of circumstances in a visual form. In an Indigenous-led context I have learnt that the relational certainty of conventional design practice is open to question. The embedded taken-for-granted processes that I understand as professional design practice, and which Tony Fry (2009) describes as 'teleological', 'instrumental' and 'decision based' practices, are complexified through my connection with Indigenous perspectives and my lack of scientific knowledge. These two aspects of what is not

known to me contribute to a sense of awareness and openness to *the emergent in formation* (Maze and Redstrom 2007). My attention to the openings between the worldviews of design, science and the revitalisation of Indigenous cultural practices is central to my experimental investigation of a speculative design practice that is concerned with transformation through openings to multiple perspectives or worldviews (Gothe 2016). My participation in this project, as I have indicated, is not singular; rather, the dialogue between my apprehension of Indigenous perspectives, science and the languages of natural resource management is dependent on guidance in my collaborations with participants in the Firesticks project.

In this personal and social transformation, the material outcome is not the primary goal. Instead, alongside the consideration of visual communication design outcomes, my focus has turned to the development of design practices that recognise a complex of responsibility, authorship and reciprocity in the intercultural context that are focused on social change as an affective experience and an effect of the work.

[T]ransformative action has to focus on changing us, especially by transforming the worlds we make for ourselves as they design our modes of being.

(Fry 2009 p.112)

This transformative action is concerned with the movement between and across subjectivities, disciplines, cultures and languages from the perspective of a visual communication designer. The consideration of movements through, between and across internal and external realities experienced in practice brings attention to the psychic dimension of experience. According to Jane Rendell, the 'psychic dimension' of the experience of working between and across materialises in the transdisciplinary project, in part, in the relational and emotional aspects of research and practice (Rendell 2013, p.128). Subjectivity is central to transdisciplinary practices through the 'recognition of the knower in the process of inquiry' (Kagan 2011, p. 207). For the visual communication designer this encounter with complexity requires paying attention to her levels of perception of connection, relations and subjectivity

materialising in the transdisciplinary object in this case as a transcultural representation.

My experience of affective emergence in the materialisation of a transcultural representation is constituted as the dialogue between a material practice and a recognition of placelcountry through historical and contemporary mediated representations including stories, reports, maps, histories, information and knowledge. In my attempt to reconcile the epistemologies of Western science and Indigenous perspectives, my concerns are manifest through tracing the connections between land, country and the complexity of the designer's role in the medial space between people, place and spirit.

Tracing knowledges, tracing stories, tracing representations.

Victor Steffensen and Kuku Thaypan Elders Tommy George and George Musgrave from Cape York have been practising cultural burning as a land management practice consistently for many years. Since 2004, there has been a concerted effort to share these practices with other interested Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities across Australia. Alongside Victor and the Elders in Cape York, Peta Standley, a non-Indigenous researcher, has been working with the Kuku Thaypan Elders and Victor as a bridge between Western land management practices and IEK. Through a process of co-generation, Victor, Peta and the Elders have experienced and documented the knowledge systems and approaches to cultural burning in the Kuku-Thaypan Fire Management Research Project: The Importance of Campfires (KTFMRP). Firesticks is a partnership between this team and the Communicating Shared Traditional Knowledge Project (CSTK). This collaboration involves Victor Steffensen, director of Mulong and Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways (TKRP), Peta Standley KTFMRP, UTS Design through myself and Clement Girault, and the Jumbunna Indigenous Research Unit with Jason de Santolo and Oliver Costello, who also had a role as the Indigenous Officer at NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSWNPWS). The Firesticks project aims to support the use of Aboriginal knowledge in natural resource management, with a particular focus on cultural

burning practices. This ambition was supported by the granting of monies by Perpetual Philanthropic Trust to UTS to support travel and mentoring between Traditional Owners in NSW and Cape York in 2010 and 2011.

This funding provided the opportunity to organise a meeting in early 2011 at UTS. This meeting, attended by 40 people including Traditional Owners, community representatives and rangers from NSW, was hosted at UTS Design in Harris Street, Sydney and documented on video by UTS Media Lab. This recording became the central material for the video 'Communicating Fire: Building Relationships and Creating Change' (<https://vimeo.com/61313379>). The script was co-created by Victor Steffensen, Oliver Costello, Daniel Bracegirdle, Peta Standley and Miguel Valenzuela.

In July 2011, the Firesticks team was invited to present at the Nature Conservation Council of *NSW Bushfires in the Landscape Conference: Different Values, a Shared Vision Conference 2011* in Sydney. This was the first opportunity for the work of the partnership between UTS Design, UTS Media Lab, Mulong, Traditional Knowledge Revival Project and Kuku Thaypan Fire Management Research Project to be presented by the Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators in a natural resource context under the identity of Firesticks.

This invitation to present came at the end of the grant cycle from Perpetual Philanthropic Trust. At this conference Victor Steffensen presented the keynote speech with the support of the short pilot video, 'Communicating Fire: Building Relationships and Creating Change' (2011). Peta Standley and I submitted the abstract *Carrying and Communicating Fire: Building Relationships and Creating Change*, which described our experience working in the liminal spaces between scientific approaches to land management, visual communication design and Indigenous cultural burning practices. Highlighting our sense of responsibility and advocacy, we called for alternative ways of working including collaboration, communication and co-generative approaches. The abstract was not accepted to be

presented as a paper but rather became the foundation for a poster for the conference poster session.

THE FIRESTICKS POSTER: COMMUNICATING FIRE

Today fire is seen as a destructive force, which most Australians fear. This fear disconnects society from the land and its people. Fire is a powerful natural element. Fire illuminates life and provides culture with ceremony, medicine, food, warmth and above all a lore that the land taught the people. We must respect this as an inherited responsibility to be passed on in our changing world. The challenge today is to keep this respect alive, not only in terms of looking after the land but to heal the differences between people and their relationship to country.

(Text written in the workshop funded by Perpetual Trust held at UTS, February 2011)

The poster, *Firesticks Communicating Fire: Building Relationships and Creating Change*, was co-created by myself, Victor Steffensen and Lyndal Harris (UTS Design alumni and creative director), with Peta Standley supplying and advising on photographs and text. The making of this poster demonstrates the complexity of cross cultural translation and brings into visibility the ambivalence I experienced as failure and misrepresentations seemed inevitable when faced with the complexity of interpretation and translation in cross cultural contexts, with time limitations and across distance.

Tracing the knowledge transfer triangle and the knowledge system.

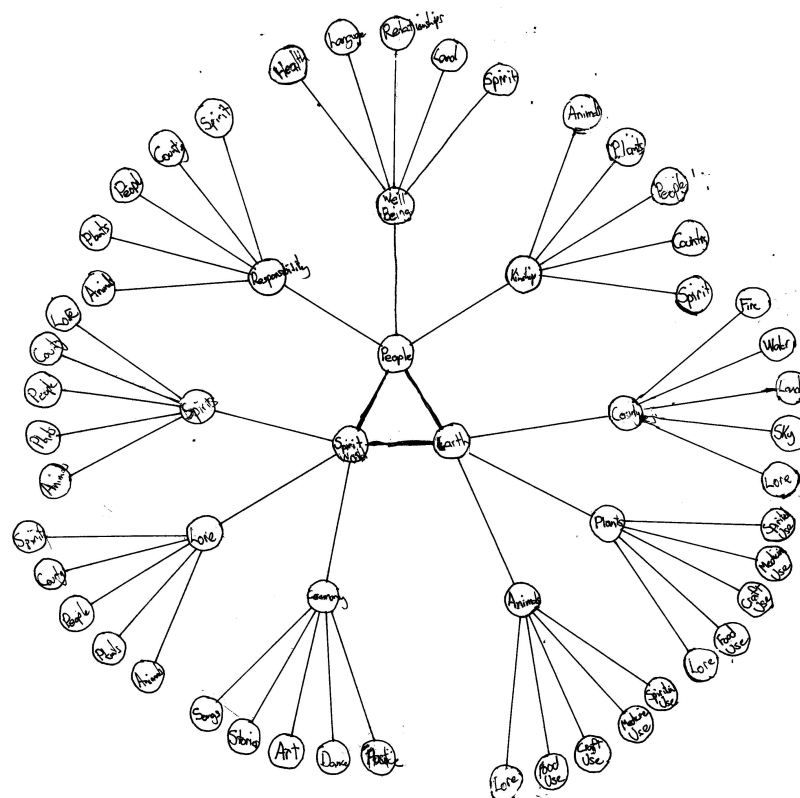


Figure 4. Knowledge map drawn by Victor Steffensen in 2010.

Two significant events contributed to the form and structure of the poster. First, in late 2010, Victor had drawn the representation of the knowledge system (Figure 4) and the knowledge transfer triangle (Figure 5). Victor, Peta, Jason, Oliver and I discussed the potential of the diagram and the triangle as the foundation for a visual structure for the Firesticks poster. These became the key images on which the poster relied for its structure and have come to provide a continuing source for the visual language of the Firesticks project.

These diagrams are initiated with KukuThaypan Elders and shared by Victor Steffensen with Peta Standley during the writing of her PhD, 'The Importance of Campfires', and the research project Kuku Thaypan Fire Management Research Project (KTFMRP). The drawings by Victor were in response to the interpreted representation and conceptual model of the interactive components of the Traditional Knowledge Recording Project (TKRP) and the KTFMRP and 'The Importance of Campfires' developed by Peta Standley in her work with Kuku Thaypan Elders (Figure 6). During a discussion with Peta about this model in 2009 at Victor's house, Victor explained that it is more like a triangle and you 'have to understand the three sides to Traditional Knowledge to use it as a baseline ... Knowing what it is, knowing what it does and knowing how to do it.'

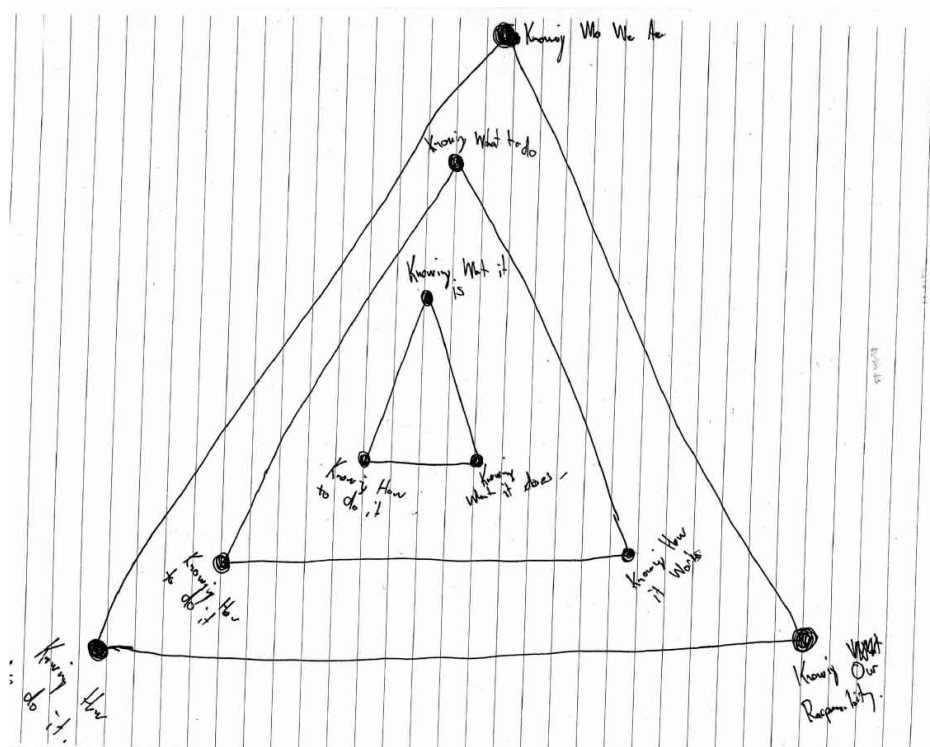


Figure 5. Knowledge transfer triangle drawn by Victor Steffensen 2009-2010.

This discussion between Peta and Victor informs the values and approach of Firesticks. This conceptual model, from Peta's co-generative research with Kuku Thaypan Elders, emphasises the need for recognition and respect for people's inherited knowledge systems (Figure 6). The transfer of this traditional knowledge

requires three things: firstly, the demonstration of traditional knowledge (TK) by Elders on country transferring traditional knowledge to younger clan members and applying their inherent adaptive management knowledge to the contemporary context; secondly, securing traditional knowledge through the community training and use of digital communication technologies (Community Informatics (CI)); and lastly communicating traditional knowledge through co-generative action research (CR).

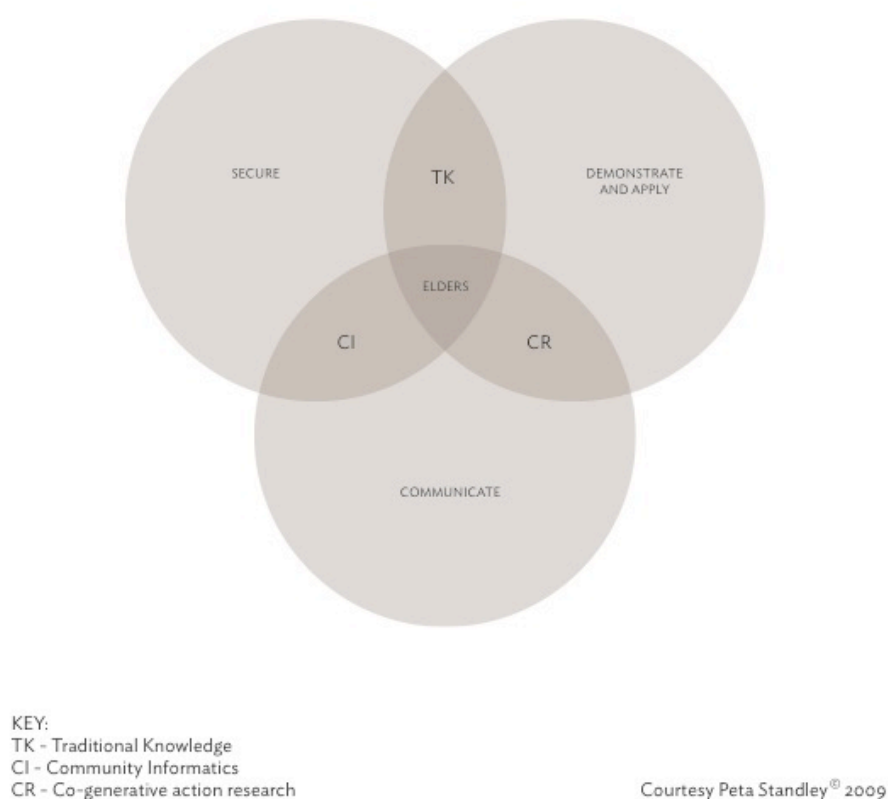


Figure 6. This representation informs the protocol for the TKRP research project and the Firesticks initiative. (Courtesy of Peta Standley)

The second significant event was my personal experience in Cape York where I experienced cultural burning. I was told that it was unlike the burns of the National Parks and Wildlife and Rural Fire Service bush fire mitigation strategies which used hot fire that moved very fast and burned too high, often damaging the canopy and

animal habitats. Cultural burning involves cool fires trickling through the undergrowth and never reaching higher than hip height on tree trunks. Often the fire moves so lightly that there is unburnt leaf litter left behind, ensuring that insects have protection either under the surface or by climbing the trees.

Central to the aims of the Firesticks project is for Indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) and contemporary environmental management to work together to provide holistic solutions to help manage and protect biodiversity. Indigenous approaches to burning help to ensure fire is applied in the right place, at the right time, for the right reasons, to support resilient functioning ecosystems.

The opportunity to present information from the Kuku-Thaypan Fire Management Project to a mainstream audience as a conference poster was a challenge in terms of visual language. The process of integrating a diagrammatic representation of the knowledge system with an information design approach that used photographs and descriptions of the relational connections between people, country and spirit provided a rich starting point.

The Firesticks poster, 'Communicating Fire: Building Relationships and Creating Change' (Figure 1) is a tracing of the knowledge transfer principles drawn by Victor Steffensen. It has a central triangle with three requirements for appropriate action: knowing what it is; knowing what it does; knowing how to do it. Around this central element are the understandings of Kuku Thaypan Elders, documented with Peta Standley, through the co-generative action research project KTFMRP The Importance of Campfires. These understandings of the effects of fire on plants, animals and law as examples of 'knowing what it does'. 'Knowing how to do it' is recognising the importance of contemporary land management approaches with the reference to biodiversity, people and monitoring and evaluation along with the use of contemporary technologies. 'Knowing what it is' brings lore, people and country into focus with the important statement at the apex of the triangle:

Coming to know and understand fire requires guidance by Elders and

fire knowledge holders through various stages of cultural learning on country. Learning the knowledge through a written or even a visual medium without that learning process on country means that components of the embedded nature of that knowledge in place and people can be misunderstood.

(Text from poster provided by Peta Standley from a draft chapter of her doctoral research.)

This statement disrupts the role of the poster as a knowledge artefact; it becomes instead a communication about the process and values rather than instructions for cultural burning. Instead of providing a didactic set of instructions for burning the poster reinforces the message that the 'on country' experience is crucial to a traditional Indigenous knowledge transfer. The poster is not a knowledge guide for cultural burning. The image and text represent elements of knowledge with the acknowledgement that this knowledge system and practice can never be understood through written or visual media. An experience alongside knowledge holders is recognised as the only way to fully come to know.

In my role as designer, what can be made known to the viewer are: a representation of traditional burning practices as complex, social and participatory; the importance of fire to the landscape as a caring practice; and the commitment to a resilient, sustainable and sustaining network. This is demonstrated in the overall design that respectfully details examples of ecological indicators such as the dew, the way fire is needed for particular grasses, the use of fire to support animal life, contemporary monitoring processes, and respect for Elders. The choice of images, the hybrid language that incorporates scientific references and Indigenous ecological knowledge and the relationship between the text and images were guided by Peta Standley, who had gathered the images as part of the Kuku Thaypan Fire Management Project. The selection of images and content was discussed via email as text was developed.

A key part of the knowledge transfer triangle is the statement 'knowing who we are'. Included in the poster is the list of people, language groups and organisations participating in the project of cultural fire workshops. This serves as a recognition of the development of networks in this project between 2004 and 2011, including the attendees at the fire workshops on country. This poster is an historical record of the mentorship by Elders from Cape York of Aboriginal communities in NSW through the Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways and the Firesticks Project. In 2014, at the fire workshop held in Cape York, the poster was pinned up and all the attendees signed their names on it as another layer of documentation of participation.

Lyndal Harris and I worked on the poster in Sydney and communicated with Victor Steffensen and Peta Standley by telephone and email. At our first evening meeting, early in May 2011 in a café in Paddington, I provided Lyndal with Victor's diagrams and two rough sketches that I had prepared for a suggested structure. The timing was tight. Lyndal was working in a full time position so we met in the evenings and communicated through email and telephone. The poster was designed by the end of May, with the artwork completed with permissions for the printer by mid June. After some adjustments to the proofs with the printer the poster was printed for the conference on 23 June 2011.

Working with Lyndal was in itself a complex translation process. I shared with Lyndal the perspectives from my experiences on country and listening to the discussions by fire knowledge holders about cultural burning practices. Lyndal and I engaged in a designerly translation of these understandings for the visual language development and poster design. My understanding of the qualities of fire in cultural burning practices is of a cool fire that burned in circles with people gathered around, birds wheeling overhead as light smoke drifted softly into the sky and the fire slowly trickling across the landscape.

These visual triggers were in contrast to the conventional images of fire and fire management of threatening walls of heat and rapid movement through the landscape, fire-fighters dressed in uniforms with trucks, and helicopters in the face of

the threat of wildfire to life and property. During this translation process, Lyndal and I moved from conventional visual languages related to fire as intense, hot and active, expressed through dynamic movement and high contrast images, to a softer and more gentle visual language.

THE FIRESTICKS VIDEO: COMMUNICATING FIRE

The designing of the interview scenography in the video ‘Communicating Fire: Building Relationships and Creating Change’ (<https://vimeo.com/61313379>) is an example of taking guidance and the need for a specific visual approach to ensure the visual representation of the connection between people and place is maintained.

My first experience in an Indigenous-led project in 1999 was working with the Keewong Mob in Western NSW and students in a Community Project that contributed to the publication *Yamakarra* (2011). In this task of representing an oral history we were asked by the Indigenous design advisor to keep two things in mind: firstly to have no white paper and secondly that any images of the Keewong Mob would always be placed ‘on country’ to demonstrate the power and importance of the connection between people and place. This meant either photographing people in the landscape or using collage to place them ‘on country’. Victor too emphasises the connection between people and country.

In the video describing the traditional knowledge recording process, made by student Luke Sandford (<https://vimeo.com/52730508>) under guidance of Victor in 2006, Victor describes the importance of the relation between people and country and says: ‘the country needs the people and the people need the country’ (Steffensen et al 2006). My awareness of this understanding (initially learned in 1999 and evident in the videography of Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways) has become a central consideration in all the work that I undertake. My awareness of the importance and power of the specificity and uniqueness of the country and the people resonates in my approach to representation.

During the UTS Firesticks meeting in 2011 there was an opportunity to interview participants and to record the feelings and thoughts about cultural burning and the

revitalisation of this practice. The set-up of the video interview was problematic. UTS is in central Sydney and is an urban environment. We could not find a tree or grass area within close vicinity and any recording became a representation of displacement. To come some way to address this breakdown we set up the recording space in front of a painting in one of the lounges at UTS (Figure 7). This painting became a signifier of the natural world. The painting of trees and roots provided a background that acknowledged a link between the interviewees and (a representation of) nature, thus maintaining, in a context of mediated representations, the spirit of understanding of the importance of people and place.



Figure 7. Still from interview with Peta Standley from *Firesticks: Communicating Relationships and Creating Change* video.

Conclusion

In my research and design practice the recognition of the emplacement of the designer is an important element in a designer's understanding of the relational qualities of the intersecting ecologies of the social, the biophysical and the artificial. This positioning orients the designer and their actions towards the fullness of placelcountry as an active participant with agency. This position brings a perspective to the project of sustainment and an expanded framing of responsibility for the

designer where placelcountry, as an entity, requires attention, listening, advocacy and representation.

This paper demonstrates some pathways to recognising the importance of an openness and a quality of listening that are essential in order to think and act differently as a designer representing placelcountry. In this case, listening as visual hearing initiates a shift from a focus on the instrumental outcome as a sign of efficiency, to the recognition of the presence of sentience everywhere. Within this move, for the designer researcher, is a realisation that learning comes in its own time and is a transforming experience. This paper outlines some of the learnings that I have experienced during my participation in the Firesticks project. In this project my capacity to sustain an openness to a dialogue with land, people and knowledge in an emergent trajectory has been particularly important in the transformation of my past designing self to a reconsideration, as a design researcher, of ways for visual communication design to address difference and complexity.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

**Weereewa/Bad Water: Photographic Investigations Into the Palimpsest
of Lake George**

Dr Rowan Conroy

What role does photographic practice play in the understanding and representation of a specific place? This question will be explored in reference to my own practice-led research. This paper is written from the perspective of a visual artist whose primary interest is in the construction of artworks through fieldwork and intuitive visual investigation. An ongoing personal project, started in 2015, is the photography of the lakebed and topography of Weereewa in New South Wales, Australia, otherwise known as Lake George. I will argue that my digital photographic explorations of Weereewa point to a shift more generally in how photography interrogates, experiences and relishes the textures, marks and light specific to particular place. To capture an intense record of place I have been using high-resolution digital panoramic stitching techniques to capture immense levels of detail. This project builds on my 2012 PhD research *The Woodhouse Rephotography Project* – in which my fieldwork in Greece investigated the photographic records of the past in exact relationship to the present in an ancient landscape (Conroy 2012). Such a process of research continues to ground me in the overlaid histories and perceptions of a specific site.

This essay begins with a description of Weereewa, and the “psychogeography” of the Lake, a term which invokes the cultural and psychological readings brought to its geography through historical facts. Recent influences have been the approach to place and making outlined by Kay Lawrence (2015) and Paul Carter’s ideas of “Ground Truthing” (Carter 2010). Key writers in psychogeography are Guy Debord (1955) and Iain Sinclair (2002), who have influenced my method of recounting powerful histories, myths and tragedies associated with the lake in combination with my own creative output. The final section describes how I came to photograph Weereewa, my processes and my initial findings. I unpack my own experience of continuously photographing this resonant place throughout 2015 and 2016.

A Description of Weereewa



Figure 1. Rowan Conroy *Untitled 1* from the series *Weereewa/Bad water* (2015) 2016
Pigment print on cotton rag produced at the ANU School of Art Inkjet Research Facility 900 x 2100 mm
(collection of the artist)

Lake George or Weereewa, in Ngunna-wal language, is most commonly encountered by passenger in a car. The Federal Highway that runs north-south along its western edge is a key geographical feature of the Lake shore and is punctuated by lookouts and picnic rest stops for drivers. When approached from the north the immense flatness of the lakebed and its extension to the horizon is hypnotic. During hot summer weather a *fata morgana* effect gives the illusion of a vast body of distant water. The view from the highway planted the seed of my interest in the lake itself. Like many Australian children I first experienced to the lake when passing on pilgrimages to and from the national institutions of Canberra. Anecdotes about this mysterious lake were often recited as the lake appeared on the horizon. My earliest memory of the lake was in the late 1980s. It must have been winter and I remember our Holden Kingswood station wagon being buffeted by icy winds and spray from waves breaking on the shore not far from the road side. A *Canberra Times* newspaper article in 1989 confirms the lake being full at this time (Wright 1989). I captured a completely different view of the lake in 2015 (Figure 1). All the lake water had

evaporated; the scene instead was dominated by this linear plane of lush green grass expertly clipped short by herds of Merino sheep; in the far distance the 80 metre high towers of the capital wind farm stood like alien sentinels above this bucolic view. During the past 184 years of European settlement the lake has come to be considered dangerous, unreliable, and constantly shifting. This is illustrated by the incompatibility of my earliest memories of the lake and the placid scene of Figure 1.

Weereewa was formed over five million years ago, when a fault line lifted an escarpment along what is now the steep western escarpment (S. Cartwright, G Jones 2002 p8). The Lake is an endorheic lake meaning that it is a closed water system which fills only through direct rainfall and does not flow to the sea. The sediment of the lake bed is up to 150 metres deep. Analysis of fossilised pollen spores from the deepest sediments stretch back three to four million years. This has given scientists the most complete climate history in the southern hemisphere stretching back over four Ice Ages (B. Pillens radio interview, 2013)



Figure 2. map of Lake George/ Weereewa region

Map courtesy of <https://databasin.org>

The lake is 34km north-east of Canberra and 43km south-west of Goulburn NSW. When full, the lake is approximately 25km long and 10km at its widest point. These

measurements are changeable as the lake is so transient. There is much popular mythology to explain the comings and goings of the water. A hidden aquifer linked to lakes in China is far-fetched idea; however, it is in fact the shallowness of the lake which causes water to quickly evaporate (S. Cartwright, G Jones 2002, 8). The lake is surrounded by farmland, and when water recedes grazing takes place on the lakebed itself.

Controversially, the eastern hills of the lake are home to the Capital Wind Farm with over 90 wind turbines, which has partially industrialised this landscape. The eastern shore of the lake is characterised by sandy beaches and exposed rocks. The sand accumulates here due to the prevailing south westerly winds (Singh G. et al, 1981, 26). These eastern shores provided rich fishing grounds for the Indigenous owners of the land. In the 1970s a team of archaeologists lead by Josephine Flood conducted excavations and study of stone tools discovered on the eastern beaches of the lake. Radiocarbon14 analysis dated these tools to at least 23,000 years before present (Flood, 1980, 280).

The Indigenous and pre-settlement ideas of the lake have curious analogies. Weereewa was the Ngunna-wal name of Lake George and translates as “bad water”, perhaps referring to the undrinkable salinity of the lake water and an association with bad spirits (Barrow 2014, 9). In the neighbouring Wiradjuri language Weereewa can mean danger. The fact that Weereewa can mean danger could also be a warning passed down from ancestor to ancestor of the dangers of venturing onto the lake. Just as the European history of the lake has had many tragic endings it is possible that the Indigenous experience was similar. As Barrow notes it is unfortunate that we are stuck with the name Lake George, which was given by Governor Lachlan Macquarie in 1820 when he visited the Lake and named it after the decadent English King George IV (Barrow p9).

Psycho-Geography and Mythology

In addition to the strong physical impact of the lake the mysterious historical events that have taken place there drew me to Weereewa. In this location I have found the idea of psychogeography compelling. Proposed by Guy Debord (1931-1994) a French Marxist theorist and co-founder of the *Situationist International*, psycho-geography was a subversive urban activity whose participants were free to roam the city using a psychological map and be guided by the ambience of the environment. Debord defined psycho-geography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (Debord, 1955, quoted in Bauder and Mauro 2008, 23). The concept of psycho-geography has been one lens through which I have peered at the strong geological and geographical characteristics of Weereewa in combination with its rich and peculiar histories.

In the early 2000s British writer Iain Sinclair conducted a psycho-geographic exploration *London Orbital: A Walk Around the M25* (Sinclair, 2003), and a video work *London Orbital* with Chris Petit in 2002. Sinclair’s psychogeographic investigation was based on his experience of walking this bleak motorway. Sinclair weaves a series of seemingly incompatible and overlaid histories through the fact of them taking place within the same geography, using the rich history of literature that shares the same land of the monotonous and banal locations of the M25 as an alternative field guide:

The best guides to the territory, in the days before JG Ballard perched in Shepperton, were to be found among the more imaginative late-Victorian authors: HG Wells at the southwest corner with *The War of the Worlds*, and Bram Stoker, who placed Dracula’s abbey at Purfleet, where the QEII Bridge comes to rest among oil storage tanks. (Sinclair, 2003 Guardian article)

In the same way multiple histories, mythologies and tragedies of the lake can be presented together; for instance, ancient geological time; deep Indigenous connection and occupation and more recently the colonial take-over and subsequent agricultural

exploitation. Similarly, but perhaps more relevant to the Australian postcolonial context is Paul Carter's concept of spatial history where place names are used as poetic historical waypoints with which to reflect on how historical resonance of place is created through writing and naming (Carter, 1996). Also of relevance is Carter's exploration of the concept of "ground truthing" which he applies to the Mallee region of north west Victoria.

Graeme Barrow has comprehensively collected many of the myths and facts concerning the lake in *Magnificent Lake George: The Biography* (2014). He recounts one of the myths that persists in popular consciousness concerns the sporadic filling and emptying of the lake. This has been believed to be the action of hidden aquifers connected to distant parts of the country or even New Zealand. However, the reality is much more comprehensible – the shallowness of the lake – only 7 metres maximum depth when full and an average of only 1 metre – means the lake functions as a very effective evaporation pan, which also explains the seawater-like salinity of the water (Barrow p29). As of April 2016, the lake is mostly empty with the eastern and deepest part of the lake the only water to be found. The lake was last full in the early 1990s and was completely dried out during the drought of 2000 (Canberra Times, 2001)

Scientists, engineers, politicians and bureaucrats have long been attracted to Lake George and have carried out various experiments over the years or put forward fanciful schemes to harness the waters of the lake or even drain it. (Barrow p73)

The history of Weereewa is rich and detailed. The chronological list below outlines the most indelible, tragic and fascinating histories, as summarised from Barrow's text and numerous sources:

60,000 years before present to 1820 Millennia before colonisation, the Ngunna-wal believed the Lake was home to the spirit Ngadyund Burorage, who has the power to make the waters of the lake appear and disappear – downing those who have offended it.

1820 Former convict Joseph Wild is the first white colonist to discover the lake. Charles Throsby recounts Wild's discovery and notes down the name of the lake "Wee,ree,waa" in a letter to Gov. Macquarie (Throsby cited by Barrow 2012 p.9). Gov. Lachlan Macquarie visits the lake and names it "Lake George" after King George IV of England.



Figure 3. Lake George imagined by Joseph Lycett, *View of Lake George, New South Wales, from the north east* watercolour; 20.7 x 28.6 cm 1825, image courtesy National Library of Australia. NLA PIC Drawer 762

#R8736

1825 Imagined view of the Lake by Joseph Lycett, published as an engraving (after the watercolour in Figure 3) and distributed throughout the British colonies.

1826 Approximately 1000 Ngunna-wal people assemble at Lake George to object to the behaviour of settler graziers who pushed the Indigenous owners off their ancestral lands (D.R. Horton 2000 quoted in National Capital Authority Fact Sheet).

1827 Sensationalist Sydney newspaper *Monitor* claims Indigenous people were responsible for murdering and cannibalising stockmen near the Lake (23 March 1827, *Monitor*, Sydney, in Barrow 2012, p8).

1852 James Byrnes drowns in the lake and almost takes the life of rescuer attempting to reach him (Canberra Times 1992 in Barrow 84).

1860 Bushranger Ben Hall is active near the lake and the village of Collector.

1865 Edward Lyons drowns attempting to cross the southerly end of the lake. (GH 1865 in Barrow 84).

1878 Weereewa's own Lochness monster, Debbil Debbi or Bunyip, described as a black seal-like creature in the *Queanbeyan Age* newspaper 22 June 1878 p.2 (Barrow, p 82).

1879 Woman and Child are drowned when the lake suddenly engulfs their house built near the lake (*Argus Melbourne* 1879 in Barrow, 84).



Figure 4. Charles Couter, 1901. Watercolour painting depicting view from the Governor-General's residence. Produced by commission of the Lake George Capital Site League. Courtesy National Library of Australia, nla.pic-an5263460

1901 Lake George was considered for the site of the new capital of Australia. The concept watercolour of Canberra on the Lake is fantastical and places the view on the portico of the proposed Governor General's residence looking north along the Lake shore (Fig 4).

1902 The lake was visited by parliamentarians determining the location of Canberra (Fig. 5); however, the lake was dry and unattractive to them and was not considered suitable for the nation's capital (Barrow, 61).



Figure 5. Edmund Thomas Luke (1864-1938) *A peep at Lake George site*, 1902, albumen photograph, 4.6 x 24.9 cm courtesy National Library of Australia PIC/7626/25

1930 The lake bed is put forward as a speedway for land-speed records to be attempted (Barrow p64). 16 year old Gordon Duncan dies in motorcycle accident on the lake. (*Canberra Times*, 25 June 1930, Barrow p84)

1940s RAAF bombing practice on the lake – unexploded ordinance is still a possibility even in 2016.

1956 8 July Royal Military College tragedy: Five cadets die in a yachting accident with high winds capsizing the vessels; the victims were drowned or died of hypothermia.

1958 12 January, Lynch family tragedy. Three children and two adults drown in the lake after a boating accident. High winds caused large waves that capsized the vessel and in the freezing water the victims drowned or died of hypothermia (Barrow, 84).

1961 March 12, Lake George Marathon swim takes place. Five men and a woman take part. Lamrock, aged 17 wins the 8km swim across the lake. (Lamrock, J., Bryant, P. 1961).

1968 Peter Buddee drowns after fishing vessel over turns during violent storm (*Canberra Times* 5 August 1968 in Barrow, 89).

1970s Major airport proposed (Barrow, 74).

1982 Cores drilled by hydrologists 'provide oldest continuing record of climatic changes in Australia with evidence from cores stretching back 3-4 million years over eight interglacial periods. (B. Pillen, 2013).

1986 Lake George is placed on the register of national significance as one of the most important geological features in Australia as it presents the oldest continuous record of vegetation and fire history in Australia.

1992 Garry Brown and John Koruga die on the lake in similar circumstances to previous tragedies. Their bodies are found five km apart in the lake one month after they are reported missing. (*Canberra Times* 23 August 1992 in Barrow, 89).

1999 Inaugural Weereewa Arts Festival begins including performance and installation works on the lake itself (Dalman, 2002).

2013 Australian National University commences three multidisciplinary studies of the lake (B. Pillans 2013).

Graeme Barrow's research is the most comprehensive survey of myths and facts surrounding Weereewa / Lake George and his closing observation prompted by a walk into the dry lake bed is apt:

"Looking around me I wondered about the dreams of speedway enthusiasts and supporters of the idea that a national capital should be built on the lakeshore. And of the tourism and fishing ventures that collapsed when the lake dried up. I thought of the indigenous people who once lived here and of how their way of life changed forever when Joseph Wilde turned up on that August day in 1820. I wanted to see the prolific bird life I had read about, but there were no birds to be seen, no pelicans, no swans and certainly no native companions" (Barrow 2012, p101).

Tragedies and mythology of the Lake

As seen above, the Lake has claimed many lives due to the unpredictable weather conditions and deceptively calm waters. The freezing temperature of the water is accentuated by its salinity, and the capacity for winds to whip the shallow waters of the lake into large waves capable of capsizing watercraft cause accidents. Many hazards such as submerged fence posts and barbed wire led to unexpected dangers. Since the European colonisation of the region surrounding the lake in 1820s, there have been eighteen deaths due to drowning or exposure. A common and grim reoccurrence in these tragedies has been that the bodies of the victims are often not found for some months. In the case of the 1956 Duntroon disaster where five cadets lost their lives, three of the bodies were not located until three months after the tragedy. Unhappily, only 18 months after this event another five lives were lost when a family boating trip went horribly wrong: a summer storm capsized the small yacht. In 1992 the same fate befell two fishermen; they were reported missing on the lake but took a month before their bodies were discovered. What is particularly striking about these tragedies is how the power of the lake's waters was underestimated by the victims. The psychological effect of the drownings affect the perception of the geography an ironic fact given that the lake has not held water for almost sixteen years. The last time the lake could be called full was in the mid 1990s (*Canberra Times* 2001). A whole generation of young adults have never known the lake to have been anything other than a windswept sea of grass.

Another striking realisation is how apt the Ngunnawal mythology is in regards to many of the phenomena of the lake that can still be witnessed today, such as the rapidly rising and falling water levels, the sudden and changeable weather on the lake and the tragic effects this can have on travellers. The Don Bell recounts how in Ngunnawal mythology the spirit of the lake is Ngadyund Burorage. When two Ngunnawal boys fell in love with two girls from a competing tribe and eloped with them they broke the laws of both tribes. To try and appease factions on both sides, the two tribes including the young married couples,

conducted a ceremony on the lake. During this ceremony a senior Ngunnawal law man and the father of the offending boys went down to the western edge of the lake and asked Ngadyund Burorage to punish the boys if they chose to leave the tribe and pursue their illegal marriages. The boys refused to stay with their tribe and in retribution the spirit of the lake summoned a fierce and sudden tempest that drowned many of the opposing tribe. To finish off the remaining members of the rival tribe Ngayund tricked the survivors by quickly withdrawing the waters of the lake so it appeared completely dry, and yet when they ventured to cross the lake Ngayund filled up the lake again in the middle of the night (Bell 1999, 26 Quoted in Barrow, 9).

Photographically sampling the lake: common research threads in my practice

My own experiences on the lake have resonated with these Indigenous and settler stories. The lake is much vaster once you set foot upon it. An uncanny effect of the flatness of the lake is that once you have made some progress towards the centre at walking pace the far hills seem to get no closer – indeed you feel as if you are treading the same ground and making no progress. You can only feel more sympathy and empathise even more strongly with those poor people marooned in the freezing waters of the lake with no hope of reaching either shore, a fate that has befallen so many victims of the lake.



Figure 6. Walking on the lake Rowan Conroy documentation 2016



Figure 7. Walking on the lake Rowan Conroy documentation 2016



Figure 8. Walking on the lake Rowan Conroy documentation 2016



Figure 9. Hoof mark on the lake bed. Rowan Conroy documentation 2016



Figure 10. Succulents, Grass and Bone – Weereewa lake bed. Rowan Conroy documentation 2016

My interest in the artistic documentation of site and place has grown organically out of a decade of interdisciplinary experience of field archaeology in the Eastern Mediterranean. I was employed to undertake technical photography and illustration of objects on excavations. This methodical and forensic form of visual documentation has been influential on the way I have continued to make work that investigates history, site, and landscape. A recurrent theme in my research is an interest in the photograph's inherent gift of being able to capture in a single frame, a rich, multilayered, and often unfathomable range of timescales. In a photograph the ancient past and the most recent incursions of the present can be represented simultaneously.

From 2009-2010 I conducted a rephotography project in mainland Greece, where I re-identified and revisited hundreds of photographs taken by Professor William Woodhouse between 1890 and 1936. This project required a diverse range of practices including a year of digitisation and forensic detective work on the archive of large format glass plate negatives. Another year of field work in Greece followed, where I travelled around 3700km to relocate and accurately rephotograph the cities, landscapes and archaeological sites depicted in the archive.



Figure 11. *The Lookdown Bungonia after Fan Ku-an* 100 x 250 cm pigment inkjet prints on cotton rag 2014

A diptych from 2014 titled *The Lookdown Bungonia after Fan Ku-an* approximates the format of my rephotographic pairings in a different mode; these images were rather a shift in perspective between two co-located but very different views. This work explores the rugged precipice of the Bungonia Gorge in NSW and a historic mine.

Weereewa/Bad Water Project 2015 onwards



Figure 12. Rowan Conroy *Untitled #2* from the series *Weereewa/Bad Water* 2016
Pigment print on cotton rag, produced at the ANU School of Art Inkjet Research Facility 1420 mm x 4000
mm (collection of the artist)

I have been stopping at Weereewaa Lookout along the western shore of Lake George since July 2015. Approaching the turn-off, we are greeted with a large brown sign. Brown signs are much coveted by travellers in the Australian landscape as they denote places of natural or cultural value. This one is has a particularly powerful auratic symbol - the SLR camera symbol- signifying that a place of universal photogenic attraction is present, an assurance that the picturesque is waiting for the traveler. The act of stopping the car to contemplate and photograph a view is a powerful decision in itself. In this case the symbol has not mislead us. On pulling in the car park we are instantly aware of the view before us.



Figure 13. Conroy Entrance to “Weereewaa” Lookout, Geary’s Gap, Federal Highway NSW, 2016



Figure 14. “Weereewaa” Lookout car park, Federal Highway NSW, 2016



Figure 15. On site with Nodal Ninja 360° Panoramic photographic tripod head and Nikon D3x with 300mm telephoto lens. 2015

Digital photography and the oversampling of landscape

Digital photography is an important part of this project as it has allowed an expansive “oversampling” of the site of the lake to take place. Oversampling is a term that refers to the capturing of a large amount of data. I have been repeatedly photographing a prescribed portion of the lake. A small stone cairn helps position my tripod. Using a panoramic head and a telephoto lens I can accurately capture a scene 12 exposures wide by five exposures high. By photographing the lake bed from the same vantage point I am able to show the great diversity of textures and light that present themselves when revisiting the same visual point. Figures 16, 17 and 18 illustrate the same area of ground captured at different times of year. Photography as a daily practice is a form of

engagement with the land. Over time I have become familiar with the fall of the light and can recognize when the light is unique.



Figure 16. *Untitled* detail of study from the series *Weereewa/Bad water 2016*

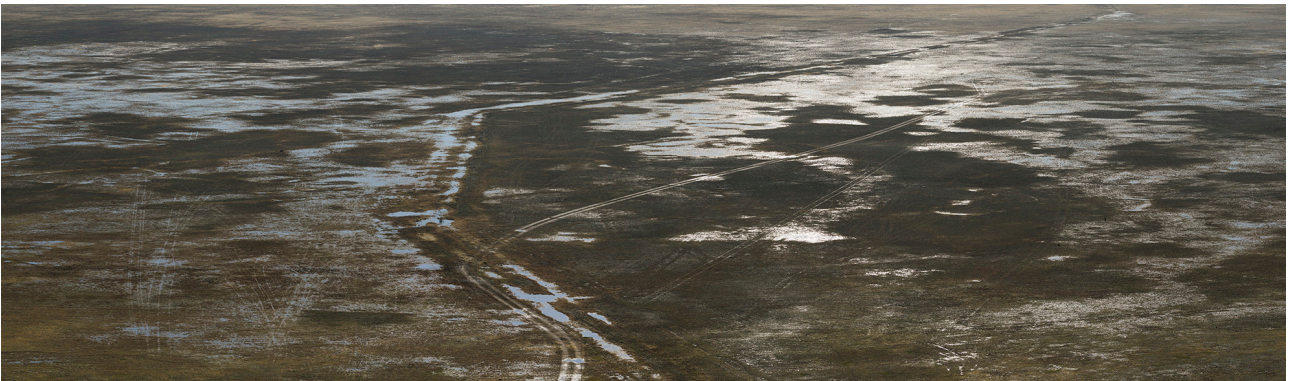


Figure 17. *Untitled* detail of study from the series *Weereewa/Bad water 2016*

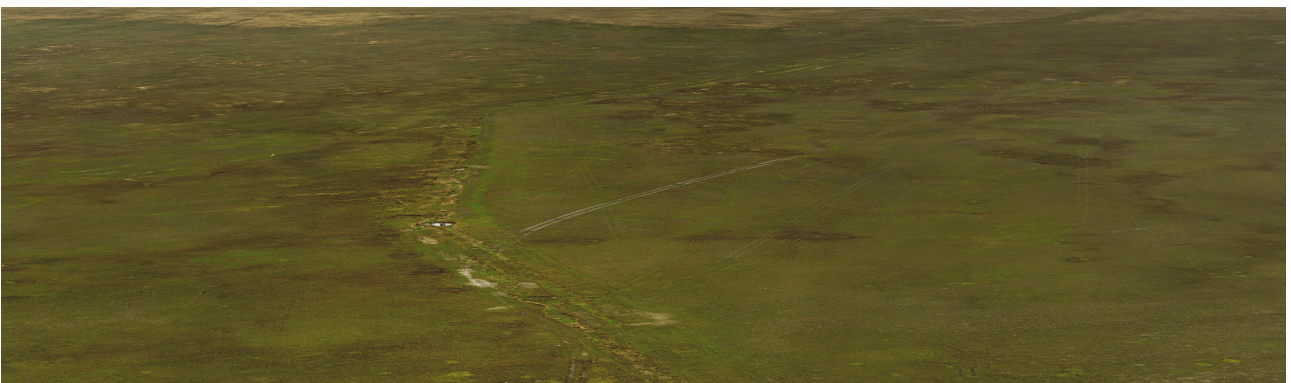


Figure 18. *Untitled* detail of study from the series *Weereewa/Bad water 2016*



Figure 19. Rowan Conroy Untitled #3 from the series Weereewa/Bad Water Pigment inkjet print 1420 x 4000 mm 2016 produced at the ANU School of Art Inkjet Research Facility, 2016 (Collection of the artist)

Each exposure overlaps with the last enabling the stitching software to detect similar textures in each of the frames and blend them together seamlessly. This allows the use of long telephoto lenses, giving a telescopic reach into the distant recesses of the lakebed. Figure 19 is made up of 60 individual photographs digitally stitched together using Adobe Photoshop – a partly automated process called *Photomerge*. The resultant files are many gigabytes in size and contain a huge amount of detailed information from the scene. These large files are output through the ANU School of Art Inkjet Research Facility using customised wide format inkjet printers. Figure 12. Untitled # 2 “Weereewa/Bad Water 2016” is a key work from this series.

Studying the details in mural sized inkjet prints reveals thousands of tracks made by humans in cars, tractors and motorbikes. Animal life is also present with kangaroos and crows, sheep and cattle scattered across the image surfaces. While these details talk of the present and the recent past they lead into a contemplation of the deeper history of patterns that have played across this surface over the millions of years of the lake’s existence.

In *Photographic Materiality in the Age of the Inkjet Print* delivered at the conference Impact 9 Printmaking in the Post Print Age at the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou (Conroy, 2015), I argued for the subtle crafted qualities that can be achieved using the techniques

high-resolution digital capture, stitching, fine and customized inkjet printing. Superimposing these practices onto the landscape of Weereewa has provided an intimate and experiential encounter with this landscape in way not possible on the site itself. The optics used to capture the image enable details, structures, marks and tones that would not have been apprehended by the unaided eye on-site, revealing unexpected details and information.

The raised perspective I have used in these images offers an aerial view point as weather and light effects move across the lake bed, and angles of light reveal hidden topographies. This is Landscape as a Palimpsest – the land contains its past and future in an ongoing process of overlaid growth, decay and partial erasure. In the discipline of aerial archaeology effects called “shadow sites”, where underlying and hitherto unknown structures are revealed through oblique angles of light and seasonal dieback or growth of crows, have led major archaeological discoveries (Hauser 2009). Through the changing of the light, of the seasons and the water level of the lake, the lakebed can reveal sites and marks of activity like the development of a photographic image in a tray of developer.



Figure 20. Rowan Conroy *Untitled # 6* from the series *Weereewa/Bad Water* pigment inkjet print on cotton rag 1000 x 2300 mm, 2016 produced at the ANU School of Art Inkjet Research Facility (Collection of the artist)

Paul Carter's exploration of the concept of "ground truthing" is relevant here. This term comes from industrial use of geographical information systems where the interpretations of digital satellite imagery must be cross checked with information present on an actual site. A human investigator, or "ground truther", is sent in to "to check that the pixels don't lie, and to identify any anomalies or unexplained variations in the photograph" (Carter, 2010, 7). My project has seen me test the ground, test the site of my imagery in a re-iterative process, of re making the same view multiple times over many months.

Returning from one of my daily photographic sessions above the Weereewaa lookout, I made the work illustrated in Figure 20. I was struck by the poetic appropriateness of the burnout tyre marks in the lookout car park. This form of popular road drawing had a poetic resonance with the palimpsest of the lake bed, which was also covered with tyre marks albeit for the purposes of agriculture, not hooliganism.

It can be argued that traditional approaches to landscape photography such as that by Ansel Adams (1902-1984) or Peter Dombrovkis (1945-1996) was concerned with the essentialisation of a landscape especially landscapes that could be considered wilderness. This approach seeks to achieve a singular exposure where light, weather and composition coalesce into the epitome of that place in the mind of the photographic author. Despite the best intentions of these photographic authors I argue that this is an outmoded historical approach that coincides with obsolete past notions of the landscape – a vision that is looking for purity of wilderness and eschews the hybrid and competing Indigenous histories that are often present at these sites. In a 1995 paper 'What do we mean by wilderness? Wilderness and *terra nullius* in Australian art', the Indigenous scholar Marcia Langton wrote 'Where Aboriginal people had been brought to the brink of annihilation, their former territories were recast as "wilderness"' (Langton 1995 in Annear 2011, 2). Through my project I have been conscious not to try and pursue one *perfect* image as a singular representation of the Weereewa, as is common in popular conception of landscape photography.

Panoramic Stitching

Panoramic Stitching is inherent now in the digital age. Seemingly every smart phone is capable of automatic panoramic capture. Until recently such techniques had been the specialised and only found in industry and science for the immersive contextual information they can provide about an environment. Some of the most astonishing examples are those from the Mars rover controlled by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (Figs. 21 and 22). These give an experiential encounter, even if far removed from earth, of Martian land forms and light. Many of these panoramas can be viewed in 360° virtual reality, providing the opportunity to see the Martian land forms as if actually standing there.



Figure 21. PIA16453: *Panoramic View From 'Rocknest' Position of Curiosity Mars Rover* November 2012. a panorama created using a mosaic of images captured by the Mast Camera on the NASA Mars rover Curiosity <http://photojournal.jpl.nasa.gov/jpeg/PIA16453.jpg>



Figure 22 NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory Mars Curiosity Rover image number PIA19912: *Mount Sharp Comes In Sharply* September 9, 2015 composite image looking at Mount Sharp

<http://photojournal.jpl.nasa.gov/catalog/PIA19912>



Figure 23. Bernard Otto Holtermann and Charles Bayliss Panorama of Sydney and the Harbour, Albumen photographs, 21.9 x 141 cm, Courtesy Art Gallery of New South Wales

In the early 19th Century the panorama was developed alongside the new technology of photography if use in Diorama spectacles. It is no coincidence that Louis Daguerre was also a painter and producer of panoramic diorama spectacles before he invented the Daguerreotype process (Gernsheim 1968, 43). Later in 1870s, Bayliss and Holtermann produced an expansive panorama of Sydney Harbour using large wet plate collodion negatives and a colossal large format camera with a 2540mm lens and negatives 90 x 150 cm, some of the largest photographs ever taken using the collodion process (AGNSW, 2007). The panoramic image has its precedence much further back in the history of art

but photography seems to have been inherently suited to the endeavours of the panoramic image. The motivation is to “get it all in” by including more of a scene – attempting to encapsulate more of the environment and trying to impart to the viewer the immensity and scale of a place – as impossible as this is.

The role of photography practice as a means of dialogue and understanding with landscape and place

The place of landscape photography in Australia is a polarizing issue. As Judy Annear points out in her essay accompanying the 2011 Art Gallery of New South Wales exhibition *Photography and Place Australian Landscape Photography 1970s Until Now*

Dealing photographically with the land is, at the least, vexed. Politically, this can be argued to be true in relation to the still unresolved issues concerning ownership of and access to country across the Australian continent. Whose country are we talking about? And by photographing it, what are we claiming to do with it? (Annear 2011)

We are left in a conundrum. This land has been wrongfully taken, but is still here with all its spectacular light and topography. As long as the photographic practitioner is aware of these cultural sensitivities there must still be a viable place for a kind of self-reflexive and aware photography of the land.

Kay Lawrence eloquently posits the different inflexion of the term landscape and place: “landscapes perceived largely through sight and thus able to be conceived as separate from and outside us; places lived in and known intimately through the senses of touch, sound, smell and vision” (Lawrence 2015, p1). This distinction is pertinent when thinking about the relationship of photography to land as opposed to place. Photography is an inherently visual medium that has a flattening effect well suited to the documentation of landscape. Photography renders landscape as “separate from and outside us” and has a difficult if not impossible task in accurately giving us the senses of place “touch, sound smell and vision.” So if photography is more suited to documenting landscape, that will

remain distant and outside us, then what genuine role can photography play in creating a dialogue with the land and the place?

The answer is perhaps best pursued through the immense Aboriginal heritage where knowledge of place and country sees the land as a living entity that requires mutual regard and respect. Senior elder from north east Arnhem land Manduwuy Yunupingu tried to instill an awareness in white Australians that country is a being in itself with its own influence and power, not an inactive and lifeless entity for mistreatment and exploitation (Yunupingu 2001 pp 1-4).

I see my Weereewa series as playing a role in recording the vicissitudes of light and weather, the marks of growth and decay, as well as serving as mnemonic device – a cultural memory of the lake, looking beyond the sublimity of the lake to its detail, the cultural markings on it. This work is a repository of what it can look like, what it may look like in the future and glimmers of what it may have looked like in the past.

Visual artists engaged with the Lake.

There have been numerous artists who have depicted the lake during the early colonial period. More recently many artists have been involved with the biannual Weereewa festival that is held on the lake (Dalman 2002, ABC News, 2016). Lake George themed exhibitions have taken place at the Goulburn Regional Gallery since the 1990s. In relation to problems in depictions of landscape and place outlined above a number of artists have presented their own solutions through very different approaches. GW Bot's 2006 sculptural piece *The Lake* (Fig. 25) which now adorns the entrance to the Goulburn Regional Gallery consists of 46 bronze Glyphs, representations of the withered and weather-worn fence posts that crisscross the lake bed signifiers that speak of the landscape that has shaped them.



Figure 24. Installation view of G.W. Bot's *The Lake* bronze, dimensions variable, 2006 courtesy Goulburn Regional Gallery (image Rowan Conroy 2016)

Rosalie Gascoigne (1917-1999) had a long association with the lake and which was explored through the exhibition curated by Glen Barkley *The Daylight Moon: Rosalie Gascoigne and Lake George* at the Goulburn Regional Gallery in 2015. Gascoigne was particularly taken with the scale and presence of the lake, its subtle colour pallet “where the colour of the land shifts and flickers under a big dramatic sky” (Barkley 2015, 8).



Figure 25. John Conomos, still from *Lake George (After Mark Rothko)* 2008 SD video single channel 25:28 minutes. video stream can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/70452494>

By contrast to Gascoigne's material pieces John Conomos' *Lake George (After Mark Rothko)* 2008 video piece (Fig 27) takes a vivid and mystical view of the lake with a haunting soundscape augmented by the endlessly panning camera that surveys the topography of the lake. Tones are smeared right to left and it is often difficult to locate the imagery as being either sky or ground.

As a genre of art, despite certain current views that it is a traditionally conservative genre, it need not be. Far from it. For me landscape as always been critical to my biography, culture and thought (Conomos 2008).

Conomos was drawn to the lake from an early age as many hours were spent driving along the Lake shore when visiting other Greek family members who owned milk bars in Canberra and Goulburn (Conomos 2008).

Conclusion

Since its inception photography has had a close relationship with the forensic sciences, and has been systematically employed to record marks of evidence, such as, footprints, tire impressions, and the locations of debris. While the evidence I am presenting in these images will not lead to any criminal conviction, it does mandate that a site should be visited many times, and photographed many times and those images be examined many times for a more comprehensive view to be established. This is an ongoing project, however, I feel I can declare the following discoveries. Firstly, the project has reinforced my conviction that photographic practice can help negotiate and enrich the visual experience of place. The lakebed of Weereewa is an expansive palimpsest and written across its surface are many overlaid histories and mythologies. Secondly, what has presented itself in are the distinctive marks left by humans and animals on the dry lakebed. These inscribe it psychologically with individual events – the car trails are like children's drawings criss-crossing its surface, the burnouts long repeated ellipses, round and round larger and smaller like the lakes shifting shore line, they are labyrinthine, providing no way out – somehow these marks recall the heterogeneous histories and tragedies that have taken place here. The lake embodies its past and future in an ongoing process of growth, decay and partial erasure. Thirdly the geography of the land displays shadows of its former self and can be read through the fragmentary evidence left by marks of past action and through the revelatory effects of light on the lakebed that hint at its immense antiquity.

I have mentioned only three of the many artists who have been attracted to Weereewa and made significant works (Barkley 2015). However, my approach is in a different zone, foregrounded by technology and technique. Digital stitching has been employed hardly at all by visual artists to capture the landforms of the lake. Access to high-resolution digital cameras and powerful computer processing and software is a recent innovation enabling my images to be printed and viewed at large scale with intricate details intact.



Figure 26. Rowan Conroy Untitled # 6 from the series Weereewa/Bad Water pigment inkjet print on cotton rag 1420 x 4000 mm, 2016 produced at the ANU School of Art Inkjet Research Facility (Collection of the artist)

A single image of the lake is a deception. The more images I make of the lake the more ambiguous, unknowable and dangerous the lake becomes. Light and weather effects play continually across the lake's surface. In the same way that photographic portraiture is a mere shadow of a person's true representation, the lake cannot be photographically encompassed through single images. A sustained approach reflecting the changeability of the lake's character over many seasons is required. Photographing from the same vantage point I have been revisiting the same co-ordinates again and again – allowing the images to be directly compared and even layered on top of one another.

In this paper I have shown how Debord's idea of psychogeography –the exploration of the specific effects of the environment on the psyche of individuals – is related to my own artistic practice in the particular place of Weereewa. The value and use of landscape photography lies in the very act of being in the land and the engagement the artist feels to the site. Over many years, this practice becomes more attuned to subtle changes to that land, and a sense of belonging and mutual respect for land and country is strengthened.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Possums in Suburbia: portrayal in selected children's illustrated storybooks.

Sandra Stewart

Australian native fauna are protagonists in many children's illustrated storybooks. *Playing Possum* (Sarah), *Possum in the House* (Jensen) and *Possum Goes to School* (Carter) will be analysed to consider the depiction of possums and their encounters with humans. Children's illustrated storybooks will be referred to by the more familiar term, picturebooks, a book identified as one where written and visual text are reliant on each other (Anstey and Bull 3). The picturebooks will be analysed using Ecocriticism "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty 7). This analysis considers how possums are portrayed in the books through the covert use of anthropomorphism that occurs as a result of anthropocentrism. Marlan describes anthropocentrism as a viewpoint that places human-animals as being more important than non-human animals (860). The portrayal of the relationships between humans and non-human animals as well as the artificial 'territories' defined by humans are aspects of anthropocentrism to be demonstrated in this analysis.

Picturebooks are unique art works, as meaning is communicated by both the written or verbal text and visual text through the medium of illustrations (Nikolajeva and Scott 1, Nodelman and Reimer 274). The relationship between words and pictures is dynamic. Both text types may require literal and interpretative comprehension skills for meaning to be acquired from their interactions (Mallan 67, Nikolajeva and Scott 1). This acquisition of meaning is complex and varied interpretations can be developed over multiple readings of texts (Sipe 101, Nodelman and Reimer 276). Nodelman states "a picture book contains at least three stories: the one told by the words, the one implied by the pictures and the one that results from the combination of the two" (153).

Picturebooks provide for children a vicarious experience with wildlife; the reader does not encounter the fauna directly but learns from an indirect encounter (More, 19). This vicarious experience may include altered factual information and anthropomorphism as the need for entertainment takes priority. For some children picturebooks may be their only opportunity to encounter wildlife in the early years

(more 20). The information gained may leave a lasting impression (More, 21) and influence what children perceive and learn about relationships between humans and animals. This can include native fauna and the place of native fauna in the worldview of the culture they inhabit. Ecocriticism provides a way to analyse anthropocentric messages portrayed in picturebooks.

Ecocriticism can be defined as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” (Glotfelty 6) the relationships between “the human and the non-human” (Marland 846) by considering how nature is reflected and perceived in literary texts.” (Sarver 9). Here, ecocriticism is used to analyse the relationships between the protagonist possums and human animals and how the environment and environmental symbols are presented in an anthropocentric way.

The experiences brought to a text by the reader cannot be ignored, I acknowledge my learning and experience gained as a wildlife rehabilitator of injured and orphaned native fauna, including possums and as a Kindergarten to Year 6 teacher. These life experiences influence my knowledge about the natural behaviour of possums and a practical understanding about books that are appreciated by younger children.

Common Brushtail possums, *Trichosurus vulpecula* and Common Ringtail Possums, *Pseudocheirus peregrinus* have been able to integrate well into suburban environments within their habitat range (Hill, Carbery and Deane 101, Kerle 45, 103). This cohabitation is at times valued by residents because they are native fauna and their appearance and behaviour is appealing. Yet when humans consider that possums have invaded their homes or gardens they are declared a pest (Kerle 104, Milton 100). Possums are only valued as long as they stay “where they belong, in the bush.” (Milton 100).

The species of possum illustrated in *Possum in the House* and *Possum Goes to School* is generic and cannot be identified as a particular species. The configuration of the fore and hind paws most resemble a Brushtail but the tail is not thick enough for a Common Brushtail nor furless enough for a Common Ringtail possum. In

Playing Possum the bushiness of the tail and the pink nose and inner ears indicates that the visual text may represent the south eastern form of the Common Brushtail possum (Kerle 41).

Playing Possum, a 2011 self-published book, is written by Susie Sarah and illustrated by Richard Herbert. It textually relies upon rhyme and repetition and has no narrative. It is in portrait mode with written text on the left hand page framed with bush motifs and an adjoining full page visual text. The author utilises alternate double pages to portray human thoughts about possums and in human centric terms how the author perceives a possum may view humans.

The other books form a series of two *Possum in the House*, written by Kiersten Jensen and illustrated by Tony Oliver, was published in 1986 and it has three editions including a North American version, the sequel *Possum Goes to School*, written by Melanie Carter and illustrated by Nicola Oram was first published in 1992 and adopts the style of the original book (Carter, 31). It has four published editions including 2012; its latest reprint was in 2014. This shows sustained purchases over time but is not indicative about the messages given to readers about possums. The written texts in all books give voice to the human opinions that possums are pests that are scary, annoying, destructive and active at the wrong time of the day. The visual texts contradict this by showing round appealing faces, wide brown eyes with long lashes, soft fur and brushy tails. Despite this attractive appearance the picturebooks demonstrate through the written and visual text that possums are acceptable as long as they are 'out there', in their world, and not within the artificial territory created by humans.

Playing Possum has identical title and cover pages. The illustration depicts a boy and a possum. The possum features a central pink nose and inner-ears, prominent round eyes, long whiskers and eyelashes. This possum image initially captures the readers' attention but the boy is visually dominant because of size, foreground placement and use of colour as yellow hair, a blue shirt and eyes are in direct

contrast to the grey of the possum that blends with the tree trunk. Irony is present in the title as humans may be 'playing possum' or livening up events, or the natural behaviour of possums is being anthropomorphised and considered from an anthropocentric perspective to be play.

The content of the written and visual text support each. The illustrations throughout the book are semi-realistic and at times very two-dimensional in nature with the possum faces prominent. The written text describes how the humans feel about the possums. They actively encourage the possums onto the verandah of the home in the early evening by leaving food in the form of sliced apple in a bowl. The humans react positively to the possums as a form of entertainment:

While snuggled up in cosy beds
We watch them having fun, (Sarah 1).

This is before the humans go to sleep. The corresponding illustration has three appealing possum faces looking directly at the reader. Two pages later the possums have become the invaders as the night darkens and they "stomp on the roof" and make sounds of "scratching, screeching, sliding claws" (Sarah 5). The human narrators believe that possum fighting is about the food that has been put out (Sarah 7). This is a factual distortion as it is more likely to be a fight over dominance than over food (Kerle 95). The visual image shows boxing gloves to match the written description:

Possums in boxing gloves

Fight for their supper snack. (Sarah 9)

It places the humans and their beliefs as most important. This book tries to counteract the anthropocentric view given on the human centred pages by attempting to portray the viewpoint of the mother possum towards human children albeit in a very 'human manner. The text of the possum mother's voice uses irony by describing humans in a way that humans will describe possums:

It's children, baby possums and they really are such pests. (Sarah 3, 7, 9)

The possums have not encouraged the children to play under the tree but the human children believe that it is their right to play 'out there'. The illustrations support the written text and are framed by an outline of a hollow to attempt to show what the possum would see, an anthropocentric and anthropomorphised representations as being nocturnal possum eyes are designed to detect low light levels, at night (Kerle 23). This also occurs in the other picturebooks, the possum is represented as invading human territory.

The cover of *Possum in the House* shows this on the cover where a possum has knocked over a variety of kitchen foods. This image and the book's title can lead to an interpretation that this is not a desirable circumstance. Further upsets to the human territory within the house as represented is provided by the visual story. The cover of *Possum Goes to School* shows a wide-eyed possum in a school bag that is hanging on a hook. This may be interpreted that the possum was taken to school by a human child or has found its own way into the bag. These picturebooks are in landscape format with illustrations across double-page spreads. The visual text displays the story and the written text presents the reactions of the humans to the possum. They utilise the possibility of both textual and visual predictions for early readers as the protagonist possum moves through different rooms.

The theme of invader of human-animal territory continues throughout both books with alternate pages opening with the written text "There's a possum in the ... and he's hiding in the..." (Carter, Jensen). In *Possum in the House* the reactions of the human animals to the possum presence is one of fear: "Help, help!" screamed Mum" and annoyance "Oh drat!" yelled Dad.". *Possum Goes to School* follows a similar pattern with the human- animals expressing annoyance and the fear of potential disruption: " "Oh, no!" cried the teacher.", whilst the children scream encouragement: " "yes, yes!". This portrayal of invader and destructor continues visually throughout the books as the possum moves from room to room and is displayed visually including the possum knocking household or school items over, ripping books and scratching or marking items.

Factual distortion occurs as the books ignore that a possum is nocturnal and has poor daytime sight (Kerle 23). The illustrations depict a wide-eyed possum that is looking directly at stationary and moving objects with rounded pupils, this dilation occurs for better night vision (Kerle). A possum in the day is non-active, if caught away from its hollow it finds a place to hide and sleep. If disturbed by humans they may react with loud vocalisations using a threat call with an open mouth and adopt a defensive position (Kerle 95) rather than with the “screech, screech” (.....) presented in the written text. This lack of fact is also reinforced through the anthropomorphisation of the possum’s dexterity and facial expressions.

Anthropomorphism occurs in these books as human characteristics are given to the protagonist possums. The illustrative text shows the possum with anthropomorphic expressions of amusement or surprise on its face that can be interpreted as a mischievous enjoyment of the ‘adventure’. Anthropomorphism is also illustrated in the dexterity of forepaw use. Although possums do use their forepaws to hold items they are not capable of executing some of the deliberate feats with human objects that are illustrated in the books including: holding a spice jar (Oliver 2), squeezing a tube of toothpaste whilst holding another tube in its tail (Oliver 21-22), holding a book open and reading it (Oram title page), and holding a cupcake in both paws, ready to eat (Oram 13). Although the possum is inside the dwelling, the ‘out-there’ is also represented in all the picturebooks.

Playing Possum acknowledges the spaces outside buildings, ‘out there’ in the visual text by depicting both fauna and flora beyond the parameters of the human dwelling. The cover, title page and borders surrounding the text pages give homage to flora by incorporating branches, leaves and eucalypt ‘gumnuts’ and blossoms and include a wide-eyed possum on alternate corners. The world ‘out-there’ outside the home is shown in every illustration.

Possum in the House (Jensen) has a limited view of 'out there' that can only be seen from inside the kitchen and includes trees that can be seen through an opaque, shut kitchen window (Jensen, 4). *Possum Goes to School* (Carter), moves the story from inside to outside as the book comes to a close. The possum is seen running into a sports room (Carter, 24) next to a human constructed garden-bed that contains native and non-native flora. The flora in the playground includes tended grass, non-native trees and small recent growth eucalypt trees. The trees are placed in areas away from buildings and lower limbs are not evident. The playground is controlled and ordered, human animals have designed it to suit their needs. The control that is shown by humans over the boundary they have created is also demonstrated when the 'out-there' is brought inside or represented by human-animals.

Attempts to control the 'out-there' when represented inside human territory are shown with flowers, both native and non-native potted, cut in vases, displayed dried or visually in paintings. These books also portray that the users of the buildings have an interest in the out there through the display of nature books. The science room portrays a place where nature is cared about as long as it is only represented or controlled whilst inside. This is symbolised by artefacts including dried flora, feathers and seashells in a jar, two live goldfish are confined to a small bowl and under the control of humans for food and habitat. A "SAVE THE WHALE" poster ironically highlights environmental awareness for an animal and a habitat far removed from the school, yet in the school yard there is no evidence of hollows or human-made possum boxes to support the possums who inhabit playground.

The conclusions of these books all place the possums in a space that is represented as being satisfactory to the human characters. *Playing Possum* has a dream scene where children are not being kept awake by possums but can reach into hollows to touch the possums "they love so very much". *Possum in the House* concludes with the dry possum curled up looking like a cat in a child's bed next to a teddy bear, despite on the previous pages having successfully both dived into and managed to climb out of the family's toilet bowl. Nevertheless the visually appealing image of a

sleeping possum supports the sympathetic words from the parents and the decision to leave the possum there because he is tired and they feel sorry for them. *Possum goes to School* ends with the possum finding its way up a tree, yawning in an anthropomorphised way and falling asleep on an open fork in a tree, although the teachers were still concerned and the children excited (Carter, 31).

The picturebooks *Playing Possum*, *Possum in the House* and *Possum Goes to School* provide an entertaining reading experience. When analysed from an ecocritical perspective it is evident that facts are sacrificed to provide entertainment. The relationship depicted between the humans and the possums are anthropocentric and the humans are happy when the possums are 'out-there'.

This is demonstrated by the negative reaction of humans when possums are encountered within their artificially imposed boundaries. Yet this viewpoint is changed when the 'invader' is sleeping and is considered to be no longer a threat. The 'out there' that is so vital for possum survival is barely included unless it is for human use.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Beyond subjectivity: The appearances of extinction in Judith

Wright's *Fourth Quarter* (1976)

Joy Wallace and John O'Carroll

“What do I want to write? I don’t know,” wrote Judith Wright in a letter to her biographer, Veronica Brady in 1999 (Clarke & McKinney, 2006, p. 561). With failing health, and her death only a matter of months away, the fact she still wanted to write at all is remarkable. Yet, many critics appear puzzled by her apparent abandonment of poetry-writing, seeing it as a radical departure from earlier positions she held on the role of art in society. Angered by critical neglect of her last three volumes of verse, by misunderstanding and misuse of her early work, by the linguistic turn of postmodern literary theory, and feeling above all a deep mistrust in the wider politics of land rights reconciliation, of land degradation and environmental destruction, and in the very future of the human species, the explanation for Wright’s non-production of verse is probably very simple: she was exhausted and the little energy she had left, she devoted to direct intervention in political causes. This is the principal context of remarks she made on her verse, such as her comment in 1995 that “poetry is not of the essence to me... Too many other things in life” (2006, p. 525).

Making sense of Wright’s apparent ambivalence toward her own verse, and that of others, requires a good deal of patient exploration. While we are the beneficiaries of a deepening tradition of Wright scholarship, we believe there is still much to do. In particular, we suggest that a careful reading of the verse and of her letters and speeches leads us to discover many continuities in her life-work, and her verse. Wright’s poetry engaged with the ethics of the interaction between people and land, and confronted the damage to, and risk of extinction of, species and cultures. In that regard, we contend that Wright did not *simply* abandon poetry in favour of politics, but rather, that she spent the last three decades of her life trialling different modes of articulation and different writing genres. The best example of this, perhaps, is a collection of speeches she gathered together, but organised into two parts: one part on poetry, the other on conservation. The two parts are gathered under the heading of the book’s title, *Going on Talking*. In a thoughtful foreword dated 1991, she writes “Poetry, however misunderstood and misused, remains the voice of feeling and of empathy, without which we deal with our “environment” purely as a system to be exploited for our own ends” (1992, pp. vii-viii). This position

confronts the Romantic-modern and Heideggerian view of the world. This is not merely the idiom of Romantic-modern lament either. Rather, it challenges the reader and writer of lyric poetry, with the horizon not just of destruction or tragic waste, but of horizontality itself, in other words, of extinction. If we read Wright's various writings of the last three decades attentively, we find her casting about for generic adequation for just this challenge. Amidst this experimentation, as we shall see, the lyric form proved more capacious than perhaps Wright feared – than, certainly, critics of the 1970s understood. When we take into account the recent expansion of our knowledge of the lyric provided by Jonathan Culler in his excellent study, *Theory of the Lyric*, we will be in a position to grasp something of the persistent critical and pedagogical trends in writing about her work that frustrated Wright by misunderstanding the essentially poetic nature of her project.

A second step in the direction of grasping Wright's explicitly *political* orientation is also needed. Culler's book richly expands our appreciation of the aesthetics of the lyric, but in order to elaborate the politically engaged context in which we can understand what Wright was attempting in her later poetry, we need also to recruit aesthetic theory beyond the traditionally literary domain. The kind of problems that Wright explored, and the ways she wanted to explore them, situate her project squarely in the broad realm of engaged, or activist art. In this respect, it might have been Wright who wrote, "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist" (Adorno 1997, p. 1). But it was, instead, Theodor Adorno. Like Wright, Adorno was an artist; he was a composer and a precociously successful performer of music. Like Wright, his view of the world was skewed, usefully in our opinion, by his skills and orientations within his favoured artform. Like Wright, he realised that the very horizon of beauty was problematic, and both artists felt deep responsibility for their words and their roles. Where Wright moved from poet to poet-activist, Adorno moved from composer to philosopher. As a philosopher, and as one soundly acquainted with the absurdities of socialist art and literature, he was deeply sceptical of the very possibility of a valuable activist art, no matter how well-meaning. While

we agree that his scepticism was generally well-founded in experience, this only offers an index of the challenge that a fine writer like Wright actually set herself. Wright has been better served by her critics than she realised – there is real strength and interest of scholarship in this area. Of these, we are guided especially by two beautifully produced books, the author-supported *South of My Days* (1998) and the afore-cited *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright* (2006). A fine critical appraisal (even if we do not always agree with its assessments), Shirley Walker's *Flame and Shadow* (1991) offers real insight into the creativity of poetry from the 1970s onwards, especially on how Wright aestheticised her view of language and politics into powerful and deceptively simple verse. Of most direct relevance is Anne Collett's detailed analysis of *Phantom Dwelling* (1985), an essay which took account of Wright's inspiration in Japanese poet, Matsuo Bashō, on the one hand, and of the idea of "late style", on the other. The latter idea is important to us, but where Collett uses the postcolonial critic, Edward Said's, late essays to develop a lateral commentary (as Said himself does in a quite adventurous series of applications), we return to the author Said himself studiously acknowledged as the source of the idea, namely Theodor Adorno himself.

2. The Lyric, Subjectivity, and Beyond

In her *Flame and Shadow*, Shirley Walker argues a trajectory of early inspiration, mid-career crisis, and late inspiration. She notes the emergence, in the entire second half of Wright's writing, of a "sense of whimsy and humour which is utterly foreign to the portentous tone of *The Moving Image* and *Woman to Man*" (1991, p. 153). We think this is unfair to the delicate lyricism of the early works, but we see the need to be aware of shifts of tone and genre in Wright's later works. Walker goes on to argue that from the 1970s collection, *Alive*, onwards, the poetry is "radically different in theme, mood, and poetic texture" (176). Later in this essay, we will qualify this argument, but we acknowledge her discernment of the shifts in the nature of Wright's writing as valuable, and as quite distinct from the cavalier generalisations and dismissals of many of Walker's critical contemporaries.

We too will begin with the early work looking for harbingers of style, of theme, and of texture that develop, or are allowed to fall away, in later works. We see Wright as a complex lyric poet, one who writes lyric verse – and later, who inhabits a lyrical space even in prose – in the face of a world that, as she frequently lamented, neither valued nor understood it. But to appreciate the force of this, we must ask what this lyric orientation is, and what it means today. The well-known poststructural literary critic, Jonathan Culler's recent book, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015), pulls together a "capacious" rather than formally defined account of the genre, treating it as both generically recognisable and as historically situated. He draws together a neo-Hegelian universalising subjectivity and an event-quality in the lyric whereby, on the one hand, the personal utterance is not just personally voiced, but is a situation of wide application, and on the other, its "address" is personal enough to be an event in and of itself.

First, Culler's learned and comprehensive discussion of the lyric assists us in developing an analysis of Wright's deployment of subjectivity that explains its intimate connection with her late style, in Adorno's sense, and incidentally adds further weight to the defence, mounted by Shirley Walker and others, of the poetic quality of Wright's later work, in the face of the kind of criticism made by Vincent Buckley. Culler's analysis of a lyric by Sappho explains how it "is neither the direct expression of a subjectivity newly discovered nor the ritual expression of community values" but rather a song of which the "event quality" makes the listener want to memorise it (2015, pp. 14-15). For us, this captures the mesmerising bluntness and memorability of entire stanzas of Wright's poems, especially the later ones.

Second, Culler's discussion is particularly valuable for its debunking of the persistent critical belief that the "eventness" of a lyric is dependent on its being read as the utterance of a particular fictive persona. In particular, he notes that the dramatic monologue has become, in critical parlance and pedagogy, the default model for the lyric, making us reluctant to accept the poem as a performative event spoken by the

poet (2015, p. 2). In Culler's book, there is much unpicking of the critical tendency to conflate voice and subjectivity that is illuminating for the reader of Wright, and helps explain both the continuities and the developments in her style. Most importantly, it assists us in perceiving the connections between literary criticism of Wright, and Adorno's irritation with music critics who insisted on hearing, in Beethoven's late works, only the elements of an unmediated subjectivity, and were deaf to the very analysis of subjectivity that, for Adorno, is an important element in the "voice" created by the composer in his late style. Similarly, Wright always strove for a mode of address that suggested the wide, and not merely personal, applicability of the situation or topic, while creating a personal event quality that serves to make the poem memorable. It became increasingly complex to sustain and manage the voice of her poems as her early confidence, forged from the responses of her readers, that she "spoke" for many others was dented. Also under attack was her life-long assumption that poetry was a vehicle – for her, the best vehicle – for the expression of meaning and value. Small wonder that (as we foreshadowed in our introduction) she doubted her approach to writing poetry! The frustration evident in her Foreword to the *Collected Poems* appears to be occasioned by the kind of critical and pedagogical narrowing of the nature and scope of lyric discourse that Culler discusses. In his comments on the persistence with which criticism and pedagogy cling to the notion of the fictional speaker as the voice of lyric, Culler adduces several poems, including "Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams, as evidence of the need for a "broader conception of lyric, one not centred on a fictional speaker". He argues that poems like "Red Wheelbarrow" are versions of "epideictic discourse: public poetic discourse about values in this world rather than a fictional world" (2015, p. 115). In the 1940s and 1950s, Wright spoke to and for readers who, like her, took for granted that poetry was about values in this world, but to her grief, the critical horizon shifted, critics and teachers of poetry seemed bent on ridding it of the contexts that give it meaning in the real world, and instead wanted to recruit it as the utterance of a fictional, ahistorical, subjectivity. The concept of epideictic discourse valuably illuminates the way in which a poem's mode of address

may have the personal memorability of an event – the “event quality” Culler discusses – whilst not being a confessional or otherwise autobiographical utterance.

Third, in elaborating his discussion of the lyric’s mode of address, Culler offers yet another observation particularly germane to the defence of Wright’s later poetry as lyric. The event quality of the lyric utterance, he suggests, frequently inheres in its mode of address, which is either apostrophic or hyperbolic or both in its stance (2015, pp. 349-52). Explaining the latter claim, he says that lyrics sometimes demand impossible “action, asking time to stop its course or the winds to blow” and that some poems are themselves “often the most sceptical about their power to achieve what is desired” (2015, pp. 351-52). Indeed, he says, if “lyric is a form where the leap of poetic imagination and scepticism about its efficacy are always implicitly at issue, it is also engaged in the very down-to-earth activity of seducing us with its arrangements of letters, sounds, and silences” (2015, p. 352). These three things – the universalising subjective-inner impulse, the mode of address, and the underlying doubt – are at stake in all Wright’s work, and in her late silences too. She has, as Collett rightly says, a “poetic sensibility” and in her prose, this sensibility “survives” (2013, p. 256).

Poets, more than most, are keenly aware of the limits of the force of their works in wider society. They are also, in certain cases like Wright’s, aware of its value. In the early work, where Wright felt more assured of her heritage’s place, and her own place, in the world, her modes of address are simple and direct, presuming that they speak for others. We see this in the first collection of verse, *The Moving Image*, but as we do so, we notice that even in some of these poems, another, darker, doubting questioning is latent. In “The Company of Lovers” (1994), in the midst of war, the military company is displaced by an imagined company of lovers. In this, to be sure, we see the hyperbolic statement of the impossible, but there is surely also a note of gender political doubt in these lines:

Death marshals up his armies round us now.

Their footsteps crowd too near...

Grope in the night to find me and embrace,

For the dark preludes of the drums begin,

And round us, round the company of lovers,

Death draws his cordons in. (1994, p. 7)

In these lines a Levinasian face-to-face challenge, in this case, a variety of lyricism, is pitted against the impersonal realities of international warfare.

In this collection too, we find two themes that, with considerable modulation, will form lasting themes in Wright's lifework. These are the themes of Indigenous-settler relation to land, and the theme of land conservation. In "Bora Ring," the poem takes the form of a Modernist lament. Wright's awareness of white settler culture involves from the outset a sense of its destructiveness:

The song is gone; the dance

Is secret with the dancers in the earth,

The ritual useless, and the tribal story

Lost in an alien tale. (1994, p. 8)

The power of the poem pricks the conscience of the white settler beneficiaries, of which number Wright herself is counted. This early form of lyric reverie did not prove adequate for Wright and her later work on reconciliation engaged more directly with the living. Her lament, however, takes on savagely critical dimensions even in her first volume, where in "Nigger's Leap, New England," she recalls in vivid terms a massacre, as in just the kind of hyperbolic and apostrophic terms Culler outlines, she invokes the night to "Swallow the spine of range" and to "Be dark" and to "Make a cold quilt across the bone and skull / that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff" (p. 15). The lament, even in this early collection, takes on a harder political edge, posing a challenge to the well-being of anyone who thought simply to enjoy a sea view from a cliff-top. In "Trapped Dingo," the poet lapses perhaps into a deeper Romanticism about a dying dingo, whose "sunlight hide" is "twisted in steel, and spoiled with red" (1994, p. 9). Meantime, from the surrounding hills, its mate yowls,

and Wright as poet imagines herself joining in the calling: “Did you hear / my silent voice take up the cry?” she asks (1994, p.9).

The poems, loved by generations of adults and children, which apparently lionise settler cultural figures are not as simple as many believe, either. While “Bullocky” (1994, p. 17) perhaps is a straight lament for a lost vocation, “South of My Days” is nothing of the sort (1994, pp. 20-21). Her letters reveal that Wright herself came to bitterly resent these poems being used as representative of her work, and eventually, she verged on withdrawing them altogether.

We will not trace the rest of the early work, although we note that the equally successful *Woman to Man* collection developed a far richer sense of the damage that people were doing to the environment, with poems mixing memory with observations about willow-choked creeks, and invasive European plants destroying natural environments. This collection, too, began to dwell on far less sentimental portraits of damaged life than we find in the first collection. “Metho Drinker,” for instance, is a harrowing portrait of alcoholism and homelessness. In noting all the things we have, however, we hope to build on the sense that Wright’s work is not simply a story of radical shifts and abandoned projects. On the contrary, it is a story of development and of persistence. This is the background to our treatment of late style.

3. Late Style: Adorno

As we have noted, Collett’s application of the idea of late style to Wright’s work is mediated by Edward Said. Collett picks up the formal features Said’s rephrasing of Adorno emphasises: a certain oppositionality and intransigence, as well as of deliberate anachronism and contradiction (2013, p. 246). The sense of it, she writes (after Said), “comes with a great artist’s realisation of approaching death” and an artist who works in such a style is “unreconciled” (pp. 246-47). Collett suggests that one interpretation of Wright’s apparent refusal to write further verse lies in just this form of “extreme exile”: Collett (rightly in our view), does not accept that this is what

Wright was doing. This leads Collett, at this point of her argument (pp. 247-49) and then again near its end (p. 256), to qualify her endorsement of the notion of late style in Wright. If that were all there were to the notion of late style, we would agree with her, and be able to leave the matter there.

But Adorno's version of late style is more useful and more significant than a series of formal features assigned to an artist's biographical trajectory. There are a number of features of his quite disparate treatment of the topic that are not just helpful as analytic prisms, but also, prove strangely symmetrical to Wright's own preoccupations and orientations as an artist responsible for her work. To make sense of these, we need to tease Adorno's ideas out in a few different contexts, and be able to acknowledge the variety of ways in which he raised the problem of late style.

To start with, we need to inquire as to why something like "late style" would actually matter. If it were just a series of stylistically interesting commonalities of great artists at career's end, it would have little more than curiosity value concerning the psychology of the ageing artist. Adorno's work on art and artists always sought to evaluate their achievements in terms initially of an autonomously conceived aesthetic domain, but one which existed nonetheless in a social context of power relations. For Adorno, great pieces of art revealed something about the nature of their worlds. Beyond this, though, the late style works he evokes reveal not just the nature of their social and cultural worlds, but offer insights into the very aesthetic domains themselves.

As a musician, Adorno was deeply offended by a very common biographical interpretation of Beethoven's music. He was angered further by the commodification effects of culture, especially the "great conductor" tradition of the twentieth century, as mediated by radio and then by long player recording. His lacerating account of Toscanini is an example of this. While he never devoted a book to it, Adorno repeatedly returns to Beethoven, and especially Beethoven's later work, to attack

those who reduced it merely to psychology. This has particular relevance to Wright's work, and to the view of her as somehow having failed to maintain her early project, of abandoning her interest in and value of art. The letters and interviews of the last years of her life do show exhaustion, physical exhaustion. They do *not* show that she ceased to value the work of art, or its role in society. What they do show, however, is that – as with Adorno – the task of creating art that is adequate to its responsibility in a society where its reception is uncertain is greater than ever.

The late style, Adorno writes, is not mature like sweet fruit, nor rounded and full, but rather is, "furrowed, even ravaged...bitter and spiny" (Adorno). Attacking the psychologico-biographical version of this, he says:

The usual view explains this with the argument that they are products of an uninhibited subjectivity, or better yet, "personality," which breaks through the envelope of form to better express itself, transforming harmony into the dissonances of its suffering. (Adorno)

Studies of the late Beethoven, he says, "seldom fail to make reference to biography and fate. It is as if, confronted with the dignity of human death, the theory of art were to divest itself of its rights and abdicate in favour of reality" (Adorno). Adorno's work, despite some incorrect caricatures, frequently offers nuanced interpretations which are carefully situated, socially, and yet also aesthetically astute. He does not, as may first appear, simply reject all psychological explanation, but rather, insists on both a subjective and objective account. Adorno addresses this issue in many places, perhaps most clearly in "Subject-Object," where having shown different orders of lyrical subjectivity (the "I" in the poem, the subjectivity in the poem), and how the artwork nevertheless is also an object, then says:

Subjectivity, however, though a necessary condition of the artwork, is not the aesthetic quality as such but becomes it only through objectivation; to this extent subjectivity in the artwork is self-alienated and concealed. (Adorno 2004, p. 231)

This is what Beethoven resolutely refuses to reconcile: “objective is the landscape, subjective is the light in which – alone – it glows into life. He does not bring about their harmonious synthesis” (Adorno).

Finally, the “alienation” in Adorno’s other major essay on late style, “Alienated Masterpiece,” concerns just these terms of existence of art itself. The alienated masterpiece in question is Beethoven’s late mass, the *Missa Solemnis*. At stake this time, though, is what Adorno sees as a kind of avoidance. Beethoven, the conqueror of worlds, suddenly avoids the triumphalism, not so much of his own work (though that too), as of the very Romanticism that framed it:

But what compelled Beethoven, that immeasurably deep human being in whom the power of subjective creation rose to the hubris of the human being as the creator to the opposite of this, to self-limitation? It was certainly not the psychology of this man who could traverse at one and the same time the composition of the *Missa* and the composition of works entirely its opposite. It was rather a pressure in the thing itself....Here we find something common to both the *Missa* and to the last quartets in their intellectual structuring. They share a common avoidance. The musical experience of the late Beethoven must have become mistrustful of the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, the roundness of symphonic successes.... (Adorno, 2000, pp. 315-16)

If we can accept Adorno’s explanation for the peculiar intensities of Beethoven’s late style, it suggests that in Wright’s case, we can expect to find it emerging in a related way in her work too. Adorno does not find the late style in just one text, nor even in just a couple of years: he traces it in a variety of places and over a period of years: from the over-emphatic *Credo* in the *Missa* (Adorno p. 313), his sometimes savage piano sonata (opus 106), the fractured and at times anguished late quartets (especially op. 131-134), and even (for Adorno at least) the late Diabelli variations. We believe the same thing is true of Wright’s work, and in that respect we tend to endorse a view like Shirley Walker’s that something of a new

problematism crept into Wright's work far earlier than *Phantom Dwelling*. It is to these mid-period poems that we now turn.

4. Extinction, Rupture, and Reverie

In her poem, "Extinct Birds," Wright poses a question, and then appears to answer it. Summoning up the spectre of the nineteenth-century Australian poet, Charles Harpur, she describes his writing in "hope and in love" about the birds of the forests. Now, though, these "birds long vanished with the fallen forest" are still available to us in the poetry, but this is undermined by Wright's description of them as being "in copper plate on unread pages" (Wright 1994, p. 179). The final stanza notes that the poet thought himself immortal, and then, ironically, even quizzically remarks of this that indeed, "is he not immortal, where I found him....the poet vanished, in the vanished forest, /among his brightly tinted extinct birds?" (p. 180).

We have seen the earlier idiom of modernist lament in poems like "Bora Ring" and "Half-caste Girl." In our view, this intensifies in *The Gateway* (1953), where poems like "Eroded Hills" name the object of their mourning more directly. Walker cites "Nameless Flower" (1955) to note how Wright begins to develop a commentary on language itself, and its inadequacies in relation to its object (Walker 1991, pp. 155-57). With "Extinct Birds," however, we see a deliberate lightness that does not befit its theme. The tone in this poem, gently sardonic, is the more disturbing for this reason. For us, this poem marks the onset of Wright's overt realisation that extinction itself was the issue. Most of the rest of this collection, though, are – just like Harpur's own works – renderings of birds into art and are, indeed, often light-hearted.

The letters and other documents now available to us offer useful insights into the transformations in Wright's priorities: certainly, with the 1970s, came a new, leaner, and simpler style of verse. While Walker finds much to criticise in *Shadow* (1970), this is the collection where Wright experiments with what can only be called a plain

style. This tendency had already disconcerted critics like Vincent Buckley, and to such a mind, none of what followed really counted in her oeuvre as art. But *Shadow* (1970), *Alive* (1973), *Fourth Quarter* (1976), and *Phantom Dwelling* (1985) all experimented with style, content and form, and did so not just because of “what” Wright felt she needed to say (though with the lyric poet, this is always part of it), but also, their new forms demanded, to paraphrase Adorno, a new kind of creativity, one that, as Walker remarks, she actually managed to find (p. 176).

The kind of creativity explored in *Shadow* (1970) appears to require, for Wright, a more overtly analytical approach to subjectivity than she had previously felt necessary. The volume opens sombrely, with “Two Sides of a Story”, in an enactment of the unassimilated orders of subjectivity that reveal the rupture of the colonial condition (1994, pp. 255-58). The poem plainly maps the different subjectivities, European and Indigenous, by allocating them two different, named, sections. In a new departure for Wright, she attempts to psychologise the Indigenous perspective by showing how the complex motivations of the Indigenous man, stemming from his status as songman for his people, bind him strangely to the European man who is setting up as a hero to be sung. While the end of both the explorer, Kennedy, and the Indigenous man who accompanied him, is death, the ironies play differently over each. Certainly, Kennedy’s heroic pretensions are punctured for the reader, but his own subjectivity appears to stay intact to his death and there is no question mark over his name for posterity. In contrast, the Indigenous man must struggle between two names and identities, his own tribal name, Galmahra, and the name given him by the colonisers, Jacky Jacky. With his adopted European hero gone, his occupation as songman is destroyed and the poem ends in a graphic image of extinction, with the man grasping his own death, a burning log, caught between his unresolved dual subjectivities of Galmahra and Jacky Jacky. For this reason, we do not agree with Walker in her criticism of the diction of this part of the poem as “too prosaic” (1991, p.175).

Elsewhere in the volume, the poet performs the anatomy of subjectivity on herself. Throughout *Shadow*, she casts about her for a subjectivity that will fit, in her state of personal and socio-political dislocation following McKinney's death, when she was also suffering from the angst of the intellectual during the nuclear age. Unusually for her, she experiments with the subjectivities of past figures from history or myth: Eurydice, Heloise, Rosina Alcona (the last a character from Emily Brontë's fictive kingdom, Gondal). The uncertainty over poetic subjectivity may also be revealed by the experimentation, in several poems, with a kind of gnomic voice. The loss of confidence that she is any longer speaking for others could explain the reaching back to a traditional, impersonal and generalising voice.

Wright's next published volume, *Alive* (1973), seems poignantly to be a series of fractured attempts to return to past sources of the *heimlich*, while discovering all the while a sharper sense of alienation. Again, poetic subjectivity is bound up with the emotional vicissitudes of the quest. The volume is bookended by two poems that measure the journey from a rediscovered homeliness to a new, bitter alienation. Again, too, the thematic or topical complexities are met by a restlessness over form and convention, as Adorno would find inevitable. The volume opens with "Habitat", which finds something of the fresh, confident interpersonality of the seventeenth-century divine, George Herbert, in the midst of rehearsing a theme akin to the traditional *topos* of the body and soul dialogue, with the long-inhabited house sheltering the dislocated spirit and giving it a renewed sense of belonging (1994, pp. 297-309). Yet, by the last poem in the volume, "The Slope", the poetic subjectivity has been riven by doubt and the poem is a kind of medieval *psychomachia* of warring impulses cloaked under a fable of a tortured landscape and a division between land and people (1994, pp. 336-37). In between, the poems journey back to the past only to show, in a mood far from nostalgic, the impossibility of recapturing it. In "Falls Country", there is a momentary return to a pastoral vision of unity between land and people but it is neither heroic nor ideal. The land and people are seen as united only in being tentative and fragile - the poet's remembered aunt and

uncle are “reluctant as leaves” in a pastoral pragmatics of quiet adaptation, which is, in any case, long gone (1994, pp. 328-20).

Two poems in *Alive*, “Oriole, Oriole” and “Reminiscence”, relate the matter of poetic subjectivity overtly to the theme of extinction in a way that prepares the reader for what is to come in Wright’s next volume, *Fourth Quarter* ((1976). The theme of the impotence of art in the face of the extinction of species is picked up from where it was first announced, in “Extinct Birds” (1962), but now Wright is bent on relating it to her own explorations of subjectivity. “Oriole, Oriole” shows the poet still relatively secure in her subjectivity, despite the melancholy awareness of the vanished oriole from her acres (1994, p. 318). She still trusts her remembered observation, and her power to record what she saw, and while the vanished oriole may imply species vulnerability, this is not thematised. There is no doubt that the oriole, though now gone, did exist. But in “Reminiscence”, the surface charm and lightness only throws into relief an underlying anxiety that infects even memory and the observing subject. Whereas “Oriole Oriole” was based on an observation of the poet that is not in doubt, in “Reminiscence”, the huge profusion of different kinds of parrots has no certain existence for the poet. The catalogue of the various types is not introduced even by an account of someone else’s literal observation, but rather by the quotation, by her father, of an old neighbour who, when “asked for difficult detail in his stories would exclaim ‘Madam, you might as well / ask me to enumerate the parrots’”. There follows a breathless roll-call of types of the species, but no certain sighting, or even memory of a sighting. The only existence of the parrots is figurative; they recede into the “coloured country” the poet invokes in the first line, with its implicit doubt over whether the landscape is only “coloured” by nostalgic memory. The last line, “Parrots! They were something to remember”, leaves the subjectivity of the memory (the poet’s? Her father’s? The old neighbour to whom her father referred?), ambiguous. The deliberate lightness of tone floats the popular meaning of the phrase – the parrots are a sight to behold, something worth remembering – over the grimness of the literal meaning: the parrots were only the stuff of memory now, with no real existence (1994, pp. 329-30).

5. *Fourth Quarter*: Magic Without Synthesis

The disconcerting lightness of tone heard in “Reminiscence” does still occasionally sound in *Fourth Quarter*, but it is only an element in an experimentation with form and convention more comprehensive even than in *Shadow* and *Alive*. Following Adorno, we think that this formal restlessness – with its concomitant demystification of artistic subjectivity – is connected to the artist’s social, political and ecological anxieties. The rupture we find in *Fourth Quarter* goes to the heart of our departure from Walker’s interpretation of the volume (1991, pp. 185-94), and it requires close and patient commentary. Her analysis of the poems situates them within an abstract philosophical debate, drawn from Romanticism, over human encounter with the mutability of nature. She thus finds reconciliations of a philosophical kind in the poems. Our perception of the unity of Wright’s writing project means that we find, in *Fourth Quarter*, a confrontation with the extinction of species that cannot be accommodated within a Romantic acceptance of mutability. The poet may well be able to accept her own ageing and changing as inevitable, as Walker argues, but it would be another matter to accept the influence of colonialism on Indigenous peoples and on the landscape, with its flora and fauna, as likewise natural and inevitable. Wright would never, did never, accept such a thing.

To the contrary, in a preliminary move, Wright invokes nature’s power and its magic and apparently abandons the lyric in its favour. A number of the poems in *Fourth Quarter* relentlessly confront extinction and do so whilst also sustaining the anatomy of poetic subjectivity that Wright has performed from *Shadow* onwards. These manoeuvres occur through a final, determined essay on the lyric mode and they complete the rupture of the Romantic-modern stance that Wright has engaged in since *Shadow*. The first two poems of the volume, the eponymous “Fourth Quarter”, and “Easter Moon and Owl”, use lyric apostrophe and hyperbole to signal a point of no return for humanity and nature, and establish the tone for the rest of the poems. In “Fourth Quarter”, the typical lyric address is reversed and the poet, instead of instructing or exhorting nature – the moon – imagines the moon

commanding her. Rather than confirm a Romantic connection between herself and nature, she traces a sharp disjunction, telling the moon that while it will return from its fourth quarter, she will not be back this way again - so, if she is to effect anything, she must not yield to the moon's imagined direction that she should "give in" (1994, p. 241). The disruption to lyric subjectivity that this suggests is confirmed by "Easter Moon and Owl", which, in its explicit yielding of the traditionally conceived lyric mode, may be said to reverse the abjuration of magic uttered by that famous ageing artist, Prospero. For, the abandonment of lyric, as commonly understood, does not mean the abandonment of poetry; rather, poetry retrieves its ancient connection with magic and is to be permitted to curse – yet, it is still to be recognised as poetry while its maker begs to be allowed to be "hag, but poet" (1994, pp. 241-42).

To complete the manoeuvre described in the preceding paragraph, we then realise that even Wright's self-confessed departure from the lyric is only apparent. Jonathan Culler insists that the ritualistic element is as integral to lyric as the mode of address and the event-quality, and cites Northrop Frye's linking of *melos* to charm and magic (2015, p. 351). In the rest of *Fourth Quarter*, this new, ancient *lyric* poetry is still to be a matter of experimentation. There is a real sense that Wright appears to be finding her poetic bearings anew, thus late in her career, in these poems. She casts about amongst the conventions of Romantic-modern poetry, earlier poetry, and her own past practices, sometimes accepting, sometimes rejecting – with the end results of destabilisation and ambivalence. At times (in "Tightrope", for example), she appears comfortable with figurative language; at others, she undercuts its pretensions to convey worthwhile meaning. Sometimes, she uses, without overt self-commentary or implicit irony, the projection of the microcosmic onto the macrocosmic, typical of the heroic mode. In "Remembering Michael", her tribute to the Australian poet, Michael Dransfield, who died in 1973 at the age of twenty-four, she makes the projection explicit in the first lines of the poem:

When you were dying, we couldn't stop thinking of you,
counting what we had of you
letters, kisses, poems.

They tasted chemical-strange. So did the world.

The body of the poem is an account of a plane journey. In it, she expands the idea of the "chemical-strange" taste of the world in the imminence of the young poet's death, and concludes:

That wild copper mare of a sunset
reared right out of this world.

Flanks stabbed by chimneys,
acidic smoke in its veins,
kicking the sun's last arc

to death. (1994, pp. 355-56)

Yet, elsewhere, in "Interface III", she sketches a cosmic frame around her observations of nature, only to dismantle it. She spends the body of the poem tracing an analogy between the tendency of whales to beach themselves and humanity's tendency to self-destruction, yet ends, deprecatingly, with:

But this is to mourn a whale -
only a whale. (1994, pp. 345-47)

Nor are these isolated examples. Wright accomplishes a deftly ironic and amused exercise on the theme of the vanity of human wishes in "Notes on Canberra", and a wryly postcolonial account of Olympian revels in "Party with the Gods".

6. Late Style in *Fourth Quarter* vis-à-vis the Early Works

In the midst of what we see as deliberative uncertainty about form, convention, voice, Wright achieves, in some of the poems, a disillusioned subjectivity that presents a bleak vision of extinction. In these poems, we most clearly we see Adorno's "late style", something which may be illustrated by comparing the poems with earlier explorations of similar themes. In "Platypus", Wright addresses the

extinction of animal species in a distinctly different poetic voice from the one used in “Extinct Birds” (1962). The sardonic reference to the Romantic poetic pretensions of Charles Harpur, which blurred the focus on the extinction of birds, is gone. Instead, there is a recognition of the link between the destruction of habitat and the fate of species. While the species platypus is not actually extinct, the poet perceives that the car-choked rivers and contaminated waters of its former habitat could spell disaster, so that the reference, in the last line, to “the ripples of your wake” plays on the double meaning of “wake”. For the poet, this means that there is no possibility of a Romantic identification, either with the platypus glimpsed years before, or the girl who glimpsed it: unlike, for example, Wordsworth’s famous recreations of earlier nature and earlier self in *The Prelude*. Here, the orders of subjectivity are kept coolly distinct, in a way typical of Adorno’s notion of late style. There is the remembered self from long ago, there is the older self who prosaically picks up a pen to record a past memory, and there is the long-vanished platypus; there is no artistic reconciliation amongst the three (1994, pp. 368-69). To reiterate what Adorno said of Beethoven’s late style, there is no “harmonious synthesis” but a recognition of different orders – “objective is the landscape, subjective is the light in which - alone - it glows into life”.

Our second example, “The Dark Ones”, represents the end point of Wright’s poetic exploration of the fate of Indigenous Australians under colonial rule. It is a graphic reminder of the truth of the point made by these Australians that, for them, there is no “postcolonialism”. The stance of “The Dark Ones” is quite different from the much earlier “Bora Ring”, a Romantic-modern lament for a vanished culture. There is no longer any special, privileged “lyric” voice available to the poet, who elides any sense of her separateness from the general company of non-Indigenous Australians. She creates a sense of the ethical encounter between the two cultures that has a new intensity in her work. It is akin to what the philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, calls the face-to-face relation, in which the other is faced and recognised, not assimilated, by the self. Whereas the earlier poems we examined gave a Romantic-modern existence to Indigenous Australians by virtue of the voice of the lamenting lyric poet,

here, the challenge to white Australians is precisely that the processes of destruction have produced people who are indeed still alive, but in themselves material reminders of the extinction of cultures. The lyric mode of poetry might at first seem inadequate to the task of capturing what these people are. Neither apostrophe nor hyperbole will do. Instead, the poet reaches for narrative precision, and the plainest of plain style:

On the other side of the road
the dark ones stand.
Something leaks in our blood
like the ooze from a wound....

Those dark gutters of grief,
their eyes, are gone.
With a babble of shamed relief
the bargaining goes on (1994, pp. 334-35)

Yet, even while seeming to test the lyric mode, the poet appears to settle on a confidence in figurative language that eluded her in other poems in the volume. The metaphor “gutters of grief” pierces through any conventional Romantic storehouse of figures to fashion an image perfectly suited to the pervading theme of a pastoral people lost and displaced in an alien urban milieu. Despite the fears and uncertainties rehearsed in other poems in *Fourth Quarter*, the poet has again found a poetic language to give her the vision of horizons she declared, in “Tightropes”, to be a thing of the past (1994, p. 343). The horizon this time, as we noted early in our discussion, is horizontality itself: extinction.

As Shirley Walker has perceptively argued, Wright explores the uses and limits of poetic language in her poetry of the early 1970s onwards. In *Fourth Quarter*, two poems, “At Cedar Creek”, and the last poem in the volume, “Unpacking Books”, trace the trajectory of her hopes and fears for poetry. “At Cedar Creek” explicitly

quests for the formula for poetry and ends doubtfully, in fear that unpalatable mundanities have “blurred the old radiance” (1994, pp. 379-81). Yet, *Fourth Quarter* ends with the last stanza of a poem dedicated to the West Indian writer, Derek Walcott, with a renewed faith in “essential music” (1994, pp. 388-89). In this context, the visions of extinction in “Platypus” and “The Dark Ones” seem to be occasional and evanescent, as Adorno described the *Credo* from Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*. They are manifestations of late style, which, again as Adorno has argued, is a matter of the stance of the artist to his or her material, rather than of any discernible chronological development. Such a disillusioned stance can perhaps be held only fugitively, if the artist is to be able to go on making art.

6. Conclusions: the Meaning of Late Style

“Poems written in age confuse the years” says the poet in “Dust”, the poem that ends with the reference to the Japanese poet, Bashō’s, “phantom dwelling”, which gives Wright’s last volume its name. This gnomic utterance could be said to capture the confusion of the years that haunts any attempt to isolate late style, which in Adorno’s analysis, is independent of chronology. Thus, the possibility remains open that Wright’s own late style appeared earlier than *Phantom Dwelling* (1985) and that, as we now suggest, she moved beyond it. If Collett’s commentary convinced us that we were not ourselves imagining lyricism where there was none, our impression is distinct from hers. And if both Collett and Walker see a poetic trajectory culminating in a less than lyrical kind of cerebral awareness, we too have found a trajectory of sorts, just one that is different in kind from theirs. That does leave the question, however, of what to make of the “last” late style, the one Collett, for obvious reasons, saw as most fitting of the term, namely, *Phantom Dwelling* itself.

There are certainly present, in this final collection, formal features of late style, and even an explicit espousal of them: Wright tells us in “Brevity”, for instance, that she is trying haiku for its “honed brevities, its inclusive silences” (1994, p. 413). Yet, the very decisiveness about style and form appears largely to bring to an end the

dissection of subjectivity that we have argued, after Adorno, to be the hallmark of Wright's late style in the volumes of the 1970s, culminating in *Fourth Quarter*. The rupture that characterised *Fourth Quarter* is partially covered over. While the theme of extinction does not quite disappear in *Phantom Dwelling*, it slides out of close focus. The settling on particular forms, like the ghazal, often fixes the poet's gaze upon the living. While individual deaths are recorded – an insect that drowns in the poet's glass of wine, the fox shot for killing chickens – the visions of species-extinction that troubled Wright in the 1970s volumes are no more. We can illustrate this by comparing "Reminiscence", from *Alive*, with "Seasonal Flocking", from *Phantom Dwelling*. The uncertainty about the existence of species that haunted the earlier poem is resolved. In "Seasonal Flocking", the parrots are undoubtedly present; the poet finds, in the very certainty of their seasonal return, a desire that vanished human friends would likewise come back (1994, pp. 405-06).

Such an awareness of the transitory nature of the human, indeed, infuses the poems with a compensatory resolve to preserve visual images of living nature. The volume opens with "Four Poems from New Zealand", in which the poet, to be sure, does observe a similar triumph of introduced over native species of birds and plants as she has in earlier poems lamented in Australia. Yet, she ends the set of poems with a vision of the enduringness of rock, and of love for both countries, New Zealand and her own (1994, pp. 293-96). While an occasional poem, "Victims", for instance, or "Small Town Dance", traces a human vulnerability, most use a verbal equivalent of pointillist technique to delineate elements of the Australian landscape and its flora and fauna with a confidence that their enduring quality can be captured. This certainty of form and style is matched, in these poems, by a secure poetic subjectivity very different from the vacillations of the 1970s volumes. The security is not bought of a retreat into Romanticism. That is to say, it is far from the conviction of a Charles Harpur that he could immortalise himself by writing poems about extinct birds, a conviction that we witnessed Wright ironising in that earlier poem. Rather, the easeful subjectivity of these poems about nature suggests a poet who has put self-conscious anxieties about writing and its dangerous pretensions behind

her. The technique is securely imagistic; the poet appears confident that the brief and sometimes elliptical forms chosen are adequate to the task at hand of expressing a “Late Meeting”, as the title of one of the poems would have it, between herself and the natural world she loved.

Still, Collett is right to see “late style” in this collection. Emerging in relief against this backdrop of poetic ease, in particular, the fate of Indigenous Australians continues especially to trouble the poet and once again causes the swerves of form and subjectivity that are the traces of late style. There are just two poems in *Phantom Dwelling* that treat this topic, and they are wildly different. “For a Pastoral Family” revisits the matter of Wright’s family’s dispossession of the native inhabitants, but the tone is resigned and ironic, not accusatory; the poet uses retrospection and reflection rather than the contemporary encounter that made “The Dark Ones” such a stark image of extinction of cultures. The sense of living with their mutual differences informs Wright’s attitude to her own family and her own generation. The legacies of pastoralism and dispossession are boiled down: to “rural security” for Wright’s brothers and for Wright, to merely a “base for poetry / a doubtful song that has a dying fall” (1994, pp. 406-10). Yet, the ironic awareness, the literary sophistication that enabled this last definition of poetry, with its Shakespearean reference, vanish in “River Bend”, itself the epitome of a doubtful song. Here, the focus falls on Indigenous Australians only as one element among several of death and sacrifice. The doubt infects the poetic subjectivity, making it quite different from the confident voice of “For a Pastoral Family”. While the kangaroo and the dog appear to have been observed or heard by the poet, the Aboriginal woman recedes into the realm of legend:

Down by the bend, they say, the last old woman,
Thin, black, and muttering grief,
Foraged for mussels, all her people gone. (1994, p. 416)

In this landscape, only the most powerful forces survive, only the “swollen winter river” that “curves over stone, a wild perpetual voice”.

Yet, this detached, doubtful subjectivity cannot be allowed to have the last word for Wright, with her long commitment to what Sartre, in the early days of *Meanjin*, called “engaged literature”. The final lines of the final poem in the volume, “Patterns”, turn the screw one last time:

“Twisted are the hearts of men – dark powers possess them.
Burn the distant evildoer, the unseen sinner”

That prayer to Agni, fire-god, cannot be prayed.
We are all of us born of fire, possessed of darkness (1994, p. 426)

It is possible, of course, to read these lines, as Collett and Walker both do in their different ways, as an apotheosis of the cerebral scrutiny (what Collett, reasonably enough, calls “reasoned self-reflexivity” (p. 248) Wright undoubtedly conducted in her poetry, from beginning to end: Walker thinks that the scrutiny is of opposing elemental forces, individuation, and mutability. Yet, such a reading seems dependent on the kind of developmental progression Walker (rather than Collett) traces in Wright’s poetry, from *Alive* onwards, a progression we think needs rather more nuance than this. We have suggested, instead, that while there is a topical or thematic constancy in Wright’s poetry throughout, her tendency in the 1970s was to analyse subjectivity and experiment with form, to the extent that, even when she appears to abandon lyric expression, she was in fact refashioning it by testing its capacity to the utmost. The capaciousness of lyric for Wright’s purposes is intimately connected with the epideictic, public nature of its discourse, and with the hyperbolic and apostrophic modes of its address, modes that are never “mere rhetoric”, in the pejorative sense, but rather integral to the event quality that gives Wright’s poetic speech its directness and urgency.

For us, the exhilarating sense of the ad hoc, of the grounding of poetic discourse in the materiality of the poet’s life and concerns, public as much as, if not more than,

private, forces the poems of *Alive* and *Fourth Quarter* free of the kind of Enlightenment narrative of thematic development and maturity that Walker finds in them. We thus read those last lines of “Patterns” differently. Walker finds in them an overt statement of reconciliation of the kinds of opposing forces that, in her reading, Wright has been working progressively to balance in her last three volumes of poetry. To us, though, the spectre of extinction, which Wright has managed to confront in those fleeting manifestations of her late style that we have discussed, hovers over the very end of *Phantom Dwelling*. In setting individual mortality, of humans, creatures and plants, amidst the power of the elements, and in forbidding the detachment that would preserve the innocence of the self while blaming destruction on others, the poet falls silent. But she has left us the creation of a subjectivity that meets Adorno’s condition for the production of ethical art: the admitted implication of the artist in the violence that human history has created.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

**Designing a sonic landscape: A practice-led approach to creating
3-D sound space for screen.**

Dr Damian Candusso

Introduction

Several 3-D feature films that the author has recently been engaged on, including *The Great Gatsby* (Luhmann, 2013) and *The LEGO Movie* (Lord and Miller, 2014), have followed strict schedules and followed a known formula for producing a high quality soundtrack that satisfies the studio, and equally importantly, the cinema audience. With such high profile and financially successful films, it is difficult to argue that the formula for producing these high quality soundtracks needs to be further investigated. *The LEGO Movie* opened in the US with the box office taking in excess of US\$69 million, well above the estimated entire film budget of US\$60 million in a single weekend ([Box Office Mojo](#), 2014).

Many 3-D feature films continue to adhere to traditional 2-D soundtrack methodologies and practices, with the film industry following a steady path of innovation in relation to developments of the soundtrack and in particular soundtrack exhibition. Generally speaking, advancements within the industry have seen an increase in the number of speaker channels over time, for example; mono to stereo to quad surround to 5.1 surround to 7.1 surround and now the introduction of sixty-four channel immersive sound technologies. Although several formats have explored additional sound channels throughout this linear evolution of sound on film including Fantasound, a general trend can be observed. However, does increasing speaker channels increase the immersive experience of film, or can an alternative soundtrack be designed to better immerse an audience?

Previous format limitations were a result of how many sound channels could be accommodated within the available film format of the time; for example, the physical space limitations on 35mm film and 70mm film. However, the introduction of digital film has drastically increased the capacity for sound channels through the DCP film format. Although developments in cinema sound have led to increased sound channels, I question if changing the sound environment can increase the spatial homogeneity between the 3-D image and the soundtrack.

An initial line of enquiry into 3-D sound actually resulted from a single problem that was identified whilst the author was working on the first Australian 3-D animated feature film, *Legend of The Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole* (Snyder, 2010). The problem presented itself through the inability to position sound accurately within z-space (Figure 1).

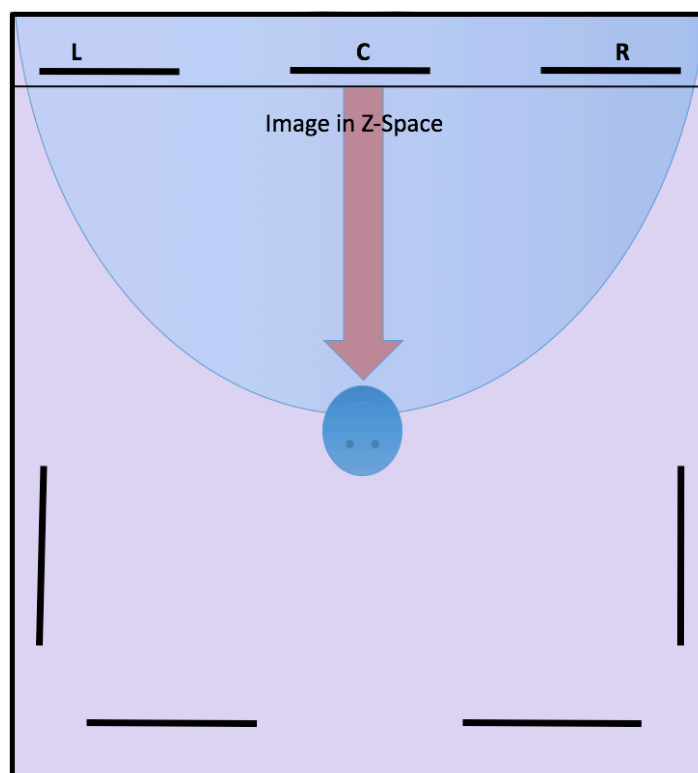


Figure 1: Z-Space

An object could be panned around the room, from left to right of screen or from the front to the rear of the cinema; however, the sound object could not be located within the centre of the room. No matter how the various sound effects were designed and no matter how the objects were panned throughout the 5.1 surround sound space, limitations of the 5.1 format did not allow for the accurate positioning of the sounds along the z-axis. In particular, this was highlighted with a sword tip passing slowly in front of the audience members' noses as the 3-D imagery showed a blade converged off the screen in strong negative parallax (Figure 2).

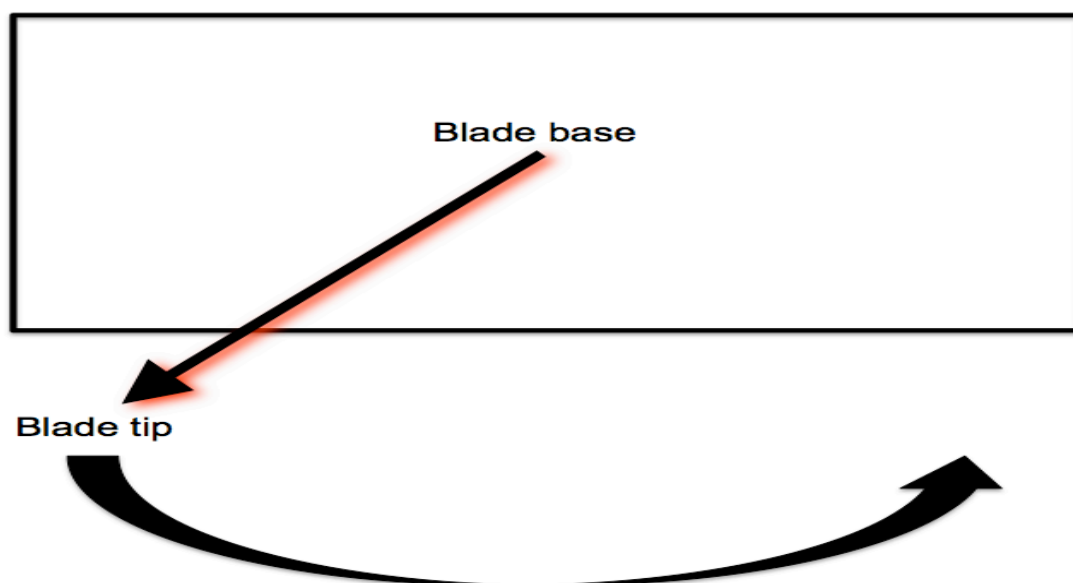


Figure 2: Negative Parallax

The objective was to create the illusion that the sound had volumetric depth that complemented the imagery.

The tip of the blade originated from the neutral parallax (on the screen plane) before extending into negative parallax as it travelled from the screen into the audience. Problems arose when trying to replicate this with various layers of sounds using the parameters of 5.1 panning. Although able to pan the base of the blade as it was anchored on the screen plane, the tip of the blade in strong negative parallax proved extremely difficult. When the sound was panned from the screen into the surround speakers, it became diffused throughout the theatre. To achieve an acceptable outcome, several sound elements were panned independently to create the aural illusion that the overall sound was attached to the blade. This however was a compromise.

Through practice-led investigation, this paper questions the potential immersive environment of the soundtrack through alternatives to loudspeaker playback through the use and portrayal of sound space.

Defining an aural spatial landscape

Gravity (Cuarón, 2013), a film set in space, provides an example of defining sound for space. It is the detail in establishing the environmental vastness that enables the soundtrack to punctuate and accentuate this infinite perception of space portrayed by the visuals. Shot in 3-D, *Gravity* has explored not only the visual medium, but also the sonic medium so that both elements work in unison. As Smalley suggests (Smalley 37), 'A listener needs time to progress from an initial listening encounter with the soundscape to a state of engaging actively and fully in scanning and exploring the spectromorphological and spatial properties on offer.' *Gravity* provides an example of this.

The film begins with a musical crescendo before abruptly stopping to complete silence, reflecting the science of space. In many ways *Gravity* is mixed quite unconventionally, in that the dialogues do in fact pan across screen and beyond, with the characters even panning into the surround speakers. Notably the music is also composed for surround sound with different elements panning throughout the various speakers, at times spinning around the room alongside the camera and dialogues. In an interview for the Soundworks Collection, director Alfonso Cuarón makes particular mention of how the panning of the dialogues and the music helps provide a superior immersive experience (Coleman, 2013). In combination with the atmospheric soundscape, *Gravity* is successful in providing an aural illusion of infinite space by allowing the music and dialogue to pan and make use of all speakers. This was a brave move by Cuarón as it goes against convention. Cuarón made a conscious decision to allow the sound and the speakers to work for the narrative of the film, rather than following traditional mixing practices.

The art of mixing a film is knowing where to direct the audience's attention in relation to the story. In many instances and as history has shown, the direction is always forward towards the screen. *Gravity* is an example of these rules having been broken deliberately. By complementing the unique story and location of the film, this is done

deliberately to orientate the audience with the characters as they are often off screen, floating in space.

Practice-led research

As an exception to norm, *Gravity* provides a remarkable example of suturing the audience with the film landscape (or lack thereof). So how can this work when we are not in space? Through practice-led research various alternative approaches for creating an immersive and homogenous 3-D film soundtrack have been investigated. This includes manipulating the spatial environment of the atmospheres, dialogue and foley, recording sound with localisation considerations in ambisonic and binaural formats, and where recording was not an option, explore digitally synthesised 3-D spatial sound options.

Two films have been selected for this enquiry. These are:

- *Carwash* (Candusso, 2013)
- *Foxed!* (Stewart and Bezaire, 2013)

Through practice-led research I am afforded the luxury of not having to work to any preconceived convention as I investigate the creation of homogenous 3-D spatialisation. This investigation questions whether it is possible to achieve a more immersive, realistic, and homogenous 3-D audio-visual experience through creatively designing a soundtrack beyond existing technologies and methodologies.

Carwash (3-D)

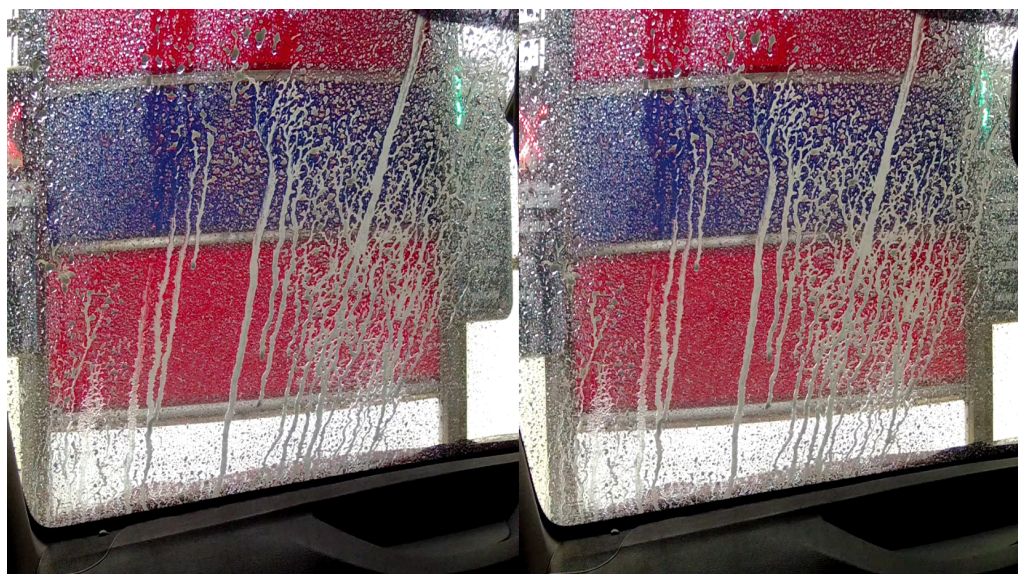


Figure 3: *Carwash* image (side by side 3-D)

Carwash is an original film created by the author. It is a single shot, first person point of view (POV) scene recorded from inside an actual carwash.

Aim

The aim of *Carwash* was to investigate the accurate reproduction of 3-D sound and vision from capture through to exhibition. The limitations of the 5.1 sound format were considered in the conception of the film. Contemporary cinema sound formats provide a canopy effect and *Carwash* exploits this. *Carwash* was purposely created to allow for the simultaneous filming in stereoscopic 3-D whilst capturing the location sound in various formats including binaural stereo and ambisonic B-format, simulating a virtual head. I hypothesise that the virtual head would record vision and sound in 3-D, and when played back, would allow the viewer to see and hear in 3-D.

Method

Filming *Carwash* was a reversal of the industry practice of capturing the best imagery first and considering the sound later. Recording the best sound was prioritised, with the image a secondary consideration. For the purpose of this exercise, my priority was to capture sound recordings that could best replicate 3-D sound whilst maintaining homogeneity with the 3-D imagery. Location sound for 3-D

films is almost never recorded in a 3-D format. *Carwash* embarked on creating a short film-clip that challenged this notion.



Figure 4: Binaural head with 3-D GoPro camera attached and Soundfield microphone

This film was intended to situate the spectator within the environment with a first person perspective. To create the POV (point of view) experience for the viewer, a 3-D camera rig was mounted to a binaural head. This ‘virtual head’ allowed the capture of simultaneous sound and vision, akin to our own two eyes and two ears. There was no post-production or processing made to either the sound or vision, allowing the original recordings to be unadulterated. An additional binaural version of the film soundtrack was created using the software plug-in Auro-Headphones.

Three versions of *Carwash* were created.

- 5.1 version created from the original ambisonic recording. ([click here to watch in anaglyphic 3-D – requires 5.1 sound system](#))
- Binaural version recorded through the dummy head. ([click here to watch in anaglyphic 3D- requires headphones](#))
- Auro-Headphone (synthesized binaural) version created from folding down the 5.1 version. ([click here to watch in anaglyphic 3D- requires headphones](#))

Results and discussion

Having experimented with binaural and ambisonic sound formats prior to this research, I already had experience and an understanding of the capabilities and limitations of each format. However, I had never recorded these audio formats simultaneously with 3-D image capture. Although binaural sound has previously been simultaneously recorded with visuals on films including *Bad Boy Bubby* (de Heer, 1993) and *Souviens-Moi*, (Derobe, 2013) I am unaware of any films that have been recorded and released with an unchanged or unedited original on-set recorded soundtrack. Ambisonic recordings are often used to record atmospheres, but they are then combined with the overall soundtrack.

Carwash was created to synchronously capture 3-D imagery and various sound formats in a simplistic controlled environment. The aim was to accurately explore the reproduction of 3-D sound and vision from capture through to exhibition and this was successfully achieved. The film represents actuality as it was filmed and recorded from a single point of view in a single take. One of the shortcomings of conventional speaker sound systems is that they are unable to render sound accurately within z-space. As 3-D imagery converges off the screen into negative parallax, this creates dislocation as the sound emanates from around the audience, creating a cocoon effect. *Carwash* deliberately capitalises on this by using an environment that is a cocoon. That is, the car represents a cocoon, with the sound of the carwash emanating outside it.

The film contains no dialogue or any additional sound effects, with only the sounds that took place at the location being exhibited. *Carwash* provides an example of successfully creating a homogenous soundtrack and 3-D imagery in 5.1 and two versions of binaural stereo headphone formats.

Although successful in creating a homogenous audio-visual experience, applying the methodology used on *Carwash* to a feature film would be impractical, but not impossible. Having dialogue and/or camera angles with varied use of parallax would

make the capturing of sound very time consuming. This would be most noticeable in the editing process. However, it would be successful, as proven here, for short films.

Foxed!

Aim

Foxed! is a 3-D Canadian production that had a pre-existing 5.1 soundtrack prior to me being granted permission to use the film for the purpose of this investigation. The original 5.1 mix was created conventionally using common film mixing methodologies, in the same manner as a feature film. As noted by Kerins, 'most dialogue continues to reside in the front centre channel, and many filmmakers still have some reservations about using the surround channels too aggressively.' (Kerins 71) The original sound mix demonstrated many of the shortcomings of contemporary surround sound formats used with 3-D film. ([Click here to view the original stereo version of the film](#))

The practice-led research objectives of considering this film were to create a binaural headphone version of an immersive sound mix. The aim was to:

- Create a more immersive film through manipulating the existing soundtrack.
- Create a soundtrack that is homogenous with the 3-D imagery.
- Support the point-of-view shots aurally to better situate and immerse the audience in the first person.

Method

In the original approach to the remix of *Foxed!*, I intended to create all pan data in a 5.1 version, and then through the use of plug-ins, fold down the mix into a binaural version. It was intended that all 3-D spatial information from the 5.1 version would be compatible, thus saving time and providing an efficient workflow. After several early mixing tests, this methodology proved to be unsuccessful, as the z-axis information did not translate into the headphone mix. This necessitated creating a mix natively in the binaural format. Through the creation of a binaural stereo headphone mix, the

film intended to emulate sound within a 3-D space, with panning in the x, y and z-axes as appropriate with the 3-D imagery

Results and discussion

All raw-sounds were supplied from the studio that created the original soundtrack. However, all mix data including volume, reverb, equalisation, compression and all effects were not supplied. This allowed the film to be remixed without knowing any original settings, or having any preconceived judgment.

Foxed! (Binaural - 3-D remix)

Foxed! was never intended to have a binaural soundtrack release and as such, the supplied sound recordings were not in the binaural format. All supplied sounds were a combination of standard monophonic and stereo files. Although conventional for loudspeaker formats, the binaural format requires that sounds be recorded (encoded) using a specific binaural stereo recording configuration. The challenge was to create a binaural soundtrack from non-binaural encoded audio.

Re-recording every sound again in binaural was not an option. Instead, I manipulated the original recordings using computer software processing. In some isolated instances, I re-recorded a few key sounds where absolutely necessary, including some of the original dialogue, using the custom-built binaural head microphone (**Figure 5**). The recordings were necessary as the binaural plug-in failed to reproduce much of the spatial positioning accurately within z-space.



Figure 5: Custom made binaural head using mannequin head, silicon ears and condenser microphones inside ear canals.

Creating the binaural mix required a complete remix from the original source files and also necessitated the wearing of headphones for the entire mixing process. A binaural mix must factor in all pan and spatial data necessary to resemble 3-D positioning of sound using only two channels. This posed many challenges including track routing, reverb usage, plug-in efficiencies and other restrictions.

Creating 3-D dialogues for headphones.

In cinema it is a relatively simple process to down-mix from 5.1 (or any other surround format) to a stereo version, as all of the tracks are ‘folded down’ – that is, the left, centre, right, surround and LFE tracks are folded down to create a single stereo mix. Although the headphone mix of this film is technically stereo, it is also binaurally encoded and thus the fold down from 5.1 does not translate as the y and z-axes 3-D spatial information is lost. A stereo signal contains only the left and right information (the single x-axis); however stereo binaural is encoded with spatial information for all three axes.

The dialogues of *Foxed!* provided the greatest challenge for the binaural soundtrack. In addition to conveying the narrative, the dialogue was mixed to provide a spatially accurate relationship with the 3-D imagery. This is evident when the two foxes are looking for Emily (1 min 5 sec), when Emily hears the discussion between her mother and the fox that has replaced her (2 min 30 sec), and also during the opening of the film. During the opening, the audience is introduced to Emily through hearing her breaths. These were mixed spatially to mirror the localisation of the imagery. One of the greatest challenges is highlighted through the title sequence and again when the audience experiences Emily’s point of view through vision and sound as she runs up the stairs (1 min. 34 sec.). Because the dialogue was originally recorded in Canada, there was no option but to use the original breaths, and artificially create the effect of the breaths coming from the viewer’s point of view. A combination of mixing techniques, including reverberation manipulation and also a third party binaural plug-in (H3-D Binaural Spatializer –v2.1.2 by Longcat.), was used to create this illusion.

The dialogue for this scene was duplicated onto two separate mono tracks. One track was reserved for the POV shots, and the other track for all other shots of Emily. This enabled the freedom to easily dedicate separate pan, reverb and binaural spatial settings independently of each track.

As Emily arrives at her home (1 min. 38 sec), she is separated from her mother by a glass window. From inside the house, her mother is unable to see or hear Emily as the glass is characteristic of a one-way mirror. The approach to this scene was to not only use sound localisation, but also to portray and replicate the acoustic spaces based on the image and the narrative. The original dialogues from the film were re-recorded using a combination of convolution and binaural recording techniques with the dummy head microphone. **Figure 6** below shows the binaural head in a room that is separated by glass doors from the speaker replaying the sound.

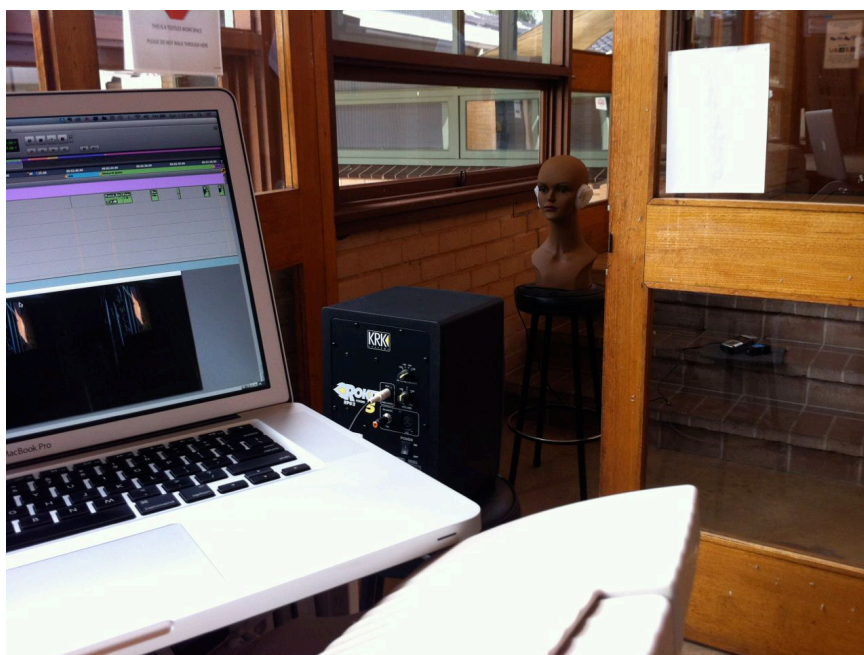


Figure 6: Convolution binaural recording of dialogue through glass – dummy head in distance

The convolved dialogues for the mix include a combination of synthesised 3-D spatialisation and 3-D binaural recordings captured in a room resembling the acoustic space as prescribed by the visuals. Gierlich mentions that through binaural post-processing, sound engineers can play a creative role by inventing new sound

situations above and beyond merely recording the original sound situation as authentically as possible. (Gierlich 227) This practice-led research demonstrated that processing beyond binaural post-processing was necessary. All of the spatialisation of Emily's dialogue during the opening scenes was synthesised using plug-ins; however, once Emily arrives back at her home and is peering through the window, the dialogue is a binaurally recreated re-recording from the original film. Not having access to the original cast necessitated that I consider my available options in creating dialogue within the 3-D space. Using a combination of binaural synthesis and capturing the dialogue through the binaural head provided the required spatial results.

Notably, the primary factor that enables the dialogues to be presented in a 3-D space is the labour-intensive heavy manipulation of post-production effects. This includes the use of filtering, equalisation and reverb qualities, including spread and tonality.

***Foxed!* Conclusion**

Foxed! was remixed in the binaural format in order to investigate the effectiveness of creating a more immersive mix; of creating sound that homogeneously matches the 3-D imagery within z-space; and of situating the audience within the first person perspective for the POV shots. Although providing different results, the remix offered a more immersive mix than the original version.

The binaural remix provides a more homogenous audio-visual experience than the 5.1 version as sounds could be situated with more accuracy along the z-axis. Although certain elements were effective in the 5.1 version, the binaural version provided a more immersive and more homogenous experience with the 3-D visuals. There was not a single solution in providing an effective binaural mix. Plug-in processing and additional re-recording were needed on various shots and this added to the complexity of the mix. This complexity also meant that the binaural mix required far more time to create than a conventional 5.1 mix.

The limitations of the investigation included working with pre-recorded sounds and not having the original sounds recorded in the binaural format.

Conclusion

Through practice-led research the author challenged contemporary feature film mixing practices and methodologies. This approach allowed an investigation into creating a more immersive, realistic and homogenous 3-D audio-visual experience without the restrictions of commercial film practices. The remixes exploited the opportunity to pan all elements within the soundtrack, including dialogue and foley.

Remixing in the binaural format demonstrated that a more homogenous soundtrack can be obtained compared to the original releases by panning all sound elements including dialogues. Using an interpretation of Smalley's space zones, (**Figure 7**) as sounds move from 'panoramic space' to 'circumspace' within the 5.1 format, the definition in the sounds' positional rendering is lost. Sounds that are located in the 'panoramic space' have convincing acoustic depth in the 5.1 format, with the atmospheres from all clips providing examples of this. (Smalley 48) If a sound pans quickly through these spaces, the 5.1 format can also be effective in providing homogeneity.

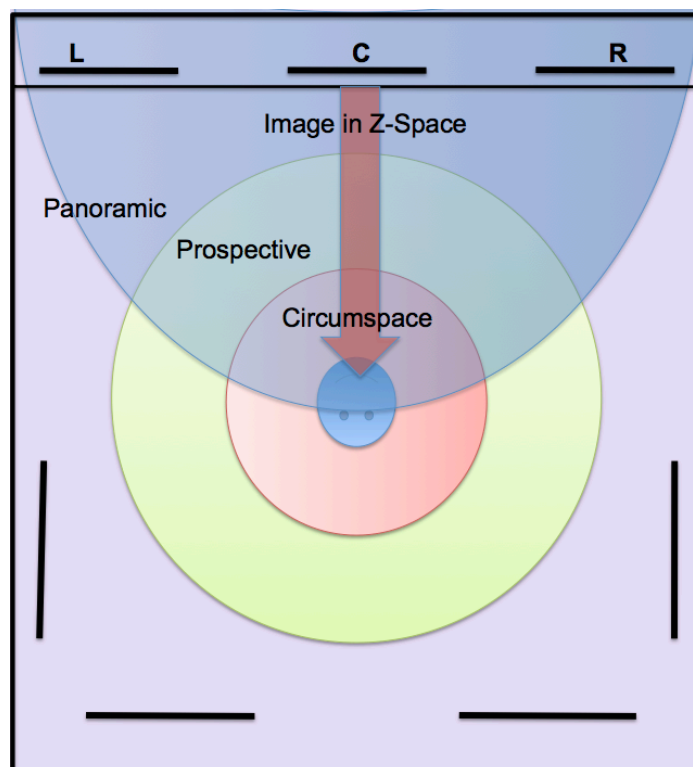


Figure 7: Z-Space imagery with space zones

The panning of sounds from panoramic in front of the listener to circumspace and then through panoramic behind the listener, is also effective in providing the illusion of sounds passing through these spaces, with *Foxed!* providing several examples. This includes the sparks at the beginning of the film and also Emily running during the opening title card. In very specific cases, the 5.1 format can work effectively in providing homogeneity for the entire soundtrack, not just individual elements, if a film is created without z-space action or dialogue, and therefore no sound in the circumspace as with *Carwash*. This takes advantage of the cocoon effect of speaker formats.

Creating the various headphone remixes required extensive individual attention. *Carwash* was an original film that allowed the sound to be recorded specifically for the 3-D medium whereas *Foxed!* contained an original soundtrack that needed a considered approach to each particular shot. Headphone technologies allow for improved homogeneity with sounds located within the 'circumspace' and for POV shots, as demonstrated in all mixes. However, creating headphone specific mixes

was time consuming, with no single technique providing a simple solution. The use of binaural plug-ins was not effective in all instances, with additional binaural re-recordings required for *Foxed!*. Preparing early in the production stages, and accommodating binaural technologies throughout the recording process is of benefit as demonstrated through *Carwash*.

Overall the headphone mixes provided a homogenous and spatially accurate relationship with z-space 3-D imagery compared to the 5.1 mixes. This became increasingly apparent as sounds moved closer to the ‘circumspace’ as in **Figure 7**. Contemporary speaker formats provide superior bass (LFE) reproduction that enables the listener to physically feel a sound. A binaural format with a dedicated LFE channel however is impractical due to it requiring three channels.

During an online survey in 2014, it was asked if it would bother participants to have speakers within the arms of 3-D glasses; 70% of participants said no (**Figure 8**). This suggests that headphones may be a consideration for future film exhibition, even if used in a hybridised situation with an LFE track.

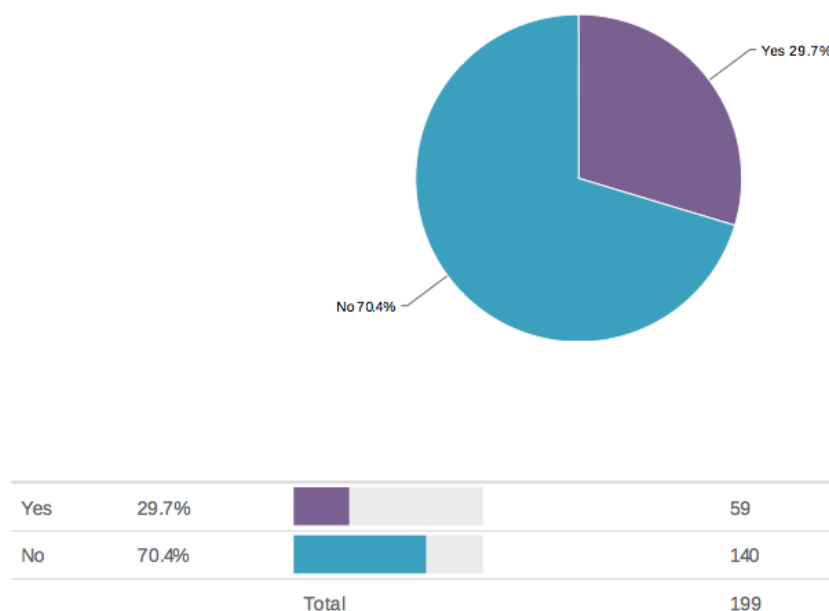


Figure 8: Would it bother participants to have speakers within the arms of 3-D glasses

Through practice-led research it became apparent that the accurate positioning of sound in any format is time consuming, as every sound needs to be positioned across all three axes and in some instances with automated movement. This highlights that it is often difficult to accurately provide positional data and have accurate positional rendering within z-space in the 5.1 and binaural formats. The BBC, DTS, Barco Auro and Dolby have committed to developing headphone technologies, which signifies that headphone technologies are a serious consideration for improving the immersive sound environment.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Way of the Turtle: Towards empowering community and building culture.

Tracey Benson and Lee Joachim

This paper explores examples of cultural and creative projects in relation to 'transdisciplinary' thinking and Indigenous knowledge systems, to frame linkages between place, technology, science and identity.

digital divide, online media, Indigenous culture, tools and data, mobile technologies, augmented reality, data art, transdisciplinarity

1. INTRODUCTION

Way of the Turtle is a collaborative longitudinal project between Yorta Yorta researcher Lee Joachim and artist Tracey Benson.

In essence, it is a multi-dimensional project which explores interconnected themes of place, country, health, creativity, technology skills transfer, intergenerational and intercultural knowledge sharing. To ascribe a theoretical model or methodology to locate how the project can be defined, transdisciplinarity is probably the closest, which will be discussed.

Transdisciplinary approaches embrace arts, science, and technology with Indigenous knowledge and has the capacity to bring multiple benefits to all these sectors and society at large.

Our project while multi-layered is also nodal in the way that we hope to connect with divergent branches of the academic realm in the arts and sciences fields, as well as creative, community and cultural contexts. Our purpose is pragmatic, focused on positive cultural, social, health and economic outcomes for the Yorta Yorta community.

There are challenges though - for example, how do we open the network more broadly? Also, how do we as cultural practitioners work in a way that can facilitate these connected networks to bring greater social awareness? Another challenge is

how can these networks have a meaningful influence in the areas of government policy setting, educational institutions and funding providers?

How we also think about 'data' in terms of culture is not just a question for collecting institutions; other forms of cultural material are also relevant - sites, kinship structures, cultural practices, genealogy, songlines, storylines, cosmology and language are all incorporated into the data taxonomy.

2. FINDING GROUND

Collaboration is a critical element when considering transdisciplinarity; as is the importance of social justice and equity. *The Charter of Transdisciplinarity* (1994) states that:

Whereas an historically unprecedented growth of knowledge is increasing the inequality between those who have and those who do not, thus engendering increasing inequality within and between the different nations of our planet.

The *Way of the Turtle* project is grounded in the goal of social justice and empowerment through the learning and sharing of knowledge through active collaboration.

Our project came by its title through a number of failed grant applications. Upon receiving a rejection letter we had a phone discussion, where it was decided to continue the project despite this setback. Lee said, "it is like the way of the turtle, one of our totems, turtles always get to where they are going, they go around, over and stick their neck out if when they have to." From that point in 2014 our work together has been under the banner of *Way of the Turtle*.

Here is a description of the Turtle totem on a site about spirit animals:

The turtle totem symbolizes our peaceful walk on this earth. It represents the path we take as we embark on our journey through life. In contrast to emotional or spiritual development occurring in bursts, the way of the turtle anchors our personal unfolding in a slow, more grounded series of steps and longer cycles of transformation.

The turtle is also an animal that is an excellent indicator of ecological health of an area, particularly the health of waterways.

2.1 Transdisciplinarity and Way of the Turtle

What makes transdisciplinary process and why is it relevant? It is important to define the difference between transdisciplinary from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. In short, all of these terms articulate a process that brings together disparate skills, disciplines, knowledge and technologies through the process of collaboration.

Transdisciplinarity has the power to transform and engage on multiple levels.

Basarab Nicolescu states:

Transdisciplinarity complements disciplinary approaches. It occasions the emergence of new data and new interactions from out of the encounter between disciplines. It offers us a new vision of nature and reality.

Not only are there interactions between multifarious forms of knowledge, there is also an acceptance of the tangible and intangible reality of all things, with no one element taking precedence. All are active participants in the process. There is also an acceptance of *the Sacred*, which can be described as the feeling of 'infinite solidarity' and 'that which connects' (Kagan 2011).

Transdisciplinarity in action has a focus on cultural and societal transformation which is holistic and considers the bigger picture. What is also highly relevant is that the ecology is an active player, not merely as a passive subject. Human and non-human actors all have agency in the transdisciplinary context. Kagan states this about ecological art:

Good examples of ecological art link specific multi-dimensional issues – that is issues that combine ecological, social, cultural, political and economic dimensions, with each other.

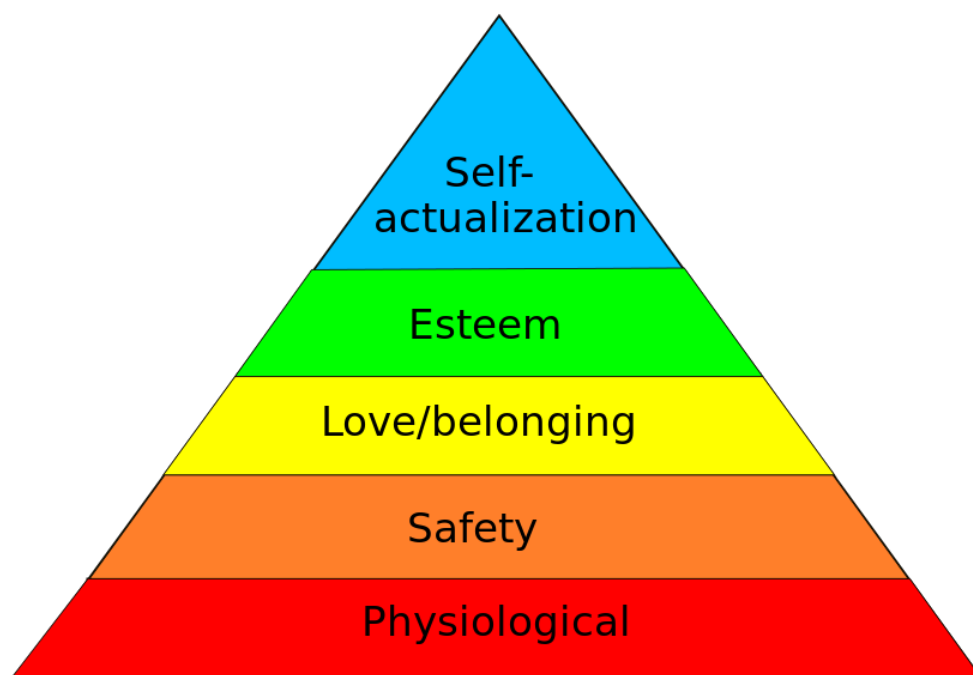
Artists have a critical role to play in this process, not just as enablers of discussion through art, but also to more deeply analyse the challenges that are presented through such immersive processes. There is no separation between art and life as the transdisciplinary process acknowledges all ‘actors’ in the space, including the non-human.

For transdisciplinarity to be successful, there also needs to be like-minded systems in place which support such forms of inquiry. For example, the model needs to also be applied to government policy development and funding, with active engagement from the bureaucracy in the process. This is quite a radical proposal, where the funding body is no longer a passive source of funding but an essential piece of the puzzle, actively working with the makers. This is no doubt a Utopian view, but in order to conceive of transdisciplinarity in an ideal setting, systems would support not thwart the process (Nelson 2012).

Transdisciplinarity also supports the notion of all forms of knowledge being of equal value, like an ecosystem.

In *Way of the Turtle* the concerns cover the linkages between health, environment, science, art and technology. The health of humans and nonhumans are considered equal and act as part of a balance. “We are the land and the land is we. The water that falls upon the land, flows over and under our land is represented of our blood, sweat and tears...” This belief of the Yorta Yorta peoples is essential to the character of non-humans survival sequestrate be they land or water dependant non humans, inclusive of intangibles. All connected through law of contiguity for holistic health and wellbeing measurable, to lose one is to lose many.

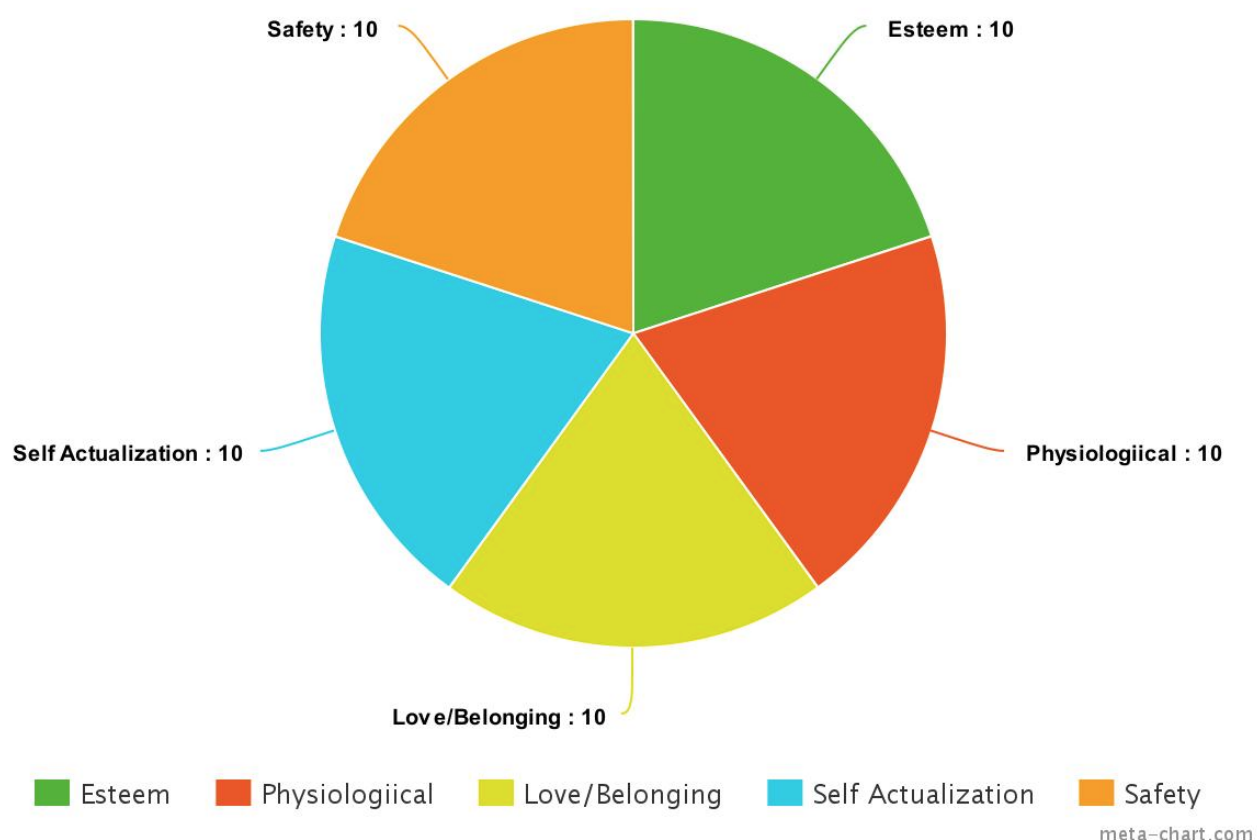
The well-being of community can be measured broadly by the physical, mental, economic and spiritual health of its people. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the framework is a pyramid, but we use the same elements as a flattened structure to simultaneously define human connectedness and self-identity.



Maslow studied what he called exemplary people such as Albert Einstein, Jane Addams, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Frederick Douglass rather than mentally ill or neurotic people, writing that "the study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can yield only a cripple psychology and a cripple philosophy." While the elements of need are useful, the hierarchy is not to our purpose and we wish to engage and motivate community at different levels.

Way of the Turtle is focused, through a process of engagement and knowledge sharing to increase the health and wellbeing of all project participants. We envisage this through developing opportunities for learning, sharing and through practical action in the shape of diverse workshops sharing knowledge and creative exchange.

Positive self and community identity through creativity, environmental awareness and cultural participation is a key objective of the *Way of the Turtle* project.



The process for exploring these diverse ideas is being designed through a number of long term projects:

- leading a transdisciplinary residency and symposium on country along the Dhungala (Murray River) and Barmah National Park at the Dharnya Centre
- developing a series of intergenerational workshops focused on creative and technology skills combined with building culture and connection to country
- long term goal of creating interactive online learning space at the Dharnya Centre

The connection to country to *Way of the Turtle* is critical in terms of grounding the project culturally and geographically. By spending time actively considering 'place' as a theme, we hope to build an ongoing process that will build awareness and respect of Woka and Walla Walla (Land and Water). It is the thread that reduces the field of subject and object through acknowledgement of the body in multidimensional space. For example in Merleau Ponty's discussion of the body, he acknowledges that "the body stands between this fundamental distinction between subject and object, ambiguously existing as both."

2.2 Intercreate and Way of the Turtle

Transdisciplinary spaces are by default collaborative; learning and sharing is a mutual journey when these energies combine. For example, Intercreate is a collective of artists, scientists, technologists and tangata whenua (people of the land) based in Aotearoa, NZ, who are focused on environmental sustainability and cultural bridging. Since 2006, Intercreate has run a series of artists residencies called SCANZ (Solar Circuit Aotearoa New Zealand), based in New Plymouth in the Taranaki region of the North Island. From the start there was a focus on acknowledging the role of tangata whenua and actively working with them to find practical ways to increase community awareness. This can be demonstrated by the continuing relationship with Indigenous research centre Te Matahiapo as well with the people of the Parihaka community. The focus of Intercreate residency process is to work across disciplines and cultures to focus on issues related to the environment, cultural bridging and sustainable futures.

To provide a recent example, in January 2016, an Intercreate residency titled "Water, Peace, Power" was held in the Taranaki region of Aotearoa New Zealand. The 9 day residency involved hui (symposium) at the camp house at the Egmont National Park, nestled at the base of Mt Taranaki. After three days the group moved base of the Western Institute of Technology in Taranaki and then two days at Parihaka. Throughout the event, the group were guided by Māori Elders, with Māori language

being extensively used. The creative result of the process was an outdoor exhibition of artworks, some powered by batteries and solar at Parihaka. The specific project was a collaboration between Yorta Yorta researcher Lee Joachim, cartographer Martin Drury and media artist Tracey Benson, under the banner *Way of the Turtle: Exchanging Breath*. It is a prototype project which is intended to expand as a community driven project with more layers of data, projection and audio.

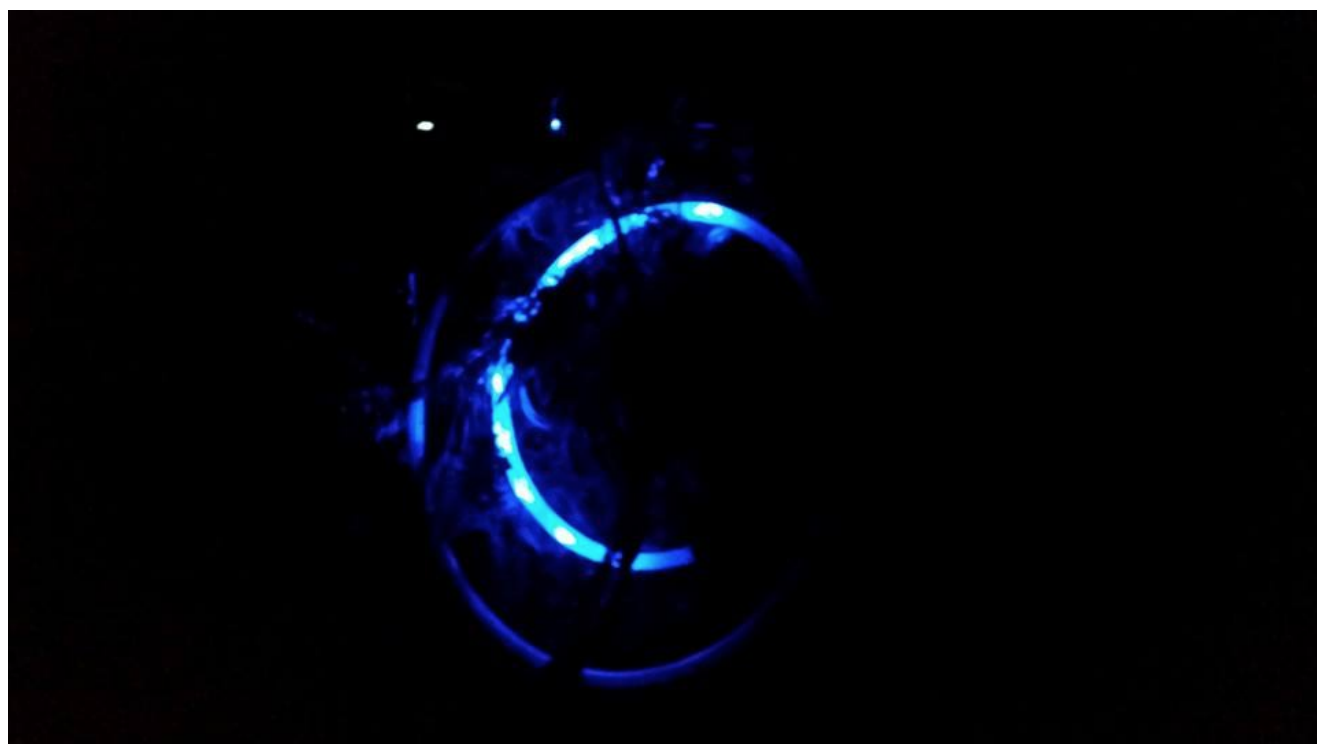


Figure 1: Image: Tracey Benson. “*Way of the Turtle: Exchanging Breath*”, installation, Parihaka Pa 2016

For this project we obtained some turtle data from TurtleSAT courtesy of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and Ricky Spencer from TurtleSAT. The data included the approximate latitude and longitude of Yorta Yorta country and nesting sites of turtles in that region. This data was generated through a sequence of LEDs representing Biami (rainbow serpent) and a Koru (a spiral, a powerful symbol for Māori). We also had an audio component which was in two parts - the story of how the Murray River was created in Yorta Yorta and English by Sharon Atkinson and a water (wai) waiata (song) in Māori by Jo Tito, who is descendant of Parihaka.

It is important to state that Parihaka was a significant site for peaceful protest, with the community resisting the forced acquisition of land in the early 1880s. Men 'ploughed' the fields and were arrested one by one and sent to Dunedin to prison. With each man that was taken away, another would stand in his place. Now Parihaka is a place of pilgrimage for peace leaders, First Nations peoples and people seeking to learn and pay respects.

The work sought to focus on the cross-cultural points of connection via the technical challenge of creating a data driven artwork that was intended to be presented outside. It also linked to the event themes of Water, Peace and Power. The piece could be run either on batteries or solar energy.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper sought to provide context to some of the theoretical and practical aspects of the *Way of the Turtle* project as well as outlining some of the key issues and approaches. It is our goal to effectively incorporate the many layers of meaning connected to country which exist in the spaces between science and storytelling, data and interpretation, place and people. To this end a range of community projects will be undertaken in 2017 which will inform our future research.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

**Creating change in agricultural landscapes: the need for a
consilience approach**

Dr Peter Orchard

Introduction (*Entrenched attitudes to landscapes and resources*)

The post-European landscape mosaic and farming systems of NSW, Australia have been developed and maintained as a result of political, social and economic drivers. Government land use policies have driven landscape changes for economic outcomes (scaled from individual to national benefits) operating under a social licence, albeit from a society characterised by a lack of interest. The common approach has been to use specialised knowledge, technology and chemical/physical inputs to drive (agro)-ecosystems towards optimisation of a narrow range of outputs *viz.* yield of food, fibre and forestry (Tyler 2008).

The short-term success of increasing yield in homogenous environments has tended to reinforce beliefs of human development being independent of nature and allowed a focus on increasing economic efficiency and the control of natural variation to predominate (Folke *et al.* 2002). There is little recognition that the drive for efficiency may reduce adaptive capacity. Where issues arise, the land use system is rarely questioned, there is just a chronic and simplistic optimism that technology and technological 'fixes' will appear and no fundamental changes are needed. Such attitudes are a function of the 'lock-in' nature of the system governed by the large investment of landholders, agribusiness, industry bodies, governments and research and extension scientists in the system (see Allison & Hobbs 2004).

Even with significant drivers as climate change or an increasing cost-price squeeze the major response is to look at adapting the system rather than transformation since the agents of change are locked-in to a system that gives them their *raison d'être* and rewards their 'expert' base.

This is not simply a feature of Australian landscapes. Wilson (1998) described the guiding theme of Western civilisation as Exemptionalist indicating that we consider ourselves as exempt from the laws of nature. This line of thinking, while having its origins in Genesis (man having dominion over animals), was a significant theme in

Enlightenment thinking (we can use science to transform the landscape as we wish) and reinforced by the Protestant work ethic (God gives material reward for effort). The Enlightenment philosophy was simplified by Rackham (2006) into 'the belief that all the world's problems can be solved by a combination of science (or what is presented as being science) and government'. Rackham (2006) also interestingly noted that Enlightenment thinking opposed communal use of resources with cultivable land to be used for conventional agriculture by private landholders, that common land and other multiple land uses were bad, timber production should be organised by the state and local knowledge should be ignored or marginalised. Clearly, some of these ideas still resonate strongly today.

However, Wilson (1998) in his book on Consilience indicated that he believed the Enlightenment thinkers had 'got it mostly right' in suggesting a lawful universe, an intrinsic unity of knowledge (consilience) and the potential of indefinite human progress. While he does not immediately define progress, in a later chapter (page 98) he suggests that it is 'the production through time of increasingly complex and controlling organisms and societies' associated with the appearance of humanity. He noted that the impacts of progress through the high intelligence and culture of humans has resulted in grief for most pre-existing life forms! While the lawful universe is generally accepted and clearly the nature of progress needs significant questioning, it is the idea of unity of knowledge that is the most pertinent to the present search for innovative solutions to sustainable landscape use. Historically land use has been driven by politics and economics and reliant on a generally (passive) societal acceptance. Arguably, if change in the way we manage landscapes is to occur it needs to emanate from society and the question becomes 'how can they (society) be engaged to drive these changes? The present emphasis on biophysical science has not been successful in producing action and a more holistic approach incorporating other disciplines should be investigated.

Do we need to Change? (*The case for change*)

On a global scale the papers of Brundtland (1987), Vitousek *et al.* (1997) and Wackernagel *et al.* (2002) are just a few examples of strong cases for the lack of sustainability of current practices in environmental management, resource use and wealth distribution. Specifically, Wackernagel *et al.* (2002) calculated that humanity's collective demands exceeded the earth's regenerative capacity in the early 1980's and continues to do so. According to their preliminary and exploratory assessment across the needs for cropping, grazing, timber, fishing, infrastructure and energy, humanity's load corresponded to 70% of the capacity of the global biosphere in 1961, and grew to 120% in 1999.

At a local level Goldie *et al.* (2005) noted positive trends in Australia for environmental parameters such as urban air quality, increases in numbers of marine parks, improved domestic energy efficiency and declines in water use per capita. However, they also reported many off-site impacts of land-use and urbanisation including turbidity and nutrient loads in coastal waters and rivers; high per capita greenhouse gas emissions; continued loss of vegetative cover (and thus biodiversity); increased land surface temperatures; loss of coastal habitats; deterioration of groundwater; and the presence of a wide range of soil health issues such as acidity and salinity. These issues are further developed and quantified by Williams and Saunders (2005).

While a greater environmental awareness may be expected in society through better education and increased sources and flows of information McMichael (2005) notes that most people passed through an educational system that was blind to the fundamental dependence of human societies on their natural resource base. Even in the year 2000 there was half a million hectares of native vegetation cleared in Australia *cf.* 100 million hectares estimated to have been cleared since European settlement (Goldie *et al.* 2005). Such losses should be viewed from a decrease in the environmental goods and services provided by biodiversity and the underpinning of resilience and other stability factors to ecosystems large and small termed

'Biodiversity Buffering' by Wackernagel *et al.* (2002). Wilson (1998) suggested that while 'we drown in information, we are starving for wisdom' and that synthesis (of information) was needed, in essence the creation of a new epistemology.

It should be acknowledged that Australian agriculture has generated considerable wealth since Federation (for example agricultural exports in 2014 were worth \$44 billion) although Williams & Saunders (2005) suggest that this has not only been at significant cost to the environment but also with ever-declining terms of trade. These authors highlight the urgent need for less harmful land-use systems although recognising that the task of maintaining landscape integrity while providing profitable farming options is not simple. From an economic perspective the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (Moir & Morris 2011) recognised that agricultural industries faced a number of challenges if they were to continue to increase production. These were given as climate change, competition for resources and technological development to allow continuation of productivity advances arguably a somewhat narrow distillation of the situation.

Change and Change Management (*Why we don't change- hurdles to overcome*)

We all live by 'convenient mythologies' that often serve to help us avoid change. There are a number of common mythologies associated with agriculture and our use of landscapes and resources including tradition, food security, clean and green and 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'. These are often presented with an air of verisimilitude but even mild scrutiny will generally identify the flaws in the statements.

Tradition is used when we're asked to give up or stop doing something e.g. clearing, access to irrigation. There is a flexible definition of the length of time that constitutes a tradition at the convenience of the speaker. In the Australian context there is also little recognition that much longer traditions were in place prior to settlement.

Food security arises when the role and importance of agriculture is being discussed and generally in conjunction with some impending situation that may have an impact on landholders. While food security is important it is rarely defined in these situations. FAO (2003) give a definition *that food security is the situation where all*

people have physical and economic access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

However, the term is often used in a producer-focussed context not as a consumer-focussed term. Additionally, many regions now describe themselves self-importantly as food bowls of Australia often as a means of protecting the status-quo.

Notwithstanding its importance to the Australian economy, on a global scale Australia is a small producer with exports directed to high value markets and the oft-quoted 'feed the world' image is unfounded.

The use of 'clean and green' occurs when describing our agricultural systems and again in association with an impending potentially negative situation or decision. It frequently describes the end product rather than the production system which as previously noted is often beset with issues such as salinity, soil acidity, soil erosion, negative impacts on water quantity and quality, herbicide resistance and increasing dependence on fungicides and pesticides. Despite these features Moir & Morris (2011) suggest that Australia's biggest contribution to world food supplies is to provide technical assistance to food deficit countries!

'If it ain't broke don't fix it' is used to avoid recognising that there may be a problem or a better way of doing things (and hence subverts the need for change); it adopts a 'business as usual' approach because 'we're doing alright'; it maintains the narrow focus on resource use, economic growth and wealth generation and the use of market mechanisms for the efficient allocation of resources (Harris, 2007).

These attitudes can partly be attributed to the conceptual blinkers developed through an education system focussed on the industrial revolution sciences of physics, chemistry and mathematics (McMichael 2005) which instilled a limitless growth and an exploitation mindset.

Although Williams and Saunders (2005) suggest that there has been a major change in the attitudes of landholders with the emergence of Landcare, the numbers of Landcare groups and membership of groups have undergone a significant decline

over the last decade particularly in cropping areas where arguably the need is greatest. In part, this has been a result of the withdrawal of funds away from community based organisations by governments in favour of discrete projects that can demonstrate short-term outputs (Robins & Kanowski 2011). This change in funding was associated with environmental issues being conceptualised as a form of market failure best addressed through market means. Similar thinking lay behind the INFFER system (Investment Framework for Environmental Resources) which used a quasi- benefit-cost analysis to determine which NRM issues should be funded (see for example Pannell *et al.* 2012). However, these simple output measures of success failed to recognise the complexity of natural systems although clearly they are an attractive method for bureaucrats who may have little understanding of landscape processes but a requirement or need to justify the disposal of funds.

Change Agents (*and historical methods*)

Given the ecological simplicity of farming systems it is perhaps not surprising that research and extension methods are also simple. Research in Farming Systems does not usually seek to develop new systems, merely to make minor adjustments to current practices. In addition a significant proportion of the research is focussed on addressing symptoms resulting from previous research e.g. soil acidity, chemical resistant of target species, nutrient management and salinity. Extension has historically been transmissive and expert-based and generally followed a pattern of taking research results and delivering them to landholders via demonstrations, field days and the development of mixed-media resources. The aims were loosely aggregated around changes in awareness, attitude, knowledge, skills and practice but often involved the extension expert demonstrating their technical expertise rather than measuring change or adoption. Interestingly there was little attempt to include the financial implications of adopting the research being promoted, rather it was accepted to be more profitable since it was generally assumed to lead to higher yields.

Government extension officers, essentially change agents, operating in agricultural areas have been traditionally production-focussed with little consideration for natural resource management other than where it impinged on production potential.

Resource degradation has rarely been factored into production costs with natural resource management being seen as a separate issue within the domain of other agencies. This thinking results from the studies and management of agricultural production and natural resources residing in separate jurisdictions and being divorced in most governments, agencies and institutions. Organisational management and funding models have exacerbated this situation by promoting intra- and inter-agency/organisation competition for resources rather than collaboration. While there are some recent changes, for example the creation of Local Land Services in NSW tasked with the dual roles of agriculture and natural resource management, success will depend on the resulting bricollage, management and the capacity to overcome path dependency (the 'tendency for a past or traditional practice or preference to continue even if better alternatives are available' (Peters *et al.* 2012)). There is a need to acknowledge that amalgamating agencies, functions or institutions is not an easy task since social, ecological and organisational histories have management implications and consequences.

More recently, at least in NSW, extension has been through structured learning packages incorporating adult education techniques including contextual material, participatory learning, reinforcement and multi-sensory techniques (Edwards *et al.* 2005; Keys *et al.* 2006). In relation to landscape management the development of the LANDSCAN^R course was aimed to allow landholders to assess their natural resources, identify exclusions and limitations and strengths/weaknesses of their landscape and to prioritise their management actions to balance production, profit and sustainability (Orchard and Hackney 2016). However, in LANDSCAN^R and all other courses the emphasis was largely restricted to technical and biophysical aspects reinforcing the theme that in an agricultural context current NRM strategies are focused on increasing resource productivity measured on limited dimensions

(e.g. maximum sustainable yield) and limited objectives (e.g. increased production or better water quality) (Tyler 2008).

In his review of approaches to applied research and learning Tyler (2008) included Adaptive Management and Social Learning methods. Briefly, Adaptive Management is learning from experience with formal interventions or experiments to test hypotheses. The process is essentially an iterative cycle linking science to action with critical appraisal of outcomes against theory and expectations and often simply described as 'Plan, Do, Monitor and Review' (Allan 2007; Tyler 2008). There is a focus on framing problems and questions, and developing protocols for monitoring, assessment and evaluation (Norton & Recknow 2006). However, more recent developments have emphasised the use of models and the acquisition of data to predict outcomes. Increasingly, complex model development as a process has overtaken modelling as a tool to test hypotheses with stakeholders and clients again being marginalised by 'experts'. There are other concerns about this approach such as the modelling of large-scale systems from small-scale data, the inability of models to account for emergent properties of complex systems and the framing of problems as wholly technical with single answers. In many respects this reliance on modelling is also an example of managing a fire with a thermometer (see Elliot 1998 p256).

Adaptive Management was generally delivered to groups of landholders and in some respects was linked to Social Learning. Although Social Learning has no particular clear definition, the term is employed to learning by social aggregates (groups, organisations and societies) and individuals conditioned by social interaction (Tyler 2008; Swartling *et al.* 2010). In an NRM context it focuses on shared learning and may be linked to Adaptive Management in the problem definition stage. From a pedagogical viewpoint it represents a move away from the transmissive expert-based teaching which characterises agricultural extension (Cundill & Fabricius 2009) although experts often insert themselves into a facilitation role. Both Communities of Place and Communities of Interest can be designated as social learning groups (Fischer 2001) with greatest outcomes achieved when 'place equals interest'.

Certain Landcare and production groups may fall into this category. However, issues may arise through divergent interests of stakeholders and differences in expectations. Other problems may also be 'learning through the experience of others' where interpretation (of the experience) is subjective and 'data-free', and the need to recognise that the process is not deterministic and may be unpredictable and long-term.

Change methods (*Alternative complex models*)

While Adaptive Management is concerned with science/ecology and Social Learning emphasises human interactions, they both are still largely focussed on bio-physical aspects and technical solutions. As Walker *et al.* (2002) point out there is often a presumed ability that management outcomes can be predicted and that the manager is outside the system being managed. In contrast Resilience Theory posits that social-ecological systems such as agriculture and natural resource management are complex and unpredictable. Tyler (2008) proposed the Resilience Framework (Complex Adaptive Systems) as a means of addressing complex social-ecological systems that behave in a dynamic and cyclical fashion.

The major characteristics of complex systems include self-organisation (driven by feedback loops), non-linearity (threshold changes/on-off systems) and emergent properties (unpredictability). Change is the central feature rather than stability (cf. agricultural systems which are ecologically simple, where change is undesirable and external inputs are critical for 'stability'). The Resilience Framework (iterative phases of growth/exploitation, conservative, release and re-organisation) can be applied to a wide range of systems and organisations (Walker *et al.* 2004). These authors suggest that while the system dynamics of the growth/exploitation stage are reasonably predictable, during the conservative stage resources are increasingly locked-up and the system becomes less flexible. The capacity to absorb shocks is reduced and can lead to system collapse (release). The subsequent reorganisation may result in a system resembling the previous one or could be significantly different. Resilience thinking recognises change as essential for system well-being in

that it creates opportunity, strength and learning (Tyler 2008). The same author suggested that the features of resilient systems could be expressed as- redundancy is good, optimization courts disaster, diversity is critical and that managing for control and stability leads to turbulence and unpredictability.

While 'resilience' has been adopted as the new 'sustainability' word, grass-roots understanding is limited and the framework has yet to be widely captured as a means of delivering change. Partly this is due to there being no long-term target, no maximum sustainable yield and no 'ideal' situation, only a series of disturbances and short-term functional objectives. However, learning can result in 'managed' change in the sense that change is recognised as inevitable and while the specifics may not be predictable, promoting diversity and flexibility allows evolution in response to new drivers and situations. Some worthwhile insights may be gained from examining and understanding the drivers and impacts of historical change (Orchard & Orchard in press). One strategy, increasing the complexity of agricultural landscapes through enhancing (bio)-diversity, may realise benefits when certain levels of complexity are reached. For example, changes in insect spectra from pest to beneficial species have been recorded by increasing the floral density and duration.

Tyler (2008) suggested that there are common features of Adaptive Management, Social Learning and the Resilience Framework in that all three approaches are research based, use iterative learning and action, and need to engage multiple sources of knowledge across multiple organisations. However, in practice agricultural extension has rarely, if ever, been delivered using multiple sources of knowledge across multiple organisations.

The three methods all have elements of implied learning and behavioural change not only in the audience but in the 'delivery agents' too which may be undesirable in an organisational context. Organisations generally require conformity and predictability and are designed to resist philosophical change other than at a cosmetic level. However, given the inevitability of change, learning may be focussed towards

anticipation and improving adaptation processes i.e. change management. Incorporating strategic redundancy into organisations i.e. doing things/having features which may have no present value but can assist in future adaptation is not a characteristic of our present 'efficiency at all costs' organisations. All of the above approaches also require leadership and long-term commitment by organisations which, unfortunately, are generally characterised by having a narrow focus on short-term outputs.

A more recent framework noted by Tyler (2008) is Adaptive Co-management (ACM) that combines features of all the three previous approaches. ACM has recently been reviewed by Plummer *et al.* (2012) who suggested that the understanding of the process was imprecise, inconsistent and confused. Tyler (2008) saw the process as being characterized by an emphasis on long-term, collaborative institutional arrangements and shared learning and tasks across a range of scales. Key features include a shared vision and common focus; and distributed or joint control with a high degree of dialogue across multiple levels. The approach recognises many of the concepts of complex adaptive systems (multiple epistemologies, non-linearity) through to evolving institutional relationships characterised by flexibility, and iterative and ongoing interactions, including governance to support continual adaptation. The latter is challenging given legislative and sectoral mandates of agencies may be inflexible and even contradictory, and the potential non-alignment of institutional and organisational objectives.

Changing Systems (Threads to the future)

The National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility has published Eight Principles of Adaptation Planning covering Social, Economic and Institutional Dimensions to guide the development of adaptation policy and the development of resilient systems *viz.* (i) Establishing shared responsibility for planning, (ii) being flexible, reflective and iterative, (iii) being consistent in messaging/messages, (iv) ensuring an equitable distribution of risk, (v) making trade-offs explicit, (vi) prioritising public goods, (vii) being mindful of greenhouse gas emissions, and (viii) recognising

that there are limits to adaptation (NCCARF AdaptNote- Theory, policy & practice in climate adaptation). While focussed on climate change these principles have the potential to be extrapolated across a range of situations.

Keath and Brown (2009) have listed and compared attributes of traditional and resilient urban water management regimes and these ideas can be extrapolated to landscape management (Table 1). There is clearly an assumed outcome of a more resilient regime using a systems approach with interconnections between a range of services being delivered to achieve multiple outcomes and benefits.

Increased resilience implies an adaptive capacity capable of responding to, and being prepared for, multiple future situations. Such systems are characterised by a level of “strategic redundancy” which contrasts with the historical management approach that has been towards optimisation for a ‘most probable’ future and hence potentially vulnerable to other future changes.

Table 1 Comparisons of traditional and resilient systems (modified from Keath and Brown 2009)

Attribute	Traditional Regimes	Sustainable Regimes
System Boundary	Maximum yield	Multiple purpose landscapes
Management Approach	Compartmentalisation and optimisation of single components	Adaptive, integrated, sustainable management of total system

Expertise	Narrow technical and economic focussed disciplines	Interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder learning across social, technical, economic design, ecological spheres etc.
Service Delivery	Centralised, linear and predominantly technologically and economically based	Alternative, flexible solutions at multiple scales via suite of approaches (technical, social, economic, ecological etc.)
Role of public	Managed by government on behalf of communities	Co-management between government, industry and communities
Risk	Risk regulated and controlled by government	Risk shared and diversified via private and public instruments

Summary/key points so far

- Entrenched attitude that humans are independent of nature and/or that we can control nature;
- Landscape changes are driven by politics for economic outcomes under a social licence;
- Governments, landholders, agribusiness, industry bodies and research/extension staff have invested in the current system and are locked-in to it;
- The rate and trajectory of resource use highlights that a change in management is required;
- Research and extension responses to change are biophysical/technological and generally characterised by a 'silo' mentality;

- 'The visual symptoms of (poor) land management are biophysical in nature and measured as financial consequences. Symptoms become the problem and biophysical solutions are sought. In most respects nothing changes- the land management system(s) remain in place and the underlying problems continue'.

What needs to change?

At present we operate on the limited equation of natural capital equals economic/financial capital. The role of science is to facilitate and increase the efficiency of the process with little attempt being made to make fundamental or transformative change or to consider incorporating human, cultural, social, and the diversity of knowledge capitals available. Hence, our current landscape management strategies are heavily dependent on technical solutions although the problems are driven by policy decisions for economic outcomes. Any move toward sustainability needs to recognise that the issues are not solely biophysical but much wider and should incorporate disciplines other than science. Indeed, Elliott (1998) notes that the role of the scientific community in environmental governance is not without scrutiny and cites Gudynas (1993) who highlights the *'scientific superiority complex'* where scientists have claimed for themselves a mandate to *'determine the viable management of nature'* by which the construction of environmental problems as *'strictly scientific and technical'* serves not only to marginalise the social and political connotations of environmental degradation, but as a consequence privileges scientific knowledge and the scientific community. Additional limitations to the sole reliance on scientists are given by Acheson (2006).

In his book *'Consilience'* (consilience being defined as 'jumping together' of knowledge that leads to cross-disciplinary linkages and a common groundwork of explanation) Wilson (1998) suggests that there is a fundamental difference between scientists and scholars in the humanities in that the former make discoveries and create new knowledge while the latter usually interpret and explain existing knowledge. However, Bodin *et al.* (2011) suggest it is getting more difficult to justify a dichotomy between social and natural systems due to the intimate connections

between the biophysical environments and human health, the economy, social justice and national security.

Peters *et al.* (2012) highlighted that innovation is driven via interactions between diverse stakeholders (see also World Bank 2012) and hence innovation in sustainability, biodiversity and resource management needs a much broader base than biophysical science. As William and Saunders (2005) and Harris (2007) note, technology, data and information are only part of the story. Translating knowledge into policy or action depends on collaboration and communication between agencies, as well as social and economic considerations and even the values and beliefs of individuals. Harris (2007) also added that an understanding of ethics, values and context was required to establish a creative collaboration that linked science, governance, industry, the media and the community. Wilson (1998) was more emphatic in stating that we need to understand the fundamental principle that 'ethics is everything'.

Who needs to change?

McMichael *et al.* (2003) urgently called for a more integrated and consilient approach to sustainability if a collective vision was to be achieved. They suggested that the key disciplines were demography, economics, ecology and epidemiology but recognised that other social and natural sciences, engineering and the humanities needed to be engaged. McMichael (2005) later suggested that some mainstream disciplines failed to recognise that human sustenance, environmental stability and the flow of materials and services from nature were essential to good health, survival and social advance. He added that while recent 'thinking and attitudes to health saw it as a matter of individual choice, behaviour and access to health care', it was 'population shifts in human culture, technology and environmental demands that throughout history have altered the patterns of well-being, disease and survival'. It is apparent that the confused thinking on the management of natural resources regarding the ability to distinguish between cause-effect and problems-symptoms is embedded in many behavioural areas.

In essence substantial changes in societal attitudes to NRM and the social licence that allows present resource management practices to over-consume are required. Wilson (1998) called for students to understand the relationship between humanities and science and bemoaned the fact that only a minority of humanity students (30%) in the US were made to take a natural science course. However, it is likely that fewer science students take courses in humanities. There is a need for all of us to examine what we do and how we instil sustainability into our actions, teaching and learning and not just as a theoretical or academic exercise (McMichael *et al.* 2003). These authors suggested that purpose built institutions would be needed to encourage inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches to sustainability in order to overcome the constraints of traditional disciplinary domains and concepts. Ten years later Kauffman (2014) wrote that 'academic institutions in this century have increasingly devoted resources for multi-disciplinary and cooperative research programs to analyze complex problems from multiple perspectives'. Kauffman (2014) further indicated that *'as sustainability science has evolved, it has become increasingly integrative and trans-disciplinary integrating knowledge from multiple disciplines social, economic, and engineering sciences as well as local indigenous knowledge to develop robust solution-options. In consciously seeking to become more holistic, the community of sustainability scientists works with a plurality of epistemologies, languages, styles of research, and experience that lead to a variety of epistemic and normative stances and methods. The trend towards more holistic approaches to research for sustainability is reflected in the academic community's support for international negotiations to deal with the challenges of sustainable development and in a growing number of academic programs and scientific literature focused on sustainability issues'*. However, it is questionable as to whether this has made any significance difference in social, political or economic attitudes. On a global level much of the debate on reversing environmental decline has often been at the rhetoric level (Elliott 1998).

Who can change?

It may be both unnecessary and unproductive for 'purpose built institutions' to be created since these have the potential to become isolationist, elitist and irrelevant and merely set up new bureaucracies' and hierarchies. Such initiatives also assume that the problems associated with our use of resources and landscapes are unknown rather than the more pressing need to show the depth and breadth of existing problems, gain societal recognition and acceptance of these and implement change. In a similar vein Acheson (2006) suggested that natural resource management required effective institutions and discussed the options of managing through private property, central government or local level. However, there is an initial and urgent step of gaining recognition that intervention and management is required.

It is unlikely that initiatives will come from government or its agencies as these are focused on 'hip pocket' issues, short-term time frames (election cycles) and expediency. Exceptions to this are the Australian government funding of multi-organisation Co-operative Research Centres or The Climate Change and Adaptation Research Facility, although again there are questions about the degree of external (societal) impact and the limited range of disciplines included.

The expressed need for involving many disciplines indicates that the educational system in general and universities in particular should be at the forefront of change. Importantly their role is to develop leaders in society and hence the large influx of graduates into the workforce annually could have potentially wide-ranging effects. While sustainability should be a key element and embedded principle of all disciplines it is through trans-disciplinary initiatives that the greatest benefits will be realised as opportunities arise to share visions or achieve a shared vision. Dialogue should develop new ways of engagement and create new approaches, knowledge bases and epistemologies. Planning also requires us to think in much longer time frames. Usually we start in the 'now' and ask 'what's possible?' which invariably defaults to discussing what's not possible. The focus question is what should be?

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Conversing with The Undead in Australian Woodlands

Dr Barbara Holloway

In the 1980s an Australian comedy duo performed successfully across the English-speaking world. Their name, *Los Trios Ringbarkos*, was a neatly absurd reference to products of a practice which, for over a century, had transformed the land from Aboriginal to European priorities and management habits by ring-barking, removing forest tree by tree. Though the duo made no further reference to it, their name showed its centrality in agriculture and in the Australian foundation myth, reconfigured the ideology and parodied the Britishness of the national narrative.ⁱ



Stumps and dead trees are a common sight across the Australian countryside.ⁱⁱ The resonance of such remnants, suggested by *Los Trios*, has not been well-examined though the history of forest and timber use in Australia has been documented, and historical projections of ‘melancholy’ onto forest in this settler culture analysed (Bonyhady, Rutherford,).

In the present, stumps and tree-skeletons, tangible vestiges of forest destruction, have an unsettling presence that I conceptualise in current cultural, environmental and economic terms : as the ‘undead,’ as symptoms of environmental necessities

and agricultural practices. I argue they have been catalysts and magnets accumulating and generating attention across decades and genres as they do in this essay.

The essay first identifies geographical and historical contexts for the tree relics before framing their communicative power theoretically as a 'dimension of surplus animation' within the energy of things that characterises the undead (Eric Santner fn). I then discuss texts, both literary and instructional, associated with their locality, to explore that uncanny presence and to suggest they now both testify to their history and raise questions about the needs of the land for environmental and agricultural stability.

1)

Though common in many places across Australia, the dead trees and stumps shown here stand in the forest of scattered eucalypts and dense native pines that slopes down to sparsely grassed paddocks on the Danandbilla Range in south-west NSW. The trees here are overlapping ecological communities of three forest types: The Grassy Woodlands, most easily adapted to European agriculture and pastoralism, estimated to have covered 800,000 hectares when the colonists arrived. The Woodlands merge to the east with the Dry Schlerophyl Forests of the Slopes and Great Dividing Range which, less directly useful for farming, is relatively well-preserved, including the eastern states' biggest national parks (Keith 118). The 'marginal areas', exemplified by the local hillside, 'have tended to be fragmented by land clearing, intentional burning and rough-country livestock grazing' (Keith 121). To the west Riverina Woodlands species merge. The vestiges are hard-woods, several *eucalyptus* species of several iron-barks, stringy-bark (*E. viminalis*), red gum (*e. blakelyi*) *e. dwyerii*, and the more recently ring-barked soft-wood, black pine (*calitris endlecherii*).

Images.

At present passed only by human and animal foot-traffic, their number and perhaps their upright figure-like grey presence appearing between the living trees and scattered across the open lower ground repeatedly draws a walker's attention. A

regular horizontal plane and saw-marks distinguish stumps from trees killed by natural causes, while standing trees with a belt of axe-marks at waist height are just as numerous.

Such marks indicate the entanglement of human and non-human from the arrival in the 1820s of the first Europeans to the district (*History of Young*) with their iron implements and fervent desire to sustain themselves with the way of life and forms of agriculture and stock-farming they best knew. Stumps either precede the 1850s, or signal timber-getting for building, fencing, fire wood, railway sleepers or telegraph poles.



From the 1860s, the 'stags' have died from 'ringbarking, the process of cutting through a tree's bark and sapwood, recently introduced by Californian gold miners with their radically efficient 'American axe'. The tree dies slowly but remains standing for many years. The purpose was to kill the leaf-canopy, allowing more sunlight onto

the ground to increase grass pasture or scope for cropping. Such land clearing rapidly transformed the condition and relations of much Australian forest. As squatter and poet John Mathew put it bluntly: 'The glittering axe with sturdy blow/ Has laid the lofty gum-trees low' (69).

Tree-removal was unregulated before the 1870s; by 1884 the NSW government alone approved ring-barking of two and half million hectares of trees, and then under (largely unimplemented) legislation, a further three million hectares by 1888 (Tim Bonyhady *Colonial Earth* 180). The dead remnants continue to disturb, astonish or enthuse different witnesses.

2)

'The sense we make of past environments is alive with the preoccupations and reference points of our own time' as the geographer Sarah Whatmore puts it. (p.1777, 2008). So it is with an Anthropocenic perception of the human in the material world; drawing on Jane Bennett's hypothesis of energy shared between material objects to underline a rediscovered mutual dependence or co-existence. The stumps and trees can be understood not as inert and circumscribed 'objects' but as interactants with energies feeding between environmental, natural and cultural zones.

This essay shows these physical entities embody a disturbance that continues to perturb, leading to dialogue as if they are, in a contemporary concept, 'undead'; 'the dead return as collectors of some symbolic debt'. (Žižek, 23).

Eric Santner's view, setting aside the priorities of the environmental crisis for the moment, is that a 'mutual exchange of properties between natural and historical worlds' (xv) — such as the dead trees appear to participate in — occurs when a 'historical fissure or caesura in the space of meaning' opens precisely when the 'form of life decays, becomes exhausted or dies' — we experience it as something that has been denaturalised. In the 21st century, the fissure or caesura opened by data indicating crisis in the natural environment and global climate leads to the

'surplus animation' that emerges *between* real and symbolic death (Santner 17). The ring-barked trees arise as 'undead' and communicate this animation in two ways: first by the marks of human engagement with axe or saw which render them both absent tree and artefact. As artefacts, they call up the human hands that wielded the implements, the brief presence of the whole person, the history of gangs of single men — Chinese, European, Aboriginal — whose working lives were performing this single task; the relations between generations of people and living trees, their technology, motives, ways of life and influence on later cultural practices. Secondly, though dead the trees are full of life. As they decay, they support lichens, fungi, mosses, insects, spiders, birds and small mammals, leading into ecological and environmental trajectories.

It is thus easy to see how the stags and stumps form 'tangible and intimate interactions between people and the environments in which they live' (Lane and Cooke) and address the trajectory of dead tree and person from their prior living state. Such bonds in place become entangled cultural 'preoccupations and reference points' as we are reminded by the comic *Los Trios Ringbarkos*. The anthropologist Marc Augé argues such points function at the core of a settler society like Australia: The place ... is in one sense ... an invention: it has been discovered by those who claim it as their own. Foundation narratives are only rarely narratives about autochthony; more often they are narratives that bring the spirits of place together with the first inhabitants in the common adventure of the group in movement. The social demarcation of the soil is all the more important for not always being original. (43)

3)

The 'group in movement' is of European colonists moving steadily across NSW, social demarcation of the soil is simultaneously exclusion of Aboriginal (Wiradjuri people from their own land and highly selective access to or exclusion from ownership by Europeans; the 'foundation narratives' are the representations of the group's actions and lives as heroic and tragic endeavours that become the official, State and society-perpetuated myths. Pre-existing genres such as the ode were

ready-made castes for rendering foundation narratives. A prime example is the cantata written by the poet Henry Kendall for the opening of the Sydney Exhibition Building in 1879. At its end 'A Choir of Children', symbolising citizens of the future, sang:

A gracious morning on the hills of wet
 A great, glad glory now flows down and shines
 On gold-green lands where waved funereal pines.

Every phrase has symbolic resonance: 'gracious morning' suggests the blessing of God and the spread of European culture and Christianity from the east of the continent, 'hills of wet' forecasts an end to inhospitable heat and drought. 'Lands' are made 'gold-green' for the spectator by crops or pasture which occlude the prior, forest-covered, vista. Goldness is both morning light — signalling youth of the country — and ripening grain, that is, abundant food; 'gladness' is associated in 'glory' in the space of the triumphing State. The forest, reduced to 'pines' — associated with darkness and sorrow — has ceased to exist. Not surprisingly, there is little ambiguity about the past; only the phrase "Where waved funereal pines' signals potential for ambivalence in the foundation story of successful state and society, a caesura where the fate of Indigenous people and their environment might be mourned or deplored.

In Robert Pogue Harrison's view 'the destruction of the forest can be considered tantamount to the obliteration of cultural memories' but to the contrary, whilever they remain the stumps and stags sustain 'cultural memories', traceable in the wood and its historical representations. Kendall's hortatory cantata took an overview but his pastoral, 'The Wail in the Native Oak' written a decade before, provides a contrary narrative of myth- and place-making. In it the scene is of violence, in ringbarking which in turn signals murder and dispossession. Dying trees open the circumstances for recognising violence against Aboriginal people as well as the forest. It begins with a running creek:

Where the gum trees, ringed and ragged, from the mazy margins rise,
 Staring out against the heavens with their languid gaping eyes;
 There I listened — there I heard it! Oh, that melancholy sound.

The textual caesura, 'ringed and ragged', opens Santner's 'mutual exchange of properties between natural and historical worlds' (xv). The word 'ringed' alone signals the local and historical reality of the Gothic sunset, storms and supernatural forces. It indicates the trees slowly bleed to death and that sounds made by a nearby casuarina, are grief — at murders that the speaking voice speculates haunt the ground.ⁱⁱⁱ A 'black man' comes to the creek to drink:

Here his fathers must have sojourned —

here his people may have died,

Or perchance to distant forests

All were scattered far and wide.

Blood hath here been surely shed...

Oh the unrequited Dead.

Questioned, he 'shakes his head' and disappears into the darkness without speaking bringing the poem to an impasse, confronted by the impossibility of reconciling the Romantic poet's ethical position and the colonist's imperatives. Unable to resolve the conflict the narrative resorts to the arrival of a storm so violent the speaker loses consciousness.

By contrast, the ringbarked tree in Augé's formulation of 'the common adventure of the group in movement' —the squatters, their workforce, and later 'settlers' moving steadily inland in increasing numbers— is represented in 'foundation narratives' as transforming unused ground into subsistence- and food-providing land. Despite the scale of the decimation of trees, a surprising number of voices were heard in protest on several principles. By early mid-century for example fear of climate change saw forest-clearing as interfering with rainfall. A concept that had percolated from the American G.P. Marsh's book, *Man and Nature* (1864) which argued that the Sahara had been the 'food bowl' of the Roman empire until decimation of tree cover of the area caused desertification as it would, Marsh predicted, in the United States and Australia as a result of the mass forest clearing (Plotz).

These terms gave meaning to the dead trees of south-west NSW. In 1882, for example, a writer experiencing wholesale clearing from both a local gold rush and the land-holdings reviewed statistics in the *NSW Gazette* in *The Temora Star*: Whole tracts of country have been ruthlessly denuded of its forest trees, an insensate procedure which, independent of the destruction of valuable timber, cannot but have an injurious effect upon the climate of the colony.

Large-scale ringbarking was thus neither unchallenged nor universally accepted, campaigns were mounted for state regulation of tree-clearing on practical grounds: the waste of useful timber, loss of shelter for introduced and indigenous animals, increasing soil erosion as well as simple horror at what seemed a vandalising mania. One unexpected result in 1881 was the appointment of Henry Kendall as inaugural Chief Inspector of Forests for NSW. At an early point in his position he notes 'recommend practice of ring-barking be banned. Licenses to be granted only those with 2 years experience of the forest'. **Source** He travelled from Wagga through the eastern Riverina, assessing applications for ring-barking licenses on the grounds of existing tree-species and quantity, though implementation was at the discretion of local magistrates, themselves usually landholders. **ref**

Resonances from the dead trees continued to be relayed by other writers in the farming industries, such as Dowling and McCafferty in *Practical Dairying in Australia* (1893). The effects on trees of soil compacted by cattle was not yet understood, but, practical and professional as their advice is throughout, they momentarily attribute ecological consciousness to the living tree:

Experience has taught Australians that indigenous trees or portions of forests frequently die of what may be termed sympathy. Certain large patches were killed, and the few trees left intact do not long survive their fellows. Indigenous timber left as cattle camps frequently die. (31)

With such observations, it is not surprising that the chapter on 'clearing the land opens 'More harm can be done by an axeman in one week than seven years can repair.' They project uncanny being onto the ring-barked trees:

The intending settler will see in nearly all districts immense tracts of dead trees standing like spectres, and as he rides or walks through these there may be heard the crash of falling branches. These are from trees that were killed by sap-ringing many years before, and the dead timber as it falls is allowed to encumber the pasture. (31)

It is as if the spectral trees have a will against which the settler making pasture-land is helpless:

Fires made at the butts of large dry [ie sap-rung] trees do much clearing, but the workers have to be very careful. Many lives have been sacrificed by the unexpected fall of trees in burning off.

When the writer and activist Mary Gilmore writes of her childhood, by contrast, the living trees convey security in a benign forest:

As children of the bush and in the bush we wandered miles and miles from home, through scrub and box and stringy-bark, setting out early with our dinners and only coming home when hunger drove us, or the slanting sun warned us, yet never got lost and never failed to locate home-direction (*Bookfellow* 1 Aug. 1907, in Wilde p 31).

She later, however, also frames the nation-making myth in terms of tree-cutting. In 'The Australian', an ode written in 1917, the sound of the axe is definitive:

His axe is heard on the timbered height,
And the echoing valley thrills... (Gilmore p. 243, 2004)



I want to end this trail of evidence from specific works with another poem by Gilmore, when she turned to her home region of the Riverina and focused precisely on points of change there, the lost or destroyed in 'bush' habitat, in Aboriginal society and culture and in earlier farming and domestic technologies. In 1930 she published 'The Ring-Barked Tree' in a volume of verse focused on Aboriginal and other-than-human substance, *The Wild Swan*. In this poem the fissure opens, through the ring-barked tree, on a historical moment articulated as 'mutual exchange of properties between natural and historical worlds' that she was particularly gifted at. Written against triumphalist foundation myth's version of nation-making, in this poem the dead tree with its ring-barking marks represents an aggressor the 'hard white man'. Beyond the

title, the ring-barked tree is present only in one line, but its metaphorical power resonates throughout in the Aboriginal people who remain, and in the contrast with their environmental practices represented by the life that continues in the tree that has had bark taken by Aboriginal hands. That bark, made into a canoe that transports an Aboriginal couple across the river, literally and symbolically connects traditional life on one bank with an unclear future on the other.

Close reading of Gilmore's work shows unequalled attention to detail of Wiradjuri life, respect for culture and the biosphere (though it is not without problems). At first glance 'The Ring-barked Tree' is a bad if not brutal 'dying race' poem framed in what first seems an awkward register of now-sentimental tropes of sunset on vanishing people and inexorable current in the stream of time. These parallel the set-up of Kendall's 'Wail in the Native Oak', which Gilmore may well have had in mind.

Her poem however focuses on the people not the narrator. Hands and fingers, also used by the ring-barker, recur; bark-cutting hands become full bodily presence at the midpoint of the poem, at a 'nexus of the natural and the human' (Santner xv) where tree, human, water and air are integrated and used consciously. A branch is used to guide the canoe against the current; it works like a fin, its twigs and the similar human hand communicate between canoe and water, the air is parted by the tree-leaves, a kind of hands. The smallness of human gesture needed to interact effectively with the other-than-human world exemplifies a seamlessness of being:

When, on a current veering,
 They held a branch as fin in conquest over strain.
 Gather the twigs to stay the swirling flow —
 The little hands the tree hangs down to part,
 As thou the waters, all the winds that blow.... (37)

'With hand and leaf diffuse what pressures toward thee set' (38) suggest 'pressures' that the delicate balance is unequal to meet. Colonization by 'the hard white man', destroying tree, human life and culture is summed up in ringbarking. Yet the midstream turbulence is negotiated using traditional skills, the spectral figure in the

bark canoe becomes an embodied couple engaging the currents. The figures use the stream to reach 'the landing place' on the other side, a metaphorical survival within disruption, still explicit in repetition of 'lonely', of Aboriginal society and life. A tree has been transferred

4) conclusion

'A past that awaits' continues to resonate in Gilmore's two trees in the repercussions of environmental desolation and dispossession of Aboriginal people (Kyle William Bishop in Rutherford, p. 31). It awaits while the trees and stumps decay slowly and themselves disappear from the land. The Soldier Settler projects after each World War developed areas hitherto uncleared, and economic pressures or lack of knowledge lead to ignoring the disappearance of the trees.

That the stumps and dead trees continue to be 'undead' and to speak of changing technology, contested ideologies and political developments is shown again in the 1980s when *Los Trios Ringbarkos* took to the stage, though the practices of ring-barking had largely ended with the introduction of the chain-saw in the 1950s, and clear-felling techniques using bulldozers, chains and tractors shortly after.

From the initial the stump and the ring-barked tree have communicated through fissures in culture; materialising as historical testaments, ecological informants and unresolved spectral presences generating fear, regret, curiosity and affection.

As we have seen, rather than 'obliterating cultural memories', they keep them in circulation. 'The return of the dead is a sign of disturbance in the symbolic rite, in the process of symbolisation; the dead return as collectors of some symbolic debt' (Žižek 23). As well as calling up colonisation, the dispossession of Aboriginal people and denuding the land, they resonate in the material world, heard in initiatives to preserve or restore living trees, action stimulated by surveying the species and quantities of trees that once sustained a healthy ecosystem. Stewardship programmes for land-holders, Landcare and Catchment projects and individual initiatives, contribute to living tree presence. The 'destruction of the forest' paradoxically may, rather than 'obliterating cultural memories', have preserved them with both comforting and discomfiting resonances.



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i Los Trios Ringbarkos

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/03/30/1048962641326.html> (6/05/16)

ii Long-dead standing trees are also known as 'stags' because their dead branches resemble antlers. For brevity 'stag' will be used in this essay to mean ring-barked tree. Throughout the writing, it has been difficult to find an appropriate vocabulary as ideological weight in the conventional terms repeatedly deflects accuracy: for example 'clearing'— the term for large-scale removal of tree-cover — erases the means and gives a positive nuance. The wholesale term 'destruction of forests' obscures both the human precision of the practice and the individually ringed trees.

iii 'Sap-ringing', ringing' and 'ring-barking' were terms for distinct processes now all known as 'ring-barking' (Dowling p. 31). The 'voice' of the *casuarina* (native oak) is heard in both Aboriginal and Australian cultures (Holloway).



FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

**Heidegger's Thing and The Island: How Performance Shapes
Landscape**

Tess Denman-Cleaver

In order to reflect upon how live performance shapes landscape, this essay offers an articulation of a particular experience of making performance with place. To reflect upon the relationship between performance and place I share a series of stories from *Project R-hythm*, a collaborative performance making project carried out in 2013-14. Alongside theoretical material including Heidegger's *The Thing*, these stories are used to consider what landscape is.

Project R-hythm was a collaborative performance project with Martine Vreiling van Tuijl. It used performance making as a research practice through which to explore and develop understandings of a place; for the purposes of this essay we will call that place 'The Island'. *Project R-hythm*'s year long development concluded with a live performance event that invited the audience to explore The Island through the frame of a loosely choreographed walk.

The Island

Before we begin, there are some things about The Island you should know. The Island is a small tidal island in the North Sea. As a tidal island it is accessible, or 'open', to the mainland during low tide, via a causeway. As you drive to The Island the causeway is strewn about with seaweed and the concrete ripples with receding salt-water. The Island's tidal nature makes the status of 'island' a somewhat confusing description, since it could also be defined as a 'peninsula' at low tide. The North Sea that surrounds The Island is, in turn, surrounded by Scotland, England, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The water moves, like this list, in an anti-clockwise rotation. At its deepest the North Sea is 700 metres deep. At its warmest the water is 17 degrees Celsius. And at its coldest it is roughly 6 degrees Celsius. I have known The Island for as long as I can remember, but until *Project R-hythm* it had been no more than a picturesque day-trip destination. My collaborator, Martine, has lived there all her life. *Project R-hythm* arose out of opportunity. Around the time that I was invited to do some work there I had a vague notion that I wanted to better understand the relationship between

performance and landscape - or probably more truthfully I wanted to make a massive, spectacular performance in a massive spectacular landscape; It would be something like Pina Bausch performing in a Robert Wilson thing. The way I imagined it, in the beginning, it would be totally derivative; You have to start somewhere. The progress of *Project R-hythm*, and my developing relationship with The Island, resulted in rather quieter event and an emerging understanding of landscape as a very unreliable stage upon which to perform. My changing notion of what landscape is, as a result of the experience of *Project R-hythm*, is the focus of this essay.

Performance-based Research: notes on the relationship between practice and theory

The aim of this essay is to offer an articulation of the experience of making performance with a particular place. For now we can call this type of performance 'place-based' performance. The articulation of making place-based performance presented in this essay supports a wider philosophical consideration of what landscape is, and how performance operates in relation to it. The process of reflection enacted in this essay is informed by a performance-based approach to research, whereby the making of performance *is* the research process. The stories of making place-based performance that I share attempt to give a sense of the experience of making, performing and being in a very particular place; The Island. They are anecdotal accounts of practice, of relational dynamics, of the failures and epiphanies of the making process, they relay the interconnections between memory and place, and are in themselves a performance of remembering. These stories, and the experiences they express, have informed my own understanding of landscape as temporal, experiential and performative. I will say more on the relationship between the stories and the performance activity itself below. In the context of this essay – as well as within my own performance practice – the stories shared here are coloured by their nearness to the theoretical material I draw on. Theoretical and conceptual material, from Heidegger to Ingold, is mobilized, appropriated, misrepresented and re-assembled throughout this essay as a strategy for reflecting upon the philosophical implications of place-based performance making; namely for

considering what landscape is. The theory present in this essay offers languages, turns of phrase and frameworks for making sense of a deeply confusing experience of place. The theory is not therefore being *explained* or *critiqued* as such. Rather, its handling is in line with Karan Barrad and Donna Haraway's approach to 'diffraction', which emphasises the potential for creativity in a 'deconstructive' process of "reading for the constitutive exclusions of those ideas we can not do without" (see Barad in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012). The stories and reflective discussions offered within this essay do not, therefore, prove or disprove, explain or justify the theoretical material referenced. Instead the stories cannot be understood without the theory. Celine Condorelli enacts a similar alternative to critique in her own work around Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy. Condorelli's series of texts, objects and installations entitled *The Company She Keeps* enact processes of "thinking together" with Arendt and McCarthy (amongst others), this thinking together is also termed "friendship" (Condorelli, 2013). Like Condorelli, accounts of practice are presented here in friendship with the theory that the essay mobilizes; Practice and theory think together through an intimate dialogue regarding what landscape is. Barad, Haraway and Condorelli's generative alternatives to critique mirror the Heideggarian formulation "into this thing, that thing" (Heidegger, 2001) - more on that shortly.

The theoretical material that is gathered together with the performance activity in this essay defines a 'site', in the sense of a field of interest or concern. This thematic or non-location-specific 'site', accords with Kwon's observation that contemporary understandings of the 'site' in 'site-specific art' tend towards matters of concern rather than the geographical situation:

"It is an informational site, a locus of overlap of text, photographs and video recordings, physical places and things. . . . It is a temporary thing; a movement; a chain of meanings" (Kwon, 2002)

Heidegger's 'thing'

It is necessary at this point to outline in brief elements of the discourse in Heidegger's essay *The Thing*, along with some related theoretical material. This outline aims to clarify how that text is understood within this essay, and to highlight which particular elements of Heidegger's writing are being put to work in thinking about the nature of performance, place and landscape.

In *The Thing* Martin Heidegger explains that *things*, unlike objects, are active presences in the world, and that we become aware of their *thingness* in their being active, in their "presencing" or *thinging* (Heidegger, 2001). Heidegger uses the example of a jug to explain how, in thinging, things "gather" the world, and that this gathering – or "staying" - activity is, by definition, what a thing is:

"The jug presences as a thing (...) The giving of the outpouring [from the jug] can be drink. The outpouring gives water, it gives wine to drink.

The spring stays on in the water of the gift. In the spring the rock dwells, and in the rock dwells the dark slumber of the earth, which receives the rain and the dew of the sky. In the water of the spring dwells the marriage of sky and earth. It stays in the wine given by the fruit of the vine, the fruit in which the earth's nourishment and the sky's sun are betrothed to one another. In the gift of the water, in the gift of wine, sky and earth dwell. But the gift of the outpouring is what makes the jug a jug. In the jugness of the jug, sky and earth dwell." (ibid.)

Thinging, a gathering force, has the effect of "bringing-near" or "nearing" (ibid.). For Heidegger, the jug "nears" earth and sky, causing them to dwell together "in mutual belonging"; they are "betrothed, entrusted to one another" (ibid.). The activity of gathering, or bringing-near is one that I will return to in order to articulate the activity of 'place-based' performance making. Heidegger's jug-thing could be substituted with any other example of a thing; a *window*-thing gathers the inside and the outside, and in the glass of the window the sand from which it was made is stayed; the rocks – from which the sand became sediment – dwell in the window, and we already know that "in the rock dwells the dark slumber of the earth." So too the beaches,

deserts and ocean beds in which those rocks once occurred, from which the sand was mined, dwell in the window. These minerals, materials, and places are married to the glass-workers and factories, to the heat in which the glass was formed. As I write these things are stayed in the old sash window in front of me, held in the wobbly inconsistencies of the Victorian glass. Tim Ingold invoked the mound as an example of a thing in his 2012 essay *The Shape of the Land*. For the purposes of this essay, the jug is a particularly useful example due to its explicitly being a *holding vessel*, so we will stick with Heidegger's thing.

Landscape and things

According to Heidegger "staying appropriates" (Heidegger, 2001). In recent years phenomenological thinkers working within the loosely defined field of 'cultural geography' have appropriated Heidegger's notion of the *gathering-staying-thinging* thing in order to put forward conceptions of landscape as temporal, experiential, and performative (see Wylie, 2007). Most enthusiastic of the Heideggerian thinkers of landscape is Tim Ingold, whose phenomenological understandings of place and landscape are indebted to Heidegger and his things. Ingold suggests that there is "an intrinsic connection between landscape and thing". He uses Heideggerian "thinginess" - which "lies [in the thing's] capacity to gather, to hold and give forth" - to formulate his own notion of 'thing-places' (Ingold, 2012). The thing-place, such as the mound, "gathers the lives of people who dwell in the land, it holds their collective memories and gives forth in the rulings and resolutions of unwritten law" (ibid.). This gathering of people, memories, rulings and unwritten laws (which could come under 'behaviours'), affected by the mound-thing, *is* the landscape. Landscape therefore is visible and felt, geographical and metaphorical, spatial and temporal, defined as action - the action of gathering or being gathered. It is in connection to this understanding of landscape that I am considering what the activity of performance, and what performance does when it is in dialogue with place.

What is performance?

“Its life is a present one and only memory can carry it into the future”

(Kaprow, cited in Potts, 2008)

This essay considers what landscape is through the activity of performance making. The performance making activities, which constitute the research process, were carried out by myself (the author), in collaboration with a handful of other artists and researchers. These activities were informed by particular approaches to making and understanding what performance is. Despite the rethinking that was necessitated by the project, which I will go on to share, it is important to clarify some of fundamental characteristics of ‘performance’ as it is conceived of within the context of this research.

“Performances are actions” (Schechner, 2002). As such performance is temporal and “performance’s only life is in the present” (Phelan, 1993). In other words performance is *live*. Or as Kwon suggests performance is defined by its “unfixed *impermanence*, experienced as an unrepeatable and fleeting situation” (Kwon, 2002). Further to this emphasis on temporality and action, the performance enacted within this research was *experiential*. It was developed through *experimental* means. And the process of making is understood as a *philosophical* engagement with place.

Experiential performance

Experiential performance, as defined by Laura Cull and Matthew Goulish, is explicitly participatory and immersive. As such it places emphasis on the audience experience and the temporality - or *live-ness* - of the event (Cull and Goulish, 2007). Phelan states that “performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated” (Phelan, 1993) and experiential performance brings the unrepeatability of experience to the fore. Through heightening the audience’s awareness of the time-based nature of the performance, and presencing this as a thematic as well as a formal concern of the

event, the audience's own experience becomes the central and defining aspect of the experiential performance.

Experiential performance tends to occur in locations other than the traditional theatre auditorium. The auditorium is a space in which the audience have been trained *not* to attend to the specifics of place – to disregard the material particularities of the theatre building itself. The auditorium audience have been primed to 'suspend disbelief' and attend only to that which is presented within the bounds of the stage. Performances that take place outside of the space of the auditorium allow a greater capacity for defining the audience role within the specific event and its location; if the location of the performance is already unexpected, the audience's awareness of the environment is already heightened, and the rules of engagement can be written anew. As Kwon explains:

"the space of art [is] no longer perceived as a blank slate, a tabula rasa, but a real place. The art object or event in this context [is] to be singularly and multiply experienced in the here and now through the bodily presence of each viewing subject, in a sensory immediacy of spatial extension and temporal duration" (Kwon, 2002)

Experiential performance has an established lineage, and the practice implemented within this research recalls the work of Allan Kaprow in particular. Throughout the 1950's to 80's artist Kaprow created artworks that he described successively as 'Environments', 'Happenings', and 'Activities'. These art events were ephemeral, performative and immersive – and as such can be described as experiential. Audience members and performers moved through specific places according to rules of engagement that were outlined by the artist, conveyed either as explicit instructions or through the limitations of the performance space itself. Kaprow was heavily influenced by John Cage, who was his teacher at The New School (New York). Both Kaprow and Cage's performances require that the audience realise the work through their own participation in the event – listening, moving, or carrying out practical tasks. Thus audience experience is central to the thematic and formal

concerns of both artists. Kwon describes the work of Cage, Kaprow and related arts as the “anti-idealist, anti-commercial site-specific practices of the late 1960s and early 1970s”, and notes how these performance events “incorporated the physical conditions of a particular location as integral to the production, presentation, and reception of art” (Kwon, 2002). Kaprow’s work, in this sense, was ‘site-specific’. The task-based nature of Kaprow’s ‘site-specific’ work also lends itself to Ingold’s definition of landscape as ‘taskscape’: “just as the landscape is an array of related features, so – by analogy – the taskscape is an array of related activities” (Ingold, 1993). We will return to the idea of place-based performance as a taskscape later.

Experimental Performance Making

Discussing the work of Allan Kaprow, Cull describes his ‘Environments’, ‘Happenings’, and ‘Activities’ as “attention training” (Cull, 2011). Attention training activities are tasks that aim to heighten one’s awareness of place and time. In the context of my own research, attention training activities were used throughout the making process and final event to attune the artists’ and audience’s perception of various physical and temporal phenomena of The Island. Through the attention training activities we experimented with our relationship to place. This experimentation was the process through which we tried to *get to know* The Island, and develop material and performative strategies for the final event. The experiments with awareness that we played with included sensory alterations, such as wearing wax earplugs that affected one’s perception of place in the immediate, as well as methods for note taking designed to encourage attention towards specific aspects of The Island. Often the attention training was designed to support an awareness of that which is not immediately visible in the environment, or to note marked changes in the landscape over the project’s yearlong duration. Activities were developed through collaborative dialogues – practical and verbal negotiations – and were adapted and modified in response to their affect upon us, their practical feasibility as we moved around The Island, and according to the performative and philosophical implications they revealed. This fluid and responsive process is understood here as *experimental* performance making.

Performance Philosophy

Performance Philosophy, in academic terms, is a relatively new discipline – though it works to highlight the existing philosophical bent of historical performance work, as well as manifesting in contemporary practice, performance-based research, and reflection thereon. The field of Performance Philosophy concerns itself with “the myriad potential relationships that might be understood to exist between ‘performance’ and ‘philosophy’” (Cull, 2015). Esa Kirkkopelto suggests that Performance Philosophy’s aim is to “to recognise the genuine nature, in other words the philosophical bearing, of the questions practitioners present to their artistic and academic communities as well as to a wider society” (Kirkkopelto, 2015). The reflective process this essay makes manifest, similarly, aims to unpick the philosophical implications of the experience of making performance with *The Island*, and in doing so come to an understanding of what landscape is through the lens of ‘place-based’ performance.

‘Place-based’

Miwon Kwon explains that “site-specific art was initially based on a phenomenological or experiential understanding of the site”, but that with a refashioned conception of ‘site’ “contemporary site-oriented works occupy hotels, city streets, housing projects, prisons, schools, hospitals, churches, zoos, supermarkets, and they infiltrate media spaces such as radio, newspapers, television, and the Internet” (2002). Before moving on to share some stories of the project itself, I will clarify my own use of the terms ‘site’, ‘space’, ‘place’ and ‘landscape’. In doing so I will move towards defining the nature of my own performance as ‘place-based’. Clarification of these terms is particularly important in the light of Malpas’ observation that “place seems an evanescent concept, disappearing in the face of any attempt to inquire into it” (Malpas, 2006), and Doreen Massey’s insistence that despite the significant political implications of the ways in which we imagine and articulate space, the very nature of space itself is thought about very little (Massey, 2005).

As suggested above, within the context of this research 'site' refers not to a geographical, spatial or temporally bound situation, but to the matters of concern for the project itself. Site, is thus '*project-based*' rather than '*place-based*', and encompasses the reflection process enacted by this essay, as well as the activity that took place on The Island.

The term 'space' has come to refer, within cultural geography and related disciplines, to the abstract rather than the specific. Anchored by Tuan's 1977 *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, this notion of 'space' counterpoints measurable, universal spatiality with local, experiential and qualitative 'place'. In *For Space* Massey argued for a greater proximity of the concepts 'space' and 'place', which would be achieved through an awareness of the interconnectedness of the local and the global. The necessary entanglement of local and global scales, made more everyday through digital technology's ability to collapse distance, problematises the implied 'rooted-ness' of 'place-bound' thinking (Massey, 2005). The term 'place' in this essay is aligned with Massey's call for a greater consideration of the non-local aspects of a given, specific location. Place is not *rooted* or *bound* due to the technological and mnemonic connections that mean our experience of place bleeds beyond geographical boundaries. Despite Massey's reservations (many of which are well founded), the use of 'place' in this essay also aligns itself with Heidegger, who "having shifted from his earlier proposition of time over space [...] moved to reconceptualise space as place" (Massey, 2005). In Heidegger's 'place' "the distinction between near and far has been dissolved" (Julian Young in Ralón, 2001), and it is understood as inherently temporal as well as spatial. The temporality of place, and the definition of landscape that emerged out of the experience of making place-based performance is the focus of this essay. Thus, rather than define place in terms of temporality, or go on to discuss the nature of *landscape* at this stage, I shall let the project's implications unfold from here.

Notes on the articulation or translation of experience

It looks well on the page, but never

Well enough. Something is lost

When wind, sun, sea upbraid

(Basil Bunting, 2000)

Alex Potts suggested that “writing, for [Kaprow], existed in creative tension with an artistic practice” (Potts, 2008). Such creative tension is caused in part by the impossibility of articulating the experience of performance, or the unfolding of the event into text. Performance by definition refuses repetition, it “occurs over a time which will not be repeated” and “cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulations of representations [...] once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (Phelan, 1993). The stories that follow therefore do not *represent* the performance, neither the making process nor the final public performance event. Instead they are the exposure of a thinking through, a reflection process that puts to work Heidegger’s thing and Ingold’s thing-places, Massey’s insistent call for measured articulations of place, and Phelan’s reminder that performance’s “only life is in the present” (ibid.). This reflection process extends and is a part of the wider project titled *Project R-hytm*. Deirdre Heddon prefaces her own reflections on ‘autotopographical’ performance with the statement “translating a creative practice into written text also necessitates a wilful act of creativity” (Heddon, 2009). In line with Heddon, the stories below necessarily and unavoidably fictionalise *Project R-hytm* in their creative articulation of experience. ‘Translation’ would suggest that there is an original singularly true performance, an event that these stories re-perform in a different language. However, performance, in its live-ness is necessarily multiple – held temporarily in the diverse and contradictory experiences of numerous audience members, performers, human and non-human witnesses – and so there is no true version to re-tell here, no original from which these stories are a translation. Since the experiential nature of the performance event means that “one’s subject resists vision and may not be “really there” at all” (Phelan, 1993) the stories that follow are their own thing, gathered with the *performance*-thing through

the dialogue of this essay. They hold The Island, the performance and the theory together with you, the reader.

The stories have been constructed from notes taken during the making process and woven through with transcriptions of conversations with collaborators and audience members; they share memories of performing and being in The Island, and they echo borrowed turns of phrase and the absorbed material of others. They aim to invite you into the landscape of the project.

Waterproofs and Walking Boots

There is no rehearsal room on the island.

I thought if we walked long enough, over and over again enough, then we'd find the constants, we'd be able to reduce it down to its essential constant measurable parts, we would be able to distil the island and identify a stability upon which to build. These sites would make it clear to us what this place is, why this place is what it is. These sites would be our stage.

Because there is no rehearsal room we are always with the wind.

Because we are always with the wind we close down our peripheral vision.

Hats.

Gloves.

Long johns and earplugs. We wear headphones. Are equipped with windshields.

We wear waterproofs and walking boots.

I wear waterproofs and walking boots,

She wears wet-look leggings and lace up shoes.

We use our shoulders and foreheads to fend off the rain. Heads bowed into the wind we call to each other about how we will need more performers and where we will put them.

There is no rehearsal room on the island.

I imagine the private space of her bedroom. You cannot see the sea from her bedroom. I imagine the private space of her bathing. I remember the sanctuary of the bath, of the lockable bathroom door.

About the Sea

The second time we walked to St Cuthbert's beach it wasn't there.

The plan was to walk the route again to see what it is like without earplugs. Hearing.

As we descended the gravel path I did not notice that the rocks below are now submerged – this is a clue I haven't learnt yet – and as we turn right from the steps the beach is not there.

I did know about the sea. I do know about the sea. How it rises and lowers and how this is the reason that people come here in the first place.

This time we are repeating not improvising so we know what we were doing - where we are going to go. As we turn away from the steps and the beach isn't there I imagine when it is all still sand and you are just floating through it.

She said she'd never been there before and we are coming to terms with the idea that we will never go there again.

We have set out to find some residue or essence of this remembered place, some evidence.

We have been doing this for a year.

Wet-look leggings

If we could float the hydrophone on the water then we'd be able to listen to the surface. Which is the bit we need to hear. That's the bit in the way. I don't think it's the bottom. We listened to that, that's just a load of seaweed and rocks and shit. That's a different world altogether - which isn't what we need. That's an underwater thing. When we got to the bottom of the steps, it was this surface - when it was all still sand and you were like floating through it – if we can't listen to this grey rippling surface, the thing that stopped us from getting to the beach, then maybe we will be able to work out what this place is.

Do you have any penny floaters? ... any of those cheap footballs that float?

(I think saying the word hydrophone makes me sound like I know what I'm doing. Hydrophones make me look like I'm a specialist).

Neil knows what a hydrophone is.

Neil runs the island shop and he knows what a hydrophone is.

Everyone here knows what a hydrophone is.

It's a microphone for the sea.

So everyone here knows what a hydrophone is.

He does that sort of roll your eyes "you kids and your hair brained schemes I can only imagine what you are up to this time." When I'm with Judy this is inflected with sexual innuendo. I'm glad that this can be inflected with sexual innuendo. It means that I can be a hair brained kid and a grown woman - according to Neil – who runs shop – who knows what a hydrophone is. I retain flexibility here.

"This one comes in a net so you can use that to put the hydrophone inside, and weight it with stones so the microphone sits at the surface level rather than under the ball."

Neil is also two steps ahead on the buoyancy front.

She throws the ball out and it floats and we hear a brief general wateriness.

Then silence.

Maybe it will rebalance.

Silence. We are wearing headphones.

We wait.

We watch the sound and wait.

Day, dim laps at the shore

In petulant ripples

The football keeps floating.

Our headphones remain silent.

As we pull at the hydrophone cord - hoping for a bit of splish - it slowly drags along the bottom of the sea, bumping over rocks and scratching seaweed towards us.

We agree that because she has wet-look leggings on she should go out and retrieve the ball, that is still bobbing atop the surface of the sound. She seems to have convinced me of this logic.

(When I was small I lent my favourite doll to some film-maker friends of my parents and later found out that they had filmed it floating out into the North Sea).

She's right, you can't tell that her leggings are wet now that they actually are.

Reflections

In the early stages of *Project R-hythm* we enacted what might be described as a topographical approach to the task of performance making; we hoped to measure, define, map and *know* the island by traversing it extensively and repeatedly. We approached the task of performance making like the topographer:

“who is concerned to map out a particular region and who has [...] the task of mapping out that region while located within it. Such a task can only be accomplished by looking to the interconnections among the features of that region and through a process of repeated triangulation and traverse—and a good deal of walking [...] Of course the topographer aims to arrive at a mapping of the region that will in some sense be “objective”—at least within a given set of cartographic parameters” (Malpas, 2006)

The tools we set out with – windshields on our microphones, Ordnance Survey maps, cameras – as well as our (*my*) attire, betrayed a belief that there was a singular, static and ‘true’ Island, an ‘objective’ knowledge to be found behind the inconvenience of the weather. This approach corresponds to the thinking of early ‘site-specific’ work discussed by Kwon in *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*:

“initially [site-specific art] took the site as an actual location, a tangible reality, its identity composed of a unique combination of physical elements: length, depth, height, texture, and shape of walls and rooms; scale and proportion of plazas, buildings, or parks; existing conditions of lighting, ventilation, traffic patterns; distinctive topographical features, and so forth” (Kwon, 2002)

In this early phase of *Project R-hythm*, during our repeated failures to measure The Island and therefore know our performance space, I longed for a rehearsal room, the traditional thinking space of the performance maker. In the rehearsal room I

imagined we would survey our findings, drink tea and make solid decisions about what to put on the stage; the stage being The Island we were yet to discover in amongst all the wind and the rain and the never-ceasing tide. Always outside, our notes, documentation, audio recordings and collected objects felt like they were disappearing behind us as we kept walking to keep warm, they fell out of our pockets, smudged in the rain, were misheard through the tireless wind.

We were thwarted in our 'topographical' endeavours rather early on. Despite having a basic understanding of tidal movement from high school geography and an enthusiasm for swimming, we had not married the movement of the water with the reality of The Island as a 'space' for performance. As the ebb and flow of the tide submerged, washed away and shifted the parameters of our stage, not only did our plans float away, our tools for working and our conception of how to perform in this place dissolved. To be in this place we would have to learn how to move with it, to work alongside it, within its alien rhythms. The notion of planning became absurd; how do you plan an action when the place you imaged performing it in is constantly changing shape? When each low tide reveals a new stage? I arrived on The Island with a general notion that performance is by its very nature unrepeatable, but with the experience of repeat performances as 'doing it again differently' on the same stage. But this time it was not only the performance that couldn't be replicated, it was the stage that kept disappearing. The Island revealed itself to be very unlike the neat yellow ground plan offered by our maps.

If you look at the maps you'll see a representation of the island's boundary at high tide, and also a large yellow patch surrounding it, which represents the approximate shape of the land at low tide.

On Google Maps the island is shown at high tide.

On Google Earth it's at low tide.

And on Google Street View it's at high tide – which is odd because the Google Car must have had to stay on the island for a good few hours, but they still haven't bothered to drive down all of the roads that make up the village. There are a couple of nice pubs on The Island, they all do food, but the Moon Under Water does the best mussels.

In our repeated attempts to return to the site of previous performed gestures we were learning that “place should not be assumed to be identical with the “where” of a thing” (Malpas, 2006). As the sea changed the shape of the island and the weather held us back from connecting with what we believed to be a *real* place, The Island resisted repetition and return; it kept moving, and in its constant flux it proved that “it is not a background, nor is it a stage” (Inglis, 1997, cited in Bender, 1998). When the “where” of the place failed us we lost our stage and we were forced to develop new methods for getting to know The Island. Defined by change all that was left of this place was our experience of the passing of time, thus place came to be understood through *Project R-hytm* as primarily temporal. It did not occur to us in these words, we were not fully aware that our notion of place was being fundamentally re-evaluated. The progress of things was a little more like “*I don't know what to do, lets just keep doing this until we think of something*”, but in the keeping-doing that The Island encouraged us to enact we became absorbed in the *experience* of place, and less concerned with the initial – hopeless - topographical endeavour. The keeping-doing moved us towards a philosophical consideration of what landscape is, a broader enquiry than the topographical attempt to know what The Island is.

Like the topographer, though less optimistic about our ability to procure an “objective” sense of The Island, we did a lot of walking. Walking became a base upon which to build the attention training activities that would lead us to a greater understanding of how to move, how to perform, how to “be” with The Island. We used walking in the environment of The Island “as a support system for the formulation, interpretation and exploration of ideas” (Massey, 2012). We walked to specific locations, we walked to listen, we walked with earplugs in, we failed to walk, we walked in the driving rain, we walked in disguise, we walked together and apart;

like The Island, we kept moving. We used the experience of walking as a mode through which to experiment with our relationship to The Island through attention training activities. We did this by altering our sensory experience of the place in various ways, sometimes by depriving ourselves of one sense in order to heighten another, or by consciously attending to particular movements, geographical or meteorological phenomena that we encountered. On other occasions we use the framework of the walk as a context in which to share material that carried associative, personal relevance to our relationship with The Island; as we wandered we told stories, played recorded music, placed objects in particular locations and exchanged images. In doing so we forged new relationships between ourselves, and the materials and places we connected. This forging of connections and associative meanings shaped our experience of the place through a process of *bringing-near*. As our focus shifted from mapping The Island to considering the very nature of the topographical experience, walking became a “state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together” (Solnit, 2014). Accordingly, our approach to performance making shifted from pre-planned gestures to be situated at ‘sites’ around The Island to developing performative ways of moving and *being* with The Island.

Kind of Chaos

Standing in the wind and the rain with the sea and the earth at Spaniel’s Head it felt as if we were finally there now. The memory is of turning. Of temperature and turning and the movement of colour.

Its kind of chaos

The flowers feel out of place. Washed out flowers guarding a small pile of damp ash - surrounding a small patch of heavy white noise in the periphery of the movement.

It is nothing.

It is weighted differently.

It is precisely nothing now and the bright white obelisk only emphasizes the chaos of sound and colour shifting, so that it too, we too, flicker with.



Image of The Island taken by audience member during the Project R-rhythm performance.

‘Landscape Performance’

The final performance event took place in the summer. 15 people joined myself and my collaborators on a walk around The Island. It took approximately 6 hours, which fitted with the duration of low tide, meaning that The Island was ‘open’. Walkers were aged between 9 and (an estimated) 70 years old. It was sunny. But not very warm. As we walked, three ‘performers’ - including myself - introduced a series of activities to the audience, ways of walking, objects and textual material. Performers also enacted gestures and worked to gently choreograph the group’s movement around The Island. An early activity carried out by the audience-walkers involved eating and drinking whilst wearing wax earplugs. This attention training performance activity

was intended to heighten the presence of one's own body in the experience of place, highlight the body as a filter and material through which one experiences place.

"I wasn't sure what the wax was for, but I took it as an invitation to look around more. I think I presumed for the most part that it was intended to be a 'sensory' experience... though I wasn't sure if the idea was to 'remove' the acoustic environment (so as to draw attention to the visual aspects of the landscape) or draw attention to it (as the sounds of my ears etc. became quite focused). In either case, it was enjoyable - it didn't matter that I didn't know. We walked down a path to the beach and then sat down and ate some chocolate." (Audience-walker remembering the event)

Later in the walk the group were invited to dress as tourists, donning cameras, sunglasses, and equipped with maps they blended into the busier parts of the island that swarmed with day-trippers during low tide. The act of disguise alerted the audience-walkers to how they perform their own identity in relation to The Island, and the ways in which this enables or denies anonymity in the landscape.

The tasks the audience-walkers were invited to carry out, along with the material that was read aloud, played through speakers and presented along the route, shaped their experience of The Island, and in doing so shaped the landscape. The performance can be understood as a taskscape in the vein of Ingold: "an array of related activities" (Ingold, 1993). Ingold's taskscape *is* landscape; the taskscape that is the place-based performance shapes the landscape. It does this by being a *thing*. Just like Heidegger's thing, the performance gathers people, place, material and memory, and this gathering is landscape. Thus, reflecting upon the experience of *Project R-hytm* I have moved to a description of such work as 'landscape performance', where landscape describes the effect of the performance rather than the context. "To hold a space" is a phrase meaning to centre or focus the activity of a place, to provide a focus. It is used in theatre to describe what an effective performance does with the auditorium; when the actor "holds the space" she holds the attention of the audience and enables them to focus on the emerging elements

and meanings of the event. Recalling Heidegger's jug, landscape performance shapes landscape by *holding* people, place, material and memory together over the period of bracketed time in which it occurs. This might also be understood as bringing these elements into a dialogue with one another. Or to use Solnit's language bringing these "characters finally in conversation together." Furthermore, the performance maker, like Heidegger's potter, "shapes the void" of the performance-thing in which these aspects are held, the performance maker's role is to shape the landscape by holding constitutive elements of audience's experience of place. *Project R-hytm* did this using chocolate, tourist disguises, earplugs and an Elvis song. Further to the choreographed movements and material gathered by the performance makers, the audience bring their own associations, memories, and materials to the performance. This multiplicity means that the landscape of the performance is *intersubjective* and "at any given moment [it is] multiple and contradictory" (Bender, 1998).

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

The River Project: A poetics of Eco-Critical Film-Making

Paul Ritchard

ABSTRACT

There is a body of film that falls under the categories of eco-cinema, environmental cinema and landscape cinema. These films take the natural environment, place or landscape as their subject matter.

As we try to make meaning of the connections of our lives and world through film, Rust and Monani (2013) note that, 'cinema is a form of negotiation, a mediation that is itself ecologically placed as it consumes the entangled world around it, and in turn, is itself consumed.' This influence is evident in complex, poetic ways, and appears to revolve around the manner in which the films listen to the landscape, rather than seeking to impose themselves upon it – exhibiting a certain kind of humility.

As a child I was attracted to flowing water. In my early teens I experienced the fear and awe of canoeing down Australia's wild Snowy River. As an adult I find myself drawn to cross, swim, walk along, look into and film rivers. Not to narrate, or even describe the river, but to use film to find a nonfiction form that acknowledges the river, writes the river.

I'm making a series of films around the Snowy River that investigates the poetics of rivers. The first in that series, *A View from the Bank*, is a 40-minute experimental, structuralist film that documents parts of the Snowy from its source to its mouth. I will examine how this film does not seek to interpret the world as much as listen and bear witness to it. This is realised aesthetically by its use of stillness, long takes and unadulterated audio which has created a form that appears and is experienced as a counter to the deliberate rhetoric common to much documentary. I will show how my methods of production were guided by the river and the landscape around it. Further, in the Anthropocene, how can this film be an agent for environmental awareness without resorting to dogmatic imposition?

THE RIVER PROJECT A Poetics of Eco-Critical Film-Making

‘Despite its thousand faces, the river takes on its single destiny; its source takes both the responsibility and the credit for the river’s entire course. The imagination barely takes tributaries into consideration. The dreamer who sees a river flow by calls up the legendary origin of the river, the far-off source.’ Bachelard (1983, p151)

‘Sometimes, if you stand on the bottom rail of a bridge and lean over to watch the river slipping slowly away beneath you, you will suddenly know everything there is to be known.’ Winnie the Pooh, A.A. Milne (1995, 12)

As a child I was attracted to flowing water. In my early teens I experienced the fear and awe of canoeing down the Snowy River. As an adult I find myself drawn to cross, swim, walk along, look into and film rivers.

Not to narrate, or even describe the river, but to use film to find a nonfiction form that acknowledges the river, writes to the river.

This river project seeks to identify the problems, potential solutions and opportunities in the production of a series of films that seeks to document a river, seeks out how it makes meaning – investigate its poetics. It uses the Snowy River as its site.

My ecological standpoint on the Snowy (though this extends to all rivers) not only deals with it as just a river, it also considers it as a system. I see the river and my filmmaking as systems that are intertwined. As much as I’d like to be able to simplify and narrow my making to the river itself I can’t ignore the fact that I’m dealing with a river that has been transformed by man. There are parts of the river not accessible by people other than on the water, but these stretches of the river have been greatly impacted by introduced flora and fauna, weeds and pests. The river has also been dammed and diverted, its water flow reduced drastically.

I’m keen to raise awareness of the parlous state of the environment and show how my production practices can become more sustainable by lowering my carbon footprint and by raising consciousness of changing production methods to further

achieve that. As result of this, and in keeping with the spirit of it, my filmmaking, its process and form, has to reflect that ethos.

In order for the river to reveal itself it must be listened to, observed then represented, without rhetoric. The intention being that my work does not talk about the river in a dogmatic way, rather that it allows the river to talk for itself: to give the viewer an opportunity to know the place in their own way. It is a subtle inversion of the usual question that many documentary makers and textbooks recommend asking: 'What do I want to say?' to, 'What needs to be said?'

The first film in the river project: *A View from the Bank*.

My desire for the first film was not to interpret the river; it was not to say anything about it. It was to learn how to document a river and to see if I could get to know the place by just being there, then knowing it through the camera.

The second film: *Journey Downstream*

I will travel down the sections of the Snowy that are inaccessible except by canoe. The film could be a series of POVs, i.e. humanised, personal – the antithesis of the first film, or a POV of a canoeist or a swimmer or an OTS of a canoeist – could we see the canoe? These POVs could be used for the next film.

I will determine the method of filming once there.

The final film: *Swimming the River*

Inspired by Roger Deakin's book, *Waterlogged*; John Cheevers' book and Frank Perry's film, *The Swimmer*; and Jonathan Glazers' film, *Under the Skin*. I will swim the length of the Snowy, then out to sea from the mouth. A fiction piece (obviously) that will utilise the methodologies of the previous films.

In the making of the first film and the planning of the others certain questions have arisen:

How can I create a method of working in my filmmaking that is in simpatico with the subject matter that the film is discussing?

How can I tread lightly, both literally and figuratively, on the landscape in the production of this project?

How do I go about devising a new method of eco-aesthetic filmmaking?

As we try to make meaning of the connections of our lives and world through film, Rust and Monani (2013) note that, “cinema is a form of negotiation, a mediation that is itself ecologically placed as it consumes the entangled world around it, and in turn, is itself consumed.”

This cycle of influence is evident in complex, poetic ways, and appears to me to revolve around the manner in which some films listen to the landscape, rather than seeking to impose themselves upon it.

Eco-criticism analyses texts that deal with the subject of nature. Most agree that it is generally narrowed to those texts that deal with environmental concerns, environmental change or degradation.

An issue at play is the stark difference between the types of films that are considered in eco-film criticism – the polar opposites of Hollywood to the avant-garde. David Ingram, ‘What are the implications for the activist ambitions and aesthetic tastes of eco-film criticism if “bad” art inspires people just as much as, if not more than, the “good”?’ (2013 p53). This does raise the question of why most of the works considered as eco-films are more of an avant-garde nature. Paula Willoquet-Marcondi (2010) suggests that what should be considered eco-cinema is those films that engage with environmental issues and that promote action. Others tend to look more broadly. Sean Cubbit (2005 p1) counters this narrowness of what can be considered an eco-film – ‘Though many films are predictably bound to the common ideologies of the day, including ideologies of nature, many are far richer in contradictions and more ethically, emotionally, and intellectually satisfying than much of what passes for eco-politics.’

Ingram (2013 p44) points to the efficacy of the avant-garde and its 'cognitive estrangement' that suits the delivery of eco-aesthetics: the state of environmental awareness.

On Andrej Zdravics' *Riverglass: A River Ballet in Four Seasons* (1997), '[It] transforms our conditioned relationship to time by demanding that we be patient and appreciative of something to which we rarely lend our attention. It asks us to see the river in its own terms, not in ours; to experience the river for itself, not for what resources it can provide us.'

Then, on the potential double-headed function of eco-cinema; to produce work that is sustainable and does not harm the environment and work that creates a different way to view the world. 'These films and videos are the inverse of the fundamentally hysterical approach of commercial media and advertising in particular, where consumption of the maximum number of images per minute models unbridled consumption of products and the unrestrained industrial exploitation of the environment within which these products are produced and consumed. [...] The job of eco-cinema is to provide new kinds of film experiences that demonstrates an alternative to conventional media spectatorship and help to nurture a more environmentally progressive mindset'.

Pat Brereton (2013 p214), '[T]here remains much dispute around both the function, as well as the efficacy, of representations of landscape in film, and ecological scholars will have to take on such aesthetic debates in the future to help develop a more robust eco-aesthetic for film studies.'

I seek to minimise my impact on the environment, and in doing so not impose myself on the river. In order to achieve this I needed to depart from industrial methods of film production. This departure requires experimentation with process.

Traditional methods of making non-fiction and fiction films, of which the majority of productions adhere to, are built upon efficiencies and expediencies that are

synonymous with late capitalism and the Anthropocene. This is most apparent in pre-production as it sets the scene for the rest of the production.

I chose to do minimal planning – I went to the source of the Snowy and started shooting. It was a ‘come what may’ approach, the intention being to allow the place and my process to talk to one another.

I kept the way I wanted to document the river simple. A lot of territory had to be covered. Each place on the river that I’d pinpointed would take at least half an hour to get to, sometimes hours – as it could be some distance from car to river. Initially my objective was to get as many shots as possible of the river. Industrial filmmaking calls this coverage, getting ‘enough’ footage so you can edit the story together.

Via car, bike or foot I’m delivered to the scene I want to capture. The landscape is sized up, evaluated, often from afar. A series of shots is tabulated in my mind. The route I will navigate through the ‘location’ and the points within that, that I choose to capture. The ‘knowledge’ of that landscape is built up as I traverse it. The paths through it are mapped out. River levels are observed, wondering what it will be like in a different season or when more or less water is released. I observe the way the landscape meets the water, how the river sits in it, where the light is coming from. In developing this new way of working a conundrum has arisen.

How can I reconcile the claim that I’m allowing the river to speak for itself whilst I’m forcing that dialogue into a process that is determined by the act of filming, however flexible and organic it is?

After the first shoot I established a set of constraints to assist with this reconciliation. They helped refine my method of working and were the basis of my eco-aesthetic approach.

They were to define my method of working.

The constraints:

No. 1 The shot must be locked off, still

No. 2 The focal length must be close to the human perspective

No. 3 The length of the recording must be over 40 seconds.

No. 4 Every shot recorded appears in the film.

No. 5 No humans. No me, no others. Just the river.

No. 1 The shot must be locked off, still

When you turn your head, pan it or are moving through space the movement is smooth and you concentrate on what you want to see (or so the brain tells us). It's different when that movement is done with a camera. Video recording and its compression have a difficult time processing a moving image, it can judder or flicker, but most importantly the viewer's eye cannot wander around the frame at will. It is directed by the frame and the composition, which invariably does not tally with the viewer's gaze.

This static frame, this stillness, is crucial to what I do. Every shot is meant to be a tableau.

When I go through this process of searching for the right shot and all the setup involved I'm conscious of how a landscape painter might feel, or a birdwatcher. James Benning talking to Scott MacDonald (2007) – '[W]hen I'm finding a frame, no language is involved: the little voice in my head is quiet; it doesn't say, "No, no, more to the right; no, not that far." I find each frame in a purely visual way - considering symmetry, negative space, meaning, color, texture, balance. [...] By not using language, I can communicate with myself much more efficiently. It's not intuitive but rather, a kind of fast thinking, based on years of experience.'

No. 2 The focal length must be close to the human perspective

The focal length is the distance measured in mm from the front lens to the sensor.

The camera's focal length is set, except for a few shots, to 50mm that in combination

with the camera's super 35mm sensor approximates the field of view of the naked eye.

The camera is always placed to approximate the human viewpoint. I did not shoot from a helicopter, nor did I place the camera on the ground or at the level of the water. I also avoided objects that loomed large in the foreground like trees or rocks as this draws attention to the camera's existence – a weird trope from bad fiction.

No. 3 The length of the recording must be over 40 seconds.

The viewer needs time to absorb the shot – time to wander around the frame, time to absorb, time to listen.

In figuring out the prescribed length of shot I knew that 10 or even 20 seconds was too short. 30 was probably enough but I went with 40. Depending on varying factors, this length of time can seem quite short and at others seem like an eternity.

It is a whole other investigation looking at what effect the length of a shot has.

Suffice to say that the longer the shot, the more things can happen. Peter Hutton talking on his film *The Study of a River*, 'I require, no, ask that the audience look at the shots with a meditative eye.' (MacDonald 2007 p65) And, James Benning again, 'First, the act of filming in that way is somewhat political just by taking a film variable and extending it through a place that most people don't live, so they are a bit uncomfortable maybe with the duration. But they are also then forced to have new readings of what they're looking at. So at first it might be a totally aesthetic experience, but hopefully through duration, that breaks down and there are hints in the image that become political or social.' (Panse 2013 p65)

The time it took – to find the right spot; to set up the shot; then the recording, with multiple shots being taken in each site – accumulated quickly, to hours. I would be absorbed as I stared at the landscape, observing the ripples on the water, watching the clouds, listening to the sound of the wind and watching its effect on the foliage.

No. 4 Every shot recorded appears in the film.

Because I was shooting and editing on my own, and because of the first three constraints, I was able to edit in camera. The length of the shot in the film is

determined by how long the recording is. I didn't slate or mark the shots because I wasn't handing the footage over to an editor, but I kept a notebook listing shot location and other details.

I would come in at the end of a day's shoot and transfer the footage off the card onto the computer. Then I would drag it into a timeline in the order it was shot. As the shoots followed the flow, from the source of the river to the mouth, the shots would be in that same order. A section of the river, the film shot and edited in one day.

But... Audio

The recording, laying up and editing of sound was not constrained in the same way as the vision editing as I knew I would disobey it. In order to replicate what we hear, or what we think we hear, it is rare that the sound can be sourced from one recording, one track of 'sync' audio. The babbling of the water; birds; insects; and the wind in trees, through grass and around rocks comes together to form a rich soundscape that we hear with the naked ear and that can only be created by recording the specific sounds, which are then layered up and mixed.

No. 5 No humans. No me, no others. Just the river.

The first four constraints are intended to immerse the viewer in the film. Similarly the minimal amount of postproduction was intended to do the same, further distancing the viewer from the fact that the film was made. In this film I didn't want the viewer to be conscious of me, the filmmaker. I didn't want it to be mediated by others either. All was designed to give the viewer an opportunity to know the river as I did in the planning and shooting.

The constraints allowed me to immerse myself further in the shooting process by not having to think about it. It gave me the time and energy to concentrate on what it was like to be there, made me more alert to my surroundings, and most importantly it made what I set out to do achievable. In a way it turns me into a machine that shoots without having to worry about the technical.

James Benning's film *Spiral Jetty* is a key inspiration for the development of my practice. Panse, again 'Benning's films do not represent an ecological subject matter. They are eco-aesthetical precisely because they do not represent subjects or a subject matter as separate and closed systems. Eco-aesthetics operate through forces rather than conscious actions. Benning's documentaries do not impose, but generate passive creation. (2013 p44)

The next steps I need to take in this project are about getting it do some work – realising its potential as an agency for change, alerting others to the state of the Snowy, or any environment that I, or others, investigate using my methodology. It could be applied to a mountain, a reef in the sea, or a lake, just as much as it could be to a river. These are just other systems. My filmmaking is a system and the interaction of my methods and the place where I work, a system also. In my teaching I run classes utilising this methodology for both under graduate and postgraduate students with the intention of getting future filmmakers to work in this way.

Prompted by Maxwell & Miller's, *The Real Future of the Media*, which 'focuses on the environmental impact of the media—the myriad ways that media technology consumes, despoils, and wastes natural resources.' (Maxwell 2013), my making will be conscious of and analysed for its sustainability. I will be calculating the carbon tonnage produced by my three trips to the Snowy, totalling 5000k or so, and looking at offsetting it. Of more importance, though, is raising awareness of the impact of filmmaking so that we think twice about, for example, taking multiple cars and larger crews when we could make do with one vehicle and a smaller crew. All in an attempt to reduce our carbon footprint – to tread lightly, literally which is part of the cycle that is producing work that treads lightly, figuratively.

Hopefully the finished films that I make – although the word 'finished' is problematic in my methods – maintain the undogmatic and humble approach that was undertaken in their making.

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LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Typography and the branding of culture: a systemic functional analysis of typography's performance in branding cultural festivals in Australia.

Tonya Meyrick

Abstract

This paper offers a social semiotic analysis of logotypes used to brand cultural festivals in 21st century Australia. A contemporary method is explored that suits the significant role typography performs within this context and offers a contribution to design research and the festival scape that not only engages with the artefacts of design but with the conceptualization of designed meaning in visual culture.

Branding is a vital part of the festival space and relies on typography to establish the symbolic values and representations of urban freedoms; rich histories, cultured places, playfulness and stimulation that seek to subvert our daily existence while performing the task of engaging local, national, and international visitors and participants. However, professional practices demonstrated in the design, media and arts industries have far outpaced the extent to which this phenomenon has been written about in the academic or public realm. This paper addresses this shortfall and offers the foundation for a systemic functional method in the decoding of typography in visual culture

1) INTRODUCTION

Exploratory in nature, this paper offers an interpretation of the cultural, social and pictorial dynamics of typography used in brand logotypes of cultural festival. This is achieved by providing a background to the impact and importance of festivals and a semiotic analysis of two festival identities from the dynamic medium and practices of communication design. Skaggs and Shank state that semiotics is the explicit heart of graphic design theory, just as it is the implicit (subconscious) engine in communication design practice (1997, p. 54). Defined as the study of meaning making, semiotics is a framework for understanding meaningful communication practices. In the 1970's Halliday described language as a semiotic system, not in the sense of a system of signs but a systemic resource for meaning (Skaggs & Shank, 1997, p. 5). In social semiotics the process of communication is not reduced to the linear pathway with the single accuracy of reproducing the message, rather communication is an open dialogue that allows for meaning exchanges within the site of cultural production and the social context (Halliday, 1978). K. O'Halloran, Tan,

Smith, and Podlasov (2009, p. 1) state that scholars in the science of semiotics have identified the need to develop holistic and comprehensive theories and descriptions of semiosis, applicable to all signs and sign systems but also capable of taking into account the specific characteristics of different semiotic phenomena. Indeed, as Jenks states (2003 p. 15) semiotics depends on a cultural network that established the uniformity of responses to/readings of the sign. Communication design is the cultural network at play here, and this paper addresses the cultural production and social context of typographic artefacts.

The social semiotic framework offered here is drawn from Michael Halliday's (1994) *Systemic Functional Grammar of the English Language* and is informed by Kay O'Halloran's work, in particular the work *Visual Semiosis in Film (2004)* and *Digital Semiotics* (K. O'Halloran et al., 2009) and Hodge, Kress and van Leeuwen's work in the area (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001; T Van Leeuwen, 2005, 2008).

Preliminary in its approach, the paper offers a starting point in crafting a social semiotic method for evaluating and interpreting the pictorial, social and cultural context within which design operates. In attempting this, the challenging nature of such an enterprise becomes evident and potential future research strategies are suggested.

2) BACKGROUND

Cultural festivals are ubiquitous across the world stage. Demonstrating a rich contribution to the fabric of contemporary society in metropolitan and non-metropolitan locations. Festivals are seen as a major source of income and tourism at local and national levels (Pessoa & Deloumeaux, 2015, p. 7) with governments investing over 12 % of possible world investments into tourism-related industries and infrastructure; receiving revenues of an average of 10 % of the world GDP (Balakrishnan, Nekhili, & Lewis, 2011, p. 4). There is an abundance of research into many aspects of the festival scape, including the tourism, marketing, event management, event design and the social, cultural and environmental impacts of festivals, however there is paucity in academic and industry based research examining the performance of the primary brand driver in the promotion, design and

marketing of these events - the branding identity or logotype. Considering the key role an identity contributes – this is surprising.

In the global marketplace and the digital economy typography is inescapable. Type is consumed each day through newspapers, books, and timetables, and on clothes, signs and billboards as well as read through digital applications on smart phones, tablets and computers. The term ‘typography’ is used to describe the appearance and arrangement of letterforms. McLean states, ‘ typography is the art, or skill, of designing visual material which communicates to others by means of words’(1980, p. 8). ‘99% of brand communication focuses on two of the key senses – *sight* and *sound*’ (Kay, 2006, p. 742). Considering this, it is critical to understand the semiotic implications of text and image components of branding. Clow and Baack maintain (2007, p. 39) that the concept of branding is immaterial, physically branding is expressed through tangible visual elements such as symbols, type and colour and intangible elements such as personal and social values, positioning and culture.

Typography it is the principal constituent in the logotype of a brands identity.

As a critical brand component, typography is both an optical phenomenon with visual properties and a communication device that transmits messages from producers to consumers through a range of mediums. Here, the linguistic and pictorial significance of typography can be manipulated to contain meaning on a multitude of levels. The precise communication of brand values to recipients is paramount for the success of a brand message (Kay, 2006) and the role typography performs is crucial in communicating and establishing these values (McCarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002). There has been much work investigating typography from a range of perspectives including focus on the historical evaluations of type, print and form (McLean, 1980; Meggs & Purvis, 2012) and the pictorial significance of typography has concerned Baines (Baines & Haslam, 2002) and Meggs (Meggs, 1992) among others. Typeface classification and behaviour has been an important contribution (Bringhurst, 2004; Brownie, 2012, 2015; T. Childers, Griscti, & Leben, 2013; Dixon, 2002; Tomiša, Vusić, & Milković, 2013) to our theorization of typography yet there are shortfalls in

academic research regarding the necessary and powerful role typography performs in branding and the logotype.

3. CULTURAL FESTIVALS

In the field of cultural production, cultural festivals are a form of cultural capital in an objectified state and an increasingly important aspect of our contemporary experience. Branding is a vital part of this festival space presenting impressions of urban freedoms, rich histories, and cultured places. Festivals seek to subvert our daily existence while performing the task of engaging local, national, and international visitors and participants. There is prestige in holding culturally relevant and socially acceptable festivals that serve the discourses of “city branding” and the “creative industries” in a competitive global context. Festivals have become a central figure of not only the political economy of tourism but also of urban regeneration and cultural tourism (van der Pol, 2005, p. 2). A key dimension of human cultures (Phipps & Slater, 2010, p. 10), there are many reasons for holding a festival. Ceremonial exchanges or agricultural celebration of the seasons or harvest have occurred for a very long time here in Australia and can be traced to medieval times in Europe. Festivals are important to indigenous communities for their contribution to community wellbeing and resilience (Phipps & Slater, 2010, p. 9). These events are often the lifeblood of communities in regional and remote locations such as the Garma Festival of Traditional Cultures in Arnhem Land. This festival brings together five regional clan groups to support indigenous cultures, maintain community ties and celebrate artistic and cultural practices among clan members (“Garma Festival,” 2015). In rural and regional NSW, Victoria and Tasmania over 2,500 festivals occur every year (Gibson & Stewart, 2009). Gibson and Stewart (2009, p. 2) state that it is ‘against a backdrop of rural decline, that many places have sought to reinvigorate community and stimulate economic development, through staging festivals. Pessoa and Deloumeau state (Pessoa & Deloumeaux, 2015, p. 7) that cultural festivals are a major source of income and tourism at local and national levels and with over 74 trillion hits returned from a Google search on the term ‘cultural festivals’ it is extraordinary that an examination of the primary brand driver and most visible aspect of these events has not just been neglected in academic or industry literature

– it is non-existent. It is a challenging task to bundle and embed the interests and identities of a culture, cultural group, place or sound into typography's letterforms for a festival brand identity. To then ensure such a representation is accurately communicated to an audience who might not belong to the same cultural group, social group or history is an even greater challenge. This highlights the practical challenges and possible theoretical implications involved in designing the brand identity and logotype for cultural festivals. As such, this challenge requires theorization cognizant of how to encapsulate these experiences and histories within the proposed design artefacts.

4) BRANDING CULTURAL FESTIVALS = DESTINATION BRANDING

Many disciplines influence the branding of cultural festivals and this sees the phenomena positioned within communication design, business and marketing, cultural studies, geography, advertising, psychology and place branding. Esu and Arrey argue that branding cultural festivals is complex due to the combination of peculiarities of cultural festivals when compared to conventional services such as banking, telecommunications, education, or healthcare (Esu & Arrey, 2009, p. 182). Cultural festivals possess the hallmarks of destination branding and inadvertently share some of the attributes that influence visitors' decisions to visit such destinations (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Cooper, 2005; Esu & Arrey, 2009; Jayswal, 2008). The destination is the place where the attractions are found (Blain et al., 2005; Cooper, 2005; Jayswal, 2008). When an event is properly branded it has the potential of contributing to the host destination as a feature attraction (Esu & Arrey, 2009, p. 182). South-by-South West Festival in Austin Texas, Deniliquin Ute Muster, in NSW, Edinburgh Festival in Scotland and Dark MOFO in the Tasmanian winter are all substantiation of this claim.

The ways in which typography is deployed to potential audiences to establish the symbolic values and representations of cultures, places, spaces and events for cultural festival branding is relatively unknown. Typography is not neutral, it is value laden and loaded with meaning, it is a semiotic mode; (T. Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 30) encoded and decoded in a similar manner to that of text or film. What has been

determined is that typeface characteristics influence and have an effect on consumer motivation, behaviours and advertising processing ability (L. Childers, T. & Jass, 2002; Heller, 2014; Hyndman, 2016; McCarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002). With this established how can we break down the influencing typeface characteristics to expose the symbolic values and cultural representations of letterforms?

5) SEMIOSIS

O'Halloran, Tan, Smith, and Podlasov, (2009, p. 1) identify that 'from the infancy of the science of semiotics, scholars have identified the need to develop holistic and comprehensive theories and descriptions of semiosis, applicable to all signs and sign systems but also taking into account the specific characteristics of different semiotic phenomena'. Graphic design or the more contemporary term communication design is one such semiotic phenomenon where holistic and comprehensive theories and descriptions of semiosis are needed. Our understanding of typography as it emerges from this discipline and its capacity to be interpreted, as a semiotic resource is a relatively recent development however Messaris maintains that any mode of communication can be understood in terms of either semantic or syntactic properties (1997, p. 141). It is the semantic properties or various modes that are central concerns of semiotics. When understood as a semiotic resource typography can be understood as a 'social and culturally shaped mode used in representation and communication to make meaning within our environment' (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 115). Conceptualizing typography as a semiotic resource with its own actions and modes presents a rich palette for a rigorous analysis to evaluate typography's role in branding cultural festivals.

Indeed uncovering the ways typography performs beyond the linguistic signification and primary function of the words it represents naturally leads to semiotics. Van Leeuwen (T. Van Leeuwen, 2006) states that it is at 'the moment typography is read pictorially that it can be treated as a semiotic mode in its own right'. Van Leeuwen (2006) Stöckl (2005) and Brownie (2009) have contributed exploratory material in this area presenting primers of how typography may be understood semiotically and

here I contribute an effort towards this understanding. Noble and Bestley state (2016, p 90) that;

...what visual communication designers understand by key concepts such as semiotics, deconstruction, or communication theory - relate in large part to the context of their practice - may differ from wider academic discourse that utilizes similar terms. This is common practice in other areas of study and the increasing maturity of the subject of design, as both an academic and professional activity, should see these terms become more embedded and formalized within the discipline.

As design research is a relatively new field of critical enquiry, its practices outweigh its theory. Those involved with theorisation of the field have often sought to fill gaps with a view to other more established disciplines in the search for ways to frame the field. In making visible methods of interpreting typography used in branding logotypes for cultural festivals, semiotics, as well as social semiotics and theories multimodality are imperfect in offering an 'off the shelf' solution for interpreting the repertoire and diversity of design artefacts and associated applications with its pre-existing terminology and codifications in the 21st century. Such modes of analysis were never meant to service visual communication design. However, by reconfiguring the scaffold or frameworks and lexicon of these fields, it is possible to offer a theoretical and practical method for understanding the construction of meaning making in design and typography that builds on the history of semiotics, social semiotics and multimodality.

6) METHOD

Drawn from Halliday's (1978) systemic functional method, whereby he uses the terms *Ideational*, *Interpersonal* and *Textual* as metafunctions to map linguistic discourse I use the terms *-Form*, *Function*, *Context*, and *Concept* to map categorical delineations in decoding meaning making within communication design. In the field of communication design these terms provide the foundations of design artefacts, practices and methods and are embedded with their own history – and the use of these terms as signposts makes logical sense to those in the field. Many authors

have also sought to re-configure Halliday's original signifying terms, for example O'Toole (1994) Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and Lemke (2002). I incorporate the language and configurations of the semiotic lexis yet proceed with the history, knowledge and actions of the design field, its idiosyncrasies, and characteristics at the very centre of evaluations. I employing Noble and Bestley (2005) explanatory descriptors for the four metafunctions as follows:

Metafunctions			
Form	Function	Context	Concept
The shape or configuration of something, as against its location, context, or meaning. This could also indicate the pattern or structure of an object, letter-form or image. In visual communication design this relates to the physical and visual nature of the designed artefact, rather than the intention of designing or designer or any inherent message or communication	The performance or role played by an object, letter-form or physical or virtual form. The service performed by a work or graphic design or visual communication.	The circumstances that are relevant to an event or situation. In graphic design terms, this would indicate a clear description of the purpose or intention of a brief alongside research into similar propositions or situations, historical or contemporary, together with audience expectations, the visual environment, and the background to the brief.	A hypothesis, theory or idea. The fundamental aspects of the brief and the intention of the designer, usually in relation to a specified context, audience, and media. A methodology or plan of action through which to test or pursue the idea. The message or communication or effect thereof.

Identifying a lexicon applicable to the designated metafunctions *Form*, *Function*, *Context*, and *Concept*; is important to feasibly encapsulate the reasonable descriptors one may encounter when framing any articulation of design. Sourcing a Australian Government festivals list (Government, 2016) a random sample method was applied to reduce the two lists of cultural festivals down to 2 sample festivals and these identities were then placed in a rubric. Baldry states (2004, p. 8) that descriptive practices including multimodal transcriptions and the structuring of queries for meaning making can be commenced through the use of a 'table' containing chronological sequences of frames or actions. 'We are able to resolve some of the difficulties of taking linguistic, cultural, social, political and pictorial modes in to account' (2004, p. 4). In achieving this Baldry states that in keeping with the systemic-functional tradition of multimodality, a multimodal transcription will also need to show how meaning is built up as a series of functional units – typically, sub phases, phases, but also macrophases, minigenres and genres (2004, p. 104). This is the recommended next phase of the social semiotic method and a major focal point for further work. The brand logotypes for cultural festivals analysed are the 2016 Darwin Festival, in Darwin and 2016 Tjungu Cultural Festival in Alice Spring, Australia.



Figure 1. Cultural Festival Logotype, Darwin Festival, 2016

METAFUNCTIONS:

FORM: Mixed Serif and Sans Serif typeface, with decorative effects. Diagonal colour banding with colours of blues, and greens - sky, sea and earth colours. Curved letterform elements with interesting, unusual serif typeface with illustrative ligatures and unusual mid length bracketed serifs. The letter S drops below the mean line,

similar to a descender. Negative space is utilised within the proximity of typeface elements. Composition made of scaled type, angular, curvaceous elements.

FUNCTION: Brand Identity for arts festival. Digital and print based. Designed to promote the event and to encapsulate the values and meaning of the organisation/company.

CONTEXT: Australia's most northern and only tropical arts festival was born out of the destruction and devastation of a natural disaster over 40 years ago. Cyclone Tracy. Darwin Festival in remote Australia. In the 1990s the Festival shifted its focus toward community arts, celebrating multicultural aspects of the unique Darwin lifestyle, with a vision of becoming a cultural focus for the region. Darwin Festival is a vibrant arts and cultural event with an eclectic and substantial program that takes advantage of Darwin's delightful dry season weather and spectacular outdoor venues. Darwin Festival reflects Darwin's position at the Top End of Australia, its unique Indigenous and multicultural population and its close proximity to Asia while at the same time showcasing some of Australia's finest arts performers. Darwin Festival is held over 18 days and nights, with local and touring performances and events including outdoor concerts, workshops, theatre, dance music, comedy and cabaret, film and visual arts. During the Festival, Darwin buzzes with performers, artists, locals and visitors enjoying the vibrant and colourful atmosphere and festivities of Darwin Festival. (Design, 2015)

CONCEPT: The cultural code in this festival logotype demonstrates a dual articulation that on the one hand offers a reading of the sans serif typeface which signifies a dominant 'international style' hegemonic of much 20th century typeface design. This presents cleanliness, readability and objectivity indicating seriousness, trust and business like features – it is at this point that the identity supports the notions and rationale of 'city branding' – signifying the government and political economic hand. This modality may be read as a paradigmatic analysis – the underlying structure of the identity, which conforms to social and cultural norms within the festival scape.

However, on the other hand the pictorial qualities of The Darwin Festival identity are positioned as referential to the festival location, the social construct. This is denoted through the aesthetic coding of colour as a signifier, in the banding of the text *festival*. Here our understanding of place and location - the destination of Darwin located on the top edge of Australia; is expressed indexically through colours - deep blue - water colour, coral reef - teal, light green tones of the flora and tropical greens from rainforests.

The decorative characteristics used in the text - *festival*, are visually, pictorially interesting. The use of ligatures between the letters 'S' and 'T' as well as the unusual link between 'I' and 'V' combine to symbolically create a prominent gestural expression, encoded to extend elegance and strong personality. The uncommon mid length bracketed serifs on the 'A' and 'I' in conjunction with the 'S' that drops below the mean line similar to a descender work together to offer an interpretative reading of the identity as vibrant plane of expression. It is through these pictorial icons that the identity seeks to break convention with the international style demonstrating a cultural irregularity of which pertains to performance, arts and multicultural dynamics.



Figure 2. Cultural Festival Logotype, Darwin Festival, 2016

METAFUNCTIONS:

FORM: Hand drawn letterforms with various decorative motifs, patterns, and with colourful, thick characters and curvaceous letterforms.

FUNCTION: Brand Identity for arts festival. Digital and print based. Designed to promote the event and to encapsulate the values and meaning of the organisation/company.

CONTEXT: Tjungu (pron. tjoo-ngoo), meaning meeting or coming together in Pitjantjatjara, celebrates the best of Australian Indigenous culture. During this four-day family friendly festival, a lively timetable of events features everything from culture to film and art, from sport to music, to food and fashion ensures Ayers Rock Resort will be humming ("Tjungu Festival," 2015).

CONCEPT: Semiotics features of *iconicity* and *bricolage* operate as conceptual metaphors for the Tjungu festival identity; these are employed as an aesthetic code for the Anangu culture that the festival celebrates. Demonstrated through the curvaceous letterforms of the word *Tjungu* in combination with hand drawn motifs contained therein, these semiotic features act as anchors for the indigenous culture. The amalgamation of letterforms presents an affable and accessible, friendly identity and combines pictorial elements showcasing the indigenous art, storytelling, narrative and activities one may anticipate from this festival. As such these exist as an iconicity of these pictorial elements with the function and purpose of this identity. The bricolage of patterns used in the letterforms is informal and welcoming and showcases emerging or established local regional indigenous artists. Patterns such as circles, lines and pathways are reminiscent of contemporary indigenous art. The colours used in this identity operate referentially as signs; they are bright and engaging and may indicate the Australian country - such as the yellow of flowering gums, wattle and sunsets. Red of the earth, the dirt and cliffs, pink of flora and fauna, and green of trees and bushes and scrub. Illuru is the location for this event and the line up includes dance, art, food, fashion, and sport, each different letter-form pattern may be representative of each of these practices. These are the cultural dynamics represented in this identity; they are intertwined with the social purpose of the identity the festival seeks to promote.

In developing a systemic functional method of analysis of typography used in the branding of cultural festivals, it is key to offer that advertisers and designers differentiate similar products from each other through various uses of typography and other design elements and in doing this they associate a product with a specific set of values such as cultural, political or social. This can be evidenced in the

Concept metafunction illustrated above and Oswald maintains (2015, p. 117) 'semiotics can be used to provide clarity and cultural context to a range of activities and argues that it is the semiotic assets that contribute to profitability by distinguishing brands from simple commodities, differentiating them from competitors and engaging consumers in the brand world'. Meggs (1992) writes of typographic resonance and how this is generated by the cultural, stylistic and connotative properties that typefaces possess, in addition to their function as alphabet signs. Such resonances have been illuminated above through descriptions of letterforms and typeface colours and characteristics. Although typeface designers' fascination with resonance and expression of letterforms has seen an explosion of typefaces (Cahalan, 2007; Meggs, 1992, p. 120), it is the historical associations of the resonant qualities related to typical use and optical properties that cements resonances functions. Similarly Childers and Jass (2002) found that typefaces do more than communicate verbal material; they convey unique associations independent of the words they represent. The semantic associations were formed in three ways: through the consistent use of a specific font in a particular situation; the direct relationship with perceptual qualities of typography; and with abstract connotations.

6) CONCLUSION

As Chandler states, (2016) anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as signifying something – referring to standing for something other than itself. He maintains we 'interpret things as signs largely unconsciously by relating them to familiar systems of conventions. It is this meaningful use of signs which is at the heart of the concerns of semiotics' (Chandler, 2016). As an endogenous researcher (Bonsiepe, 2012), my position originates from within the field of communication design. In developing a systemic function analysis of design specifically for my field, I am able to expand the ways design scholars can contribute to design research. This paper's significance lies in its potential contributions to design and typography research and the festival scape. If we can translate the mechanisms where meaning is encoded by the sender or designer and decoded by a user or receiver then this will assist others in understanding the communication cycle and establish an effective model for meaning making in the logotype branding of cultural festivals.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

The Analogue: Analogue Photography as an Analogy for Earth Processes

Rebecca Najdowski

Historically, photography has been used as a tool to understand the world, shaping cultural perception of all that it captures. It is landscape photography that frames and constructs our view — or our projection — of nature. Human positionality is often about separation and the primacy of human culture, despite the fact that humans are part of nature. Our perception of non-human nature is filtered through photographic representations that reinforce this primacy of human agency. Could a new vision of “landscape” emerge from photography if it is thought of as a material — as matter — rather than a representational medium and a discipline?

This paper proposes to use analogue photography as an analogy for earth processes in order to conceptually collapse the space between photo-media and nature. I use the term “analogue” to refer to non-digital, chemically-based photographic processes that use compounds such as: silver iodide (calotype), silver halide (silver-gelatine, chromogenic prints), silver nitrate and mercury (daguerreotype, wet-plate collodion), and ammonium iron citrate and potassium ferricyanide (cyanotype). Processes where the image is latent, or invisible, until it undergoes a chemical development.

Exposing the inherent analogues between this photography and geophysical systems — surface, time, interaction, minerals, transformation — generates new ways to know photography. These correspondences can be seen as a distinct way to examine photography’s crucial role in how we understand the natural environment. I use the term “earth processes” to emphasise the notion of process - either the action of becoming or the activity of entropy — as this is also a primary behaviour of photography. I see the geophysical systems — Earth’s interacting physical, biological, and chemical processes — as corresponding to a particular vision of photography. Ultimately, this proposal works against the conceptual and pictorial conventions of landscape photography, yet capitalises on the fact that photography is seen as a kind of knowledge.

ANALOGY x 2

In *The Miracle of Analogy: Or the History of Photography, Part 1*, Kaja Silverman contends that, “Photography is also an ontological calling card: it helps us to see that each of us is a node in a vast constellation of analogies” (11). Silverman ascribes the term “analogy” to “Being” (with a capital B), or “the world” where everything carries “the same ontological weight” (11). For her, photography “receives” the world (11). It is not a copy or an index attributed to a technology, but a liquid development where the world images itself (12).

To make her case, Silverman draws from the writings of the most well-known names in the inception of photography, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot, to describe photography as the means in which the world reveals itself, beyond human determination. Daguerre, who developed the daguerreotype process with Nicéphore Niépce — a singular photographic image on a reflective, polished metal surface — wrote that: “The daguerreotype is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature... it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself” (qtd in Silverman 26). This notion that photography is a way for the world to image itself is further emphasised by the words of Talbot, who developed the calotype process — a paper negative that could be waxed in order to reproduce positive images from the original. In “Photogenic Drawing,” Talbot states: “It is not the artist who makes the picture, but the picture which makes *itself*” (emphasis his) (qtd in Silverman 10).

I am using Silverman’s account of analogy, which includes acknowledging the agency of the world in the production of photographic images, but I am also maintaining the notion of analogy as a correspondence. This research indicates that analogue photography — its processes and materiality — has actual correspondences to the functions of geophysical systems.

Considering these early responses to the activity and material of photography, I’ve taken the photographic work of three contemporary artists, discussed in the following sections, to examine this relationship between photography and earth processes.

The artists that I discuss have practices that, through their experimental nature, enlarge and make visible the analogous connections.

DISRUPTING THE FRAME

“Use of the frame as a device in landscape photography begs interrogation. In effect, a rectilinear scene is abstracted and presented as if it represents the actual experience of looking at - or being within - an environment.” - Liz Wells, *Land Matters* (43).

The frame in landscape photography is a device that constructs a point-of-view that suggests notions of authenticity and objectivity. It is an incredibly limited view, yet bears the impossible task of standing in for that environment. The repetition of photographic framing produces a template of codes and conventionalised meaning in which standards are established for how and what is photographed.

The photographic work of Letha Wilson eschews these pictorial conventions, in part through her disruption of the frame. Wilson creates sculptural pieces, melding photographs of geologic formations with concrete, a rock composite. In doing so, she connects what is represented through photographic imagery with the artwork's material composition. Physically, they interrupt the frame of 2-dimensional photography, opening it up into space and thereby drawing attention to the frame's existence. Wilson's artworks highlight a key aspect of photography — the stratification of materials, the layering of paper and substrates and emulsions that suspend the light sensitive materials. And, significantly, they emphasise the conditions of time and process that are inherent in photography. Process is a common word associated with photography. Used as a noun, it relates to different processing techniques — e.g. the wet-plate collodion process, the gum-bichromate process, etc. More importantly, the verb "process" — to carry out an action or series of actions to cause a change in condition — emphasises time and transformation.



Letha Wilson, Badlands Concrete Bend, 2015 | C-prints, concrete, emulsion transfer, aluminium frame | © Letha Wilson

The American earthworks artist, Robert Smithson, in his 1968 essay “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Project,” spoke of the relationship between geology and art: “The strata of the Earth is a jumbled museum. Embedded in the sediment is a text that contains limits and boundaries which exceed the rational order, and social structures which confine art. In order to read the rocks we must become conscious of geologic time, and of the layers of prehistoric material that is entombed in Earth’s crust” (110). Wilson’s artworks are a composite of source photographs of geologic sites and concrete, this fusion compels the viewer to be mindful of geologic time. The instantaneous camera capture of the scene, morphing with rock composite’s association with vastly slow processes of aggregation and erosion, refers to a timescale that is both human — through the technology of the camera — and beyond human.

LIQUID INTELLIGENCE

Like Wilson’s sculptural photographs, the function of surface, time, chemical interaction, and transformation is also at play in Alison Rossiter’s photography. In her work, she takes expired B&W photographic paper and develops selected areas without exposing it with a negative or to the light of an enlarger. They do not represent an object in the world; rather, they are photographs of process and material. The creation of these works invoke the outdated terms “wet-darkroom” and “wet-printing” — Rossiter pours and pools liquid developer directly onto the surface, or dips the sheets into developer baths. The results are abstract forms displaying the characteristics of a chemical interaction and time’s effect on the paper. The process reveals the chemical shifts of photographic emulsion that have occurred as the boxes of paper sat in storage, forgotten, for dozens of year. Her procedures reactivate a material that, conventionally, would be viewed as unusable.



Alison Rossiter | From the series Landscapes | Defender

Argo, expired September 1911, processed 2014 | Unique Gelatin Silver Print | © Alison Rossiter,
Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York

Rossiter's work, through the forces of chemical interaction and time — and notably without exposure to light — conjures a primordial, subterranean process. It is not light-writing, the etymology of the word "photography," but a writing of inky shadows. The essay, "Photography and Liquid Intelligence", by photographic artist and theoretical writer Jeff Wall, provides an aqueous parallel to an aspect of analogue photography that Rossiter's work emphasises. Wall draws an analogy between liquid processes and prehistorical photography:

...water — symbolically — represents an archaism in photography... This archaism of water, of liquid chemicals, connects photography to the past, to time, in an important way. By calling water an "archaism" here I mean that it embodies a memory-trace of very ancient production-processes — of washing, bleaching, dissolving, and so on... In this sense, the echo of water in photography evokes its prehistory... this

"prehistorical" image of photography — a speculative image in which the apparatus itself can be thought of as not yet having emerged from the mineral and vegetable worlds... (109).

This analogy that Wall develops points to a deep-time that dovetails with Smithson's concerns with geologic time. Photography is of the earth, its mineral realm.

Silverman also relates her analogy — that of the world revealing itself through photography — to Wall's liquid intelligence. In his essay, technological intelligence is related to the optical / mechanical, and liquid intelligence is related to nature and the elemental. It is the liquid intelligence that helps us to know the 'dry' optical / mechanical apparatus and institution of photography (Wall 109). Wall also ascribes liquid intelligence with an agency that corresponds to the natural world and predicts that the evolution of the digital will displace the liquid in photography, distancing technological intelligence from "natural forms" (Wall, 110).

The materiality of Rossiter's liquiform shadow-writing emphasises the wet processes that churn with a temporality in analogue photography, metaphorically linked to the transformative and incalculable¹ character of earth processes.

DOINGS OF THE SUNBEAM²

In a twin effect — recalling the positive / negative condition of photography — the artworks of Chris McCaw are a reversal of Rossiter's sans-light images. In McCaw's work, celestial light is expressly used to make his photographs. In the sunburn series, he makes long exposures of the sky using large-format view cameras, creating a circumstance where the sun literally burns the paper's emulsion, at times producing a solarised effect where the negative image becomes a positive one. The path of the sun across the sky is burned into the surface of the photograph. The agency of the sun — its physical trace on the photograph — and the resulting record of the earth's rotation exemplifies Silverman's assertion that the world reveals itself through photography. In McCaw's photographs, the sun is the subject and means of

¹ Wall associates "liquid intelligence" with being "incalculable" and suggests that a consequence of the boundless and untold character of "incalculable" can be seen in the form of the ecological crisis (110).

² This section takes its title from an 1863 *Atlantic Monthly* essay by Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Doings of the Sunbeam", in which he laments the visual horror of wet-plate collodion photographs of scenes from the American Civil War — "for us to bear witness to the fidelity of views which the truthful sunbeam has delineated in all their dread reality" — emphasising the agency of the sun in producing these photographic visions of war (11).

creation. His scorched photographs recall the sentiments of Talbot: “It is not the artist who makes the picture, but the picture which makes *itself*” (qtd in Silverman 10).



Chris McCaw | Sunburned GSP#733 (Pacific Ocean), 2013

| Three Unique Gelatin Silver Paper Negative | © Chris McCaw, Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York

McCaw’s work highlights photographic materiality — its fragility and susceptibility to the forces of the world — and renders more tangible the notion that photography is a receptive entity. Photochemical reactions are an intrinsic condition of the sunburn series, which relates back to geophysical systems and crucial photochemical reactions such as photosynthesis and vision. As with the other examples, these photographs bring to the surface material correspondences with earth processes which might be latent in more traditional approaches to analogue photography.

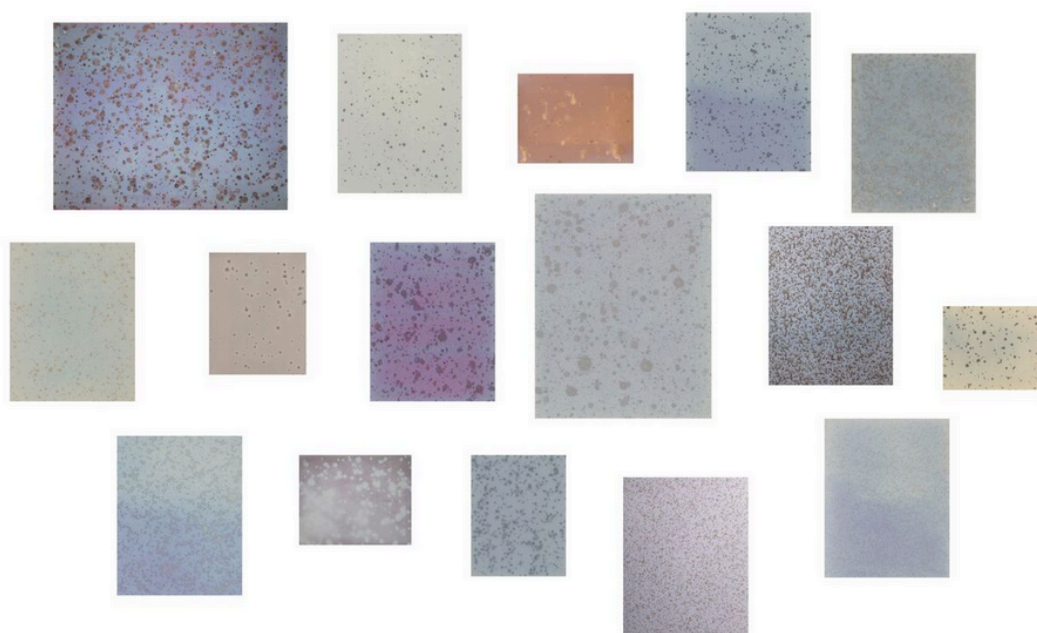
CONCLUSION

“All chaos is put into the dark inside of the art. By refusing ‘technological miracles’ the artist begins to know the corroded moments, the carboniferous states of thought, the shrinkage of mental mud, in the geologic chaos—in the strata of aesthetic consciousness. The refuse between mind and matter is a mine of information.” - Robert Smithson, *“A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects”* (107).

The analogy between earth processes and analogue photography can be related to Smithson’s abstract geology of the mind, a material thinking that coalesces with the processing of the earth. The artists that I’ve set forth as exemplars for this enquiry —

Wilson, Rossiter, and McCaw — use practical and aesthetic strategies to push the boundaries of photography's material. Wilson's photographic rock sculptures acknowledge and disrupt the frame of landscape photography while connecting to a geologic time. Rossiter's shadow-graphs, steeped in the darkroom process of liquid chemical interaction, bring to the surface photography's connection to the prehistorical earth. And McCaw's sunburn series, through photochemical reactions, recognises and employs the agency of the sun. As the materials and processes drive the artwork, authorship is questioned and conventional pictorial structures are rejected.

I examine these artists' practices because my own work is allied with theirs in the field of photography. In order to disrupt the traditional notion of landscape photography, I seek to make pictures 'with' rather than 'of' the environment. An example of this is the series of lumen prints, *untitled (desert rain)*. I use the natural phenomena of the desert rain as both the subject of and the means to create these camera-less artworks. During rain showers in the Sonoran desert, I exposed B&W photographic paper to precipitation. The interaction of moisture with the material composition of B&W paper leaves an array of coloured traces. Through the *untitled (desert rain)* project, I am proposing to offer new perspectives on landscape photography in which the physical environment is part and parcel to the art-making process.



Rebecca Najdowski | untitled (desert rain) series, 2014 |

lumen prints: B&W photographic paper, desert rain, gold toner | © Rebecca Najdowski

The aim of this research is to contribute to the field of photography by taking on a critical perspective that questions long-held assumptions about representation and authority, opening up the possibilities of the medium and challenging the conventions of landscape photography — its cultural framing and assumed primacy of human agency over the natural environment.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

**Environmental Art making: Strengthening learning through creative
land interactions**

Dr Michael Shiell

Abstract

Environmental Art has developed globally since the late 1960s. In contrast to a movement this artistic direction was never predefined by a series of standardised principles. As a result the field has become very broad and inclusive. Arguably the key distinction that separates these works from earlier land based artwork is their focus on direct interaction with land as opposed to merely the representation of it. Another significant difference in this field is the de-emphasization of the aesthetic object by some artists; in turn the process of creation and its conceptual basis have been given greater importance. This reconsideration has allowed greater scope for temporary and ephemeral works.

Where impermanent [temporary] works have a definitive installation and de-installation timeline Ephemeral Environmental Artworks have a brevity of life that when coupled with a lack of any formal de-installation process means that the works departure is more like the gentle passing of a life. The combination of being process-driven and the allowed retrogression of the form as part of the interaction ensures these works have a unique relationship with the sites they inhabit.

This relationship between artwork and site creates a learning space that is rich for both artistic and environmental education. The art making provides direct learning through reflection and response, which can be layered with more subtle learning opportunities through inter-disciplinary associations. The requisite basis of relationship to site and allowed retrogression of the form creates space for students to be mindful of their environmental impact while also challenging preconceived notions of ownership, responsibility, action and inaction as well as acceptance of change and sustainability of practice within the environment. As the artworks incorporate change with the retrogression of the form the making of the works allows for individual growth through peoples' physical interaction and dialogue with the land.

Introduction

Environmental Art has developed globally since the late 1960s. In contrast to an artistic movement this field was never predefined by a series of standardised principles. As a result the term tends to be very inclusive and the breadth of works that it references is very broad. The parameters of the field are blurred further due to the profusion of alternative terminologies and overlapping sub-divisions.ⁱ Land Art, Earth Art and Earthworks were all terms used to describe the practice early in its history. More contemporary terms include eco-art, green art and elements of bio art and sustainable art. Of all the many terms Land Art and Environmental Art are the two which are most commonly used to refer to the overall field. Unfortunately the term Land Art is also specifically associated with the monumental interventions by American artists such as Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson and Walter DeMaria; which lessens its effectiveness as an umbrella term. Therefore for the purposes of this paper, and in line with the recommendation of Sam Bower - Director of Green Museum, Environmental Art will be used as the umbrella term to refer to the field.

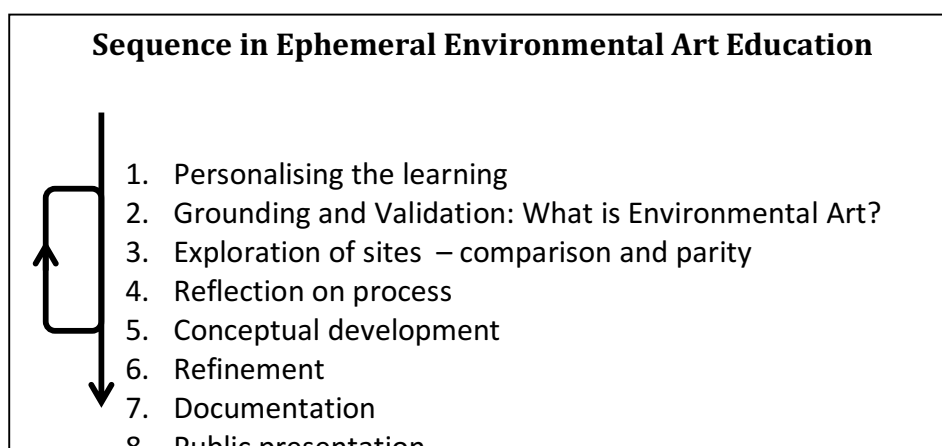
This new direction in art was in part a reaction away from the commodification of the art object and the power that gallery structures exerted over the art world. As one artist Michael Heizer stated "*the position of art as malleable barter-exchange items falters as the cumulative economic structure gluts. The museums and collections are stuffed the floors are sagging, but the real space exists.*"ⁱⁱ Another significant difference was the de-emphasis of the aesthetic object by some artists, which in turn allowed the process of creation to be of greater conceptual importance. It should be noted that this de-emphasis of the significance of the art object was not specific to the field of Environmental Art. This re-evaluation was occurring in art more generally at that time. Art critic Lucy Lippard documented this changing trend in her seminal text *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*.ⁱⁱⁱ A key distinction that separates Environmental Art from earlier land based artwork is the focus on direct interaction with land as opposed to merely the representation of it. As Ben Tufnell describes it the works are characterized by "an immediate and visceral interaction with landscape, nature and the environment".^{iv}

The extension of the field that followed with the reconsideration of process provided a place for temporary and ephemeral works. In regard to Environmental Art the distinction between temporal and ephemeral is significant due to the works relationship to site. Temporary works are impermanent and have a definitive installation and de-install timeline that defines their existence. The works exist in the site and are then removed. In contrast, Ephemeral Environmental Artworks tend to be created on site and have a brief duration that when coupled with the lack of any formal de-installation process means that the works departure is more like the gentle passing of a life. Indeed many artists such as Andy Goldsworthy consider the retrogression of the form to be part of the work.^v The combination of artwork being process-driven along with the allowed retrogression of the form as part of the interaction ensures that these works have a unique relationship with the sites they inhabit. The pieces interact with the space in which they are located and ultimately elements of that space interact with the work to cause its retrogression.

Parallel to the development of this art form there has been an increase in social mindedness towards the environment. The creation of Environmental Art is one means by which people can explore their relationship to land and express their feelings, concerns and concept. Introducing this art form into schools gives scope for both direct and indirect learning across a range of disciplines. To facilitate these schools based projects an eight step sequence has been devised to strengthen the potential for student learning. This paper explores the strengths and weaknesses of four case studies in relation to how they progressed through the sequence.

Discussion

Over many years of involvement with artist in school residencies which have focused on ephemeral Environmental Art a methodological sequence for engaging students has been developed. This process involves eight steps from initial introductory activities through to the public presentation of student work. The number of steps



necessary varies in relation to the desired outcome, the level of immersion required and the age of the students. The eight steps can be seen in the table below.

The purpose of the first step is to seek a beginning point that connects each student's personal

interests with the overall process. The objective of this is that it will heighten each person's connection to their creative process while also differentiating their methods of environmental interaction and their artistic outcomes. The second step is a presentation about what is Environmental Art, what drove its development, who is making it and why. This formal arts learning gives students a strong perspective of how their works relate to the field globally and begins to challenge considerations of what is possible. Steps three through six develop these possibilities by following a standard model for artistic development. That model relies on growth and learning through a cyclic process of experimentation, reflection and refinement. It is through these steps and with consideration of conceptual development that much informal and associative learning can take place. Step seven deals with the practice of documenting ephemeral art. As this art form is fleeting by nature, there is often a complimentary process involving the creation of a record of the transitory form. The final step in the process is the public presentation of the work and or the

documentary outcome. While this step brings a sense of completion to the overall process it also allows for further art industry specific learning.

In considering the efficacy of this model four case studies through which it has been developed are being discussed.

Case Studies

Case Study 1 – Koroit and District Primary School (2010)



Figure 1 *Celtic Knotwork*

Figure 2 Detail of woven willow ball on *Celtic*

Knotwork

The engagement with the Koroit and District Primary School was directed to students in grades 3-6 over a two week period. It was heavily focused on producing a large scale outcome on a section of community walking trail. The tight parameters of this residency limited the opportunity for significant immersion and student learning in

relation to the making of the artwork. Personalizing the learning was limited to a short group discussion relating to the town as the site of the work and aspects of individuals' relationship to the place. This was then followed by a discussion of what is Environmental Art and how its practice is related to other art forms. Due to the pre-defined restriction placed on the outcome there was limited potential for progression through the learning sequence. Further development of the artistic outcome through reflection and greater concept development wasn't possible.

The final work that came out of this process was a large Celtic knotwork pattern that was drawn onto the walking path. Along the length of the work eighty woven willow balls were placed at various points. Each ball was created by the students and interwoven with various natural elements that they brought to the work from their home environments. Ultimately the need for a predefined result hampered the students' opportunity to meaningfully explore their expression in relation to the land through the creation of an Ephemeral Environmental Art piece.

Case Study 2 – Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative Youth Group (2009)



Figure 3 *Wy-char-arng* created on the dry lakebed of Lake Wendouree, Victoria

The second case study relates to a process of engagement with the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative youth group. There were approximately 15 teenage participants in this program. Similarly to the Koroit and District Primary School this

project was focused on the production of a large scale outcome. Unlike the Koroit project however the form of the outcome was not pre-defined before the process of engagement. This allowed a great deal more scope for personalizing the learning (step 1), exploration (step 3) and reflection on process (step 4).

To support the participants in personalizing the learning a series of class-like activities were conducted over a three month period. These classes included an introduction to Wathaurong language with local language historian Dr David Cahir from Federation University. Additionally, a series of art classes with locally-based Yorta Yorta artist Billy Blackall were conducted. These classes opened the dialogue for design to what would ultimately be a massive geoglyph drawn onto the surface of a dry lakebed.

Further explorations of design were conducted with consideration to the conceptual intent for the final onsite work. In contrast to the first case study the pre-defined parameter for this project was not the outcome but rather the concept of water and lack thereof. As the design progressed further conversation with participants and elders refined other aspects of local significance such as the lack of indigenous acknowledgment at the site.

During the creation of the onsite work this conceptual basis and reflection on process needed to be revisited on a number of occasions. As public opinion about the work ebbed and flowed participants needed to reflect on the significance of ephemerality to the piece. Some members of the community requested that the work be made permanent by filling in the lines of the work with colored concrete. Therefore as water returned to the lake the piece could remain visible. Decisions relating to this request ultimately came back to the concept and the importance of the process. As the work was intended to highlight what was missing and lost, such as fauna through the Europeanization of the swamp to a lake and the lack of dialogue regarding the indigenous history of the site, it seemed inappropriate to create a permanent statement. After all, the work was not intended to be an answer to a question but rather the beginning point for a conversation.

The final work from this engagement was a geoglyphic drawing of three platypuses on the dry lakebed of Lake Wendouree, see figure 2. The design of the work has the platypus swimming in a westerly direction near the northern banks of the lake. The overall work was almost a kilometer long and eventually washed away with the return of water to the lake approximately 6 months later. Much like the first case study it was difficult to maintain group enthusiasm with participants feeling various degrees of connection to the outcome. This was both a matter of individual's sense of separation from the creative process and also variable group cohesion and attendance.

Case Study 3 – Lavers Hill P-12 College (2007)



Figure 4 Artist working in the environment with students

The artist in school residency with Lavers Hill P-12 College was aimed at middle years students from grade 5 through to year 8. It was a four and half week engagement with the thematic basis of exploring change in the Otway Ranges. While this theme was broad it was also quite disputed with many students coming from families of either conservationists or loggers. Prior to beginning the project the

school indicated their preference for a permanent final outcome. It was agreed that the lasting outcome for this project would be a limited edition artist book.

Unlike the earlier case studies the devised program of engagement with Lavers Hill did not emphasize a singular onsite outcome. This gave the project a lot more scope for individual contemplation, and it was here that students did their most in-depth reflection and learning. Steps 4-6 gave this project a much deeper level of engagement.

As this project was focused on a much more individualized process of reflection and exploration the personalizing of learning was similarly focused. Students were encouraged to engage with their home environments and talk about change in the environment with their families. This gave each of the students a very individual basis from which to begin their work.

By step 4 the students were generally making ethical decisions around the impact and permanence of their works. While these considerations were intended to occur, students were not given direction about their choice of outcome. Instead they were encouraged to consider the ramifications of their actions and make their own choice. Later on during group discussions these choices were referenced in line with students' broader regard to permanence, ephemerality and impact.

As part of Step 6 – Refinement, students explored various documentary techniques while also being mindful of the limitations of the artist book format. Along with photography, drypoint and linocut printing students were also encouraged to consider written responses to the ephemerality of their work. Arguably, the strongest of these written responses was in the succinct and refined form of haiku poetry. Below is a poem written by a year 7 student in reaction to making sand castles in the tidal zone at Johanna Beach, see figure 5 below.

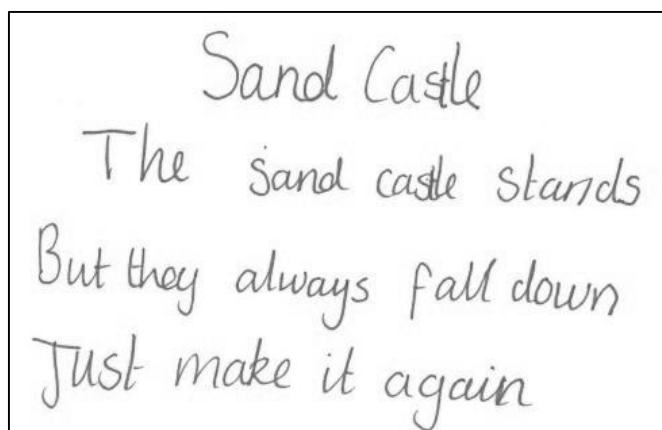


Figure 5 Year 7 poem relating to ephemeral

Environmental Art piece

While this project did consider the complementary role that documentation plays, it did not provide much scope to what the document could be. This restriction was inherent in the need for a documentary process that suited a book format and allowed replication for the purposes of creating an edition.

The final outcome of a limited edition of three artist books was produced by the students. Each student was given a spread of four consecutive pages. The first page showed the photographic image of their work. The second and third pages were a semi-transparent leaf on which the student's textual response to ephemerality and change were printed. The fourth and final page was each student's print-based response to their onsite work. The use of the semi-transparent leaf allowed for a sense of relationship across the four pages while also implying differentiation and change within that relationship.

Case Study 4 – Dimboola Memorial Secondary College (2008)

Figure 6 Teacher working onsite with student

Figure 7 Exhibition view

The residency with Dimboola Memorial Secondary College was targeted towards year 9 and 10 students and continued for the duration of a full school term. Due to the age of the students more complex concepts could be grasped quicker and explored more thoroughly. The final exhibition based outcome was very open ended and provided minimal limitation to the final outcome. This meant that over the course of the term all eight steps of the process could be engaged with at a significant level.

The personalization of the learning in this project was done in a manner that was intentionally blind to the overall objectives of the engagement. Students were simply asked to go out into the nearby bushland and take photographs of the things they saw that were of interest to them. After returning the classroom students then analysed their pictures to reflect on aspects of the landscape that appealed to each

of them. This then became the framing mechanism for the individualization of each students concerns and work moving forward.

Steps 2, 3 and 4 in the sequence were delivered in a similar fashion to the earlier case studies. Interestingly, stage 3 often requires more work with older participants as younger students appear more at ease with the required sense of outdoor play and imagination. In contrast older participants appear to need more validation that the creative process parallels their understanding of a rigorous artistic endeavor. Much like in case study 3 ethical questions of material access and use were raised. In most cases this led to students deciding that minimal impact was their preferred approach.

Step 5 - conceptual development, was able to be explored to a much more significant depth than in the earlier case studies. This heightened degree of immersion and individual expression was due to the personalization of the process that was established in Step 1. From this students expressed a heightened measure of concern for the development and expression of the concepts behind their own works. Conceptual development was not limited to considerations in the classroom. Students were encouraged to consider inter-disciplinary learning and personal environmental associations more broadly. This allowed for a greater degree of personal reflection and social reference in which students saw links between the creation of their work and the expression of greater environmental concerns. These non-directed associations strengthened individuals' development of concepts and linked artistic expression with a range of subjects such as personal narratives, imagined mythologies and scientific and civic issues. This in turn gave a sense of inter-disciplinary alignment and validation to the creative process. Additionally, it tended to result in works that had broader social resonance with stronger links to the community.

The refinement stage (Stage 6) of this project allowed for a review of the onsite work and its success in relation to the conceptual intent. This gave students a space in which to review work and make their own decisions regarding their creative success. From there students could either rework their concepts and the onsite pieces or move on to the documentation phase. Unlike in case study 3 the idea of documentation was very open ended. There were no specifications placed on materiality, longevity or salability of these pieces. Rather, students were encouraged to consider the notion of conceptual appropriateness within documentation. The question was posed, could an element of the conceptual basis for the onsite work be referenced or incorporated into the documentary outcome?



Figure 8 Shadow

Out of this question arose the pieces that formed Stage 8 – public presentation. This celebration of the project was an exhibition in which students documentary pieces were to be shown. Invariably, the breadth of approaches that students had taken to their onsite work led to a similar degree of breadth in their documentary forms. Some students focused on the handmade quality of the onsite work and replicated this in drawn and printmaking documentary outcomes. Some focused on process and narrative over time, producing artist books and photomosaic works. While for others the notion of ephemerality and fleeting moments was more significant and so they made documentary forms that would degrade and disappear with time. One particular student was specifically focused on the idea that the documentation should be a fleeting trace of form and he exhibited the carefully crafted shadow that can be seen in 8.

Conclusion

The direct and interconnected relationship between ephemeral artwork and site creates a learning space that is rich for artistic, environmental and ethical learning. The eight step sequence outlined in this paper offers a tool for guiding student experience to deepen engagement. The art making provides opportunity for direct

learning through reflection and response, which can be layered with more subtle learning opportunities through inter-disciplinary associations.

The requisite basis of relationship to site and allowed retrogression of the form creates space for students to be mindful of their environmental impact. Specifically it challenges preconceived notions of ownership, responsibility, action and inaction as well as the acceptance of change and sustainability of practices within the environment. By focusing material use to natural elements primarily found on site participants could create forms that would ultimately retrogress with minimal concern for environmental impact. This material focus also put participants at ease due to the perceived lack of preciousness.

Across the four case studies there are a number of variables that were seen to affect the quality of learning that arose from the projects. The primary limiting factor was the extent to which students could input their own direction into the process. The major restraining factor in relation to this was the degree to which the outcome was predefined. Heightened predefinition appears to hamper the space for participants to have a meaningful interaction that involved the development of their own personal expression. In this regard it appears necessary to interrogate the objectives of the project and decide if the creation of the artwork is most important or is the opportunity for improvement to student learning the primary motivator.

Beyond predefinition there were a number of secondary factors that influenced the level of learning and engagement with the overall process. The time allowed for each project and the age of students impacted the degree to which issues or concepts could be probed. While younger students seemed more at ease with the sense of play, it was older students' ability to conceptualize and grasp complex theories more readily that allowed for a rigorous interrogation of ideas.

Over the four case studies the most successful project from the perspective of student engagement, conceptualization and opportunity for learning was case study 4 – Dimboola Memorial Secondary College. This project was the only one to

experience all eight steps in the sequence, with learning potential at each step. Interestingly, the first seven steps outline a process of engagement for creating ephemeral Environmental Art, while the eighth step – public presentation is broader and more vocationally based. Arguably this step may be able to be removed without deleteriously affecting the potential for learning specific to Environmental Art. There are however wider art industry learning opportunities that come with Step 8.

While case studies 1 and 2 appear less successful in terms of individual contemplation and expression they were more focused on the production of a group outcome. By necessity participants needed to develop skills in negotiation and compromise to produce a communal result. Participants also needed to grasp the significance and importance of concepts in order to present ideas back to the group. While case study 4 considered issues of civic and social concern more deeply in their concept development, it could be argued that the practical learning of group work was more grounded in the earlier case studies.

Although not within the scope of this paper a fifth project would be interesting to explore the possibility of a group-based, singular outcome that is not overly predefined which also allows the participants to engage with all eight stages of the sequence. The question would then be could students still have a similar depth of learning and engagement while maintaining social cohesion to work towards a form of group expression.

ⁱ Bower, *A profusion of terms*, "Green Museum.org", http://greenmuseum.org/generic_content.php?ct_id=306, [accessed 19/5/2016]

ⁱⁱ M. Heizer, as cited in Beardsley, *Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape*, 13.

ⁱⁱⁱ L. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, (California: University of California, 1997).

^{iv} Tufnell, B. *Land Art* (London: Tate Publishing 2006), p. 16.

^v A. Goldsworthy, *A Collaboration with Nature*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990, and Deakin, R "Zen and the Art of Andy Goldsworthy." *Modern Painters* 10, no. 1 (1997): 50-54.



FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

**Communities as 'other': Social engineering Indigenous
Communities - Lessons from the Past to Inform Community
Sustainability**

Susan Mlcek

Abstract

This paper considers the question, *what is it that makes a community?* It uses examples of the ongoing contemporary colonisation of Indigenous communities in Australia and New Zealand, to highlight the disabling effects from different levels of Western-style governments to try to massage that definition. An increasing practice in western worlds is to galvanise actions in particular towards the redefinition of Indigenous communities. Social engineering is a phenomenon that is not talked about much, but it is far-reaching; manifested in the appropriation and dismantlement of communities. The sense that people have strengths to offer is a mute point when there are policies and practices of inclusion and exclusion that actually have the effect of not only stultifying a community, but wiping it out altogether. 'For the betterment of all' is an example of a particular form of whiteness language that promulgates debates about equality, but whiteness is the erasure of inequality because it presents as the norm in many social policy situations. Often, it surfaces as indulgent practice; reinforcing the hegemony of normativity. Dubbo's former Gordon Estate in New South Wales, Australia, and a small Māori community example from New Zealand, suffered at the hands of whiteness behaviours. The gaze of such behaviours has recently moved to the questioning and continuation of remote Indigenous communities in Western Australia. Within a whiteness frame, patterned behaviours of dealing with Indigenous communities will be exercised as the potential to produce accessibility and achievement, but who will critique the inequalities?

Background

At a 2014 social work residential school connected to the 4th-year Bachelor of Social Work [BSW] and 2nd-year Master of Social Work [MSW] students at Charles Sturt University, New South Wales [NSW], Australia, I presented a lecture on the topic of community engagement. Through discussion about definitions of community, the story of the Dubbo Gordon Estate [New South Wales] came up and all 15 non-Indigenous students were shocked and unbelieving that such a thing could have happened in Australia. During that time, I visited Dubbo on a weekly-basis, delivering

lectures and tutorials and watched as the story of the demise of the Estate unfolded before my eyes. Although only one student at that residential school knew about what happened to the Gordon Estate; mature-aged and herself from that inner-rural city of Dubbo, that student's visibly upset reaction accompanied by lamenting words akin to a grief and loss situation, was shared and supported by the whole group. It was obvious that this was a wound that had continued to fester for some years, and some further years to come; the example of people displacement was just 'too close to home'; something that did not happen only to refugee-background peoples or in places torn apart by conflict and war, but here in a close neighbourhood, right beside us.

I remembered that story when, in 2015, I visited my own home community in Matapihi Tauranga, New Zealand, and was shocked to see gigantic concrete water sewerage pipes lining the narrow road through the village, and pockets of enormous road-work machinery similar to those used in the mines of Western Australia, parked in the front fields of *whanau* [family] homes. Just months before my visit, there had been the *tangihanga* [funeral] of a young cousin, whose motor-bike had collided with an earth-moving digger (Bay of Plenty Times, December 6, 2014; April 18, 2016 [online]) that had been parked along the narrow road through Matapihi – he was just 200 meters from his house. The events were particularly shocking for someone like me coming back into the area after being away for nearly seven years, because in 2008, I had been part of the local *marae* [meeting place] committee that had rejected the initial information-dissemination about the proposed pipeline project. In 2015, I asked the question, 'how did this happen'? The responses from fellow *tangata whenua* [people of that land; that locality] signaled confusion and elements of despair that circumstances of the situation had effectively silenced their concerns. It was also in 2015, and at the same time as my above visit to New Zealand, that the West Australian and Federal Governments triggered wide-spread dissent to cease services to approximately 150 Aboriginal remote communities, therefore condemning them to imminent closure. As support rallied 'across the ditch' from New Zealand Māori activists, in the *Stringer Independent News*, Georgatos (March 22nd, 2015) wrote that, "We will be damned by the future if we sit quiet on any dispossession of

Homelands – ‘remote communities’ – just as we damn the past for similar brutal dispossessions, for the evil of the Stolen Generations, the Stolen Wages, en masse indenture, apartheid, the lot. The dispossession of hundreds of Homelands, loosely referred to as remote communities, has been in the mix for a long while. The bent of Governments for assimilation has not died, it is still their way. But assimilation is not their end all; it is a tool, a means to the end. Exploitation is the driver, and assimilation is the servant”. Prior to Georgatos’ revealing report, the then Prime Minister, Mr Tony Abbott, was criticised for being ‘hopeless’, ‘disrespectful’, and ‘simplistic’, for his likening the living in remote communities to mere ‘life-style choices’ that could not be supported by governments (Griffiths, 2015).

Introduction

The Dubbo Gordon Estate story will be revealed in a later section below, but the message from the above experiences indicate the need for social workers at least, to be watchful and aware of our own complicitness through privilege, or lack of power in some situations; the personal and political spheres of our lives are ever-entwined. So, I begin by introducing the term and context of the phrase ‘*Kia hiwa ra!*’, and also another that relates to the importance of people. The first comes from its use by New Zealand Māori guarding their communities, lands, and fortresses. It is an exclamation that was shouted from the palisades or stockades by sentries/watchmen at specific times throughout the night to be “Alert” and “Watchful” (Aranga, Mika, & Mlcek, 2008, p. 1) against potential disaster. On hearing this cry, other people from the surrounds would know that the sentry was awake and that all was well. This phrase is part of a larger injunction or *whakaaraara* (*ibid*, 2008, p. 1) to be watchful, and in a contemporary context is used mainly as an oratorical device before formal speeches by Māori orators. An extended version with a translation follows below; the words have a metaphorical resonance for the way that Indigenous community life is hijacked, not for the ‘benefit of all’, but for political gain:

Kia hiwa ra! Kia hiwa!

Kia hiwa ra ki tēnei tuku,

Kia hiwa ra ki tēnā tuku,

Kia apurua koe ki te toto

Whakapurua tonu

Whakapurua tonu

Kia hiwa ra! Kia hiwa ra!

Be watchful! Be alert!

Be watchful at this terrace

Be alert at that terrace

Lest you be overwhelmed

And the blood flows

Be watchful! Be alert!

It is not difficult to see the relevance of this *whakaaraara* [chant] to keep the watch alert, or give the alarm in time of attack (p. 14), just as the academic ritual of critical analysis is itself a seeking out and type of dialectical engagement with others.

The second phrase of significance to the stories and discussion in this paper comes from another Māori lament – *He tangata* – it is people, that is:

He aha te mea nui? What is the greatest thing?

He tangata! It is people, He tangata!

He tangata! It is people, He tangata! It is people.

In addition, we know about the spiritual links of Indigenous realities to all parts of the environment, and not just to people. Those links include what it means to be part of community/ies, and everything that lives and breathes within that environment. We also know that pristine surroundings of real and symbolic significance to Indigenous peoples are being appropriated. Peoples and places are being displaced through contemporary colonisation practices. These occur through the hegemony of normativity in the face of an improvement and betterment discourse, and through often-times willful and neglectful government and developer actions that miss important processes in the spirit of dialectic and dialogic action. That is, any engagement with communities requires the exploratory nature behind dialogue, as

well as the integration and assessment of conflicting ideas that are raised through dialectical thinking (Freire, 1972).

[Nearly nine years ago, a troubled, predominantly-Indigenous housing estate in Central NSW made national headlines. The Gordon Estate in Dubbo, Australia, was 'a hotbed of crime', as almost 'everyone' in this regional city of 42,000 admits. The reality is that many people, on the ground, have starkly differing opinions to what was reported in the media. However, despite the concerted efforts of a few, Gordon Estate was controversially 'pulled down' in 2006 after media outlets reported a New Year's Eve riot. Controversial, because families were uprooted without notice, with some sent out of town to alternative public housing across NSW.](#) The legacy lives on from the 2002 re-engineering of Claymore in Sydney's south-west (Browne, 2015), and the welfare development and renewal of Minto in east New South Wales (Collins, 2006). The strength of communities like Dubbo, Claymore, and Minto, is through its people and being leaders in the area of collective impact. So, have lessons been learned from the past?

The phenomenon of social engineering may appear to be an elusive construct to many people, but that is exactly what happened with the Gordon Estate; a predominantly-Indigenous community was dismantled, with land and housing being re-sold as free-hold, and the estate renamed as Rosewood. The enormity of such an occurrence and its aftermath to still raise the kinds of concerns at the social work residential school, is made more acute when this story is being recounted here, ten years later, and yet the one about the Gordon Estate did actually happen in 2006, finally triggered by a 2005 New Year's incident. In reality, it probably started even long before that, with the final dismantlement happening extremely quickly. Being 'too close to home' requires further explanation but fundamentally it is there in the way rural and regional human services practice is played out in Australia, that is, to the visibility of the whole community, hardly anything is not known. For example, anecdotally, several non-Indigenous people who had purchased 're-sold' property after the dismantlement of the Gordon Estate were so fearful of being 'found out', they used different postal addresses to collect mail. These experiences are

juxtaposed with the other stark reality of Indigenous Elders flying over the unraveling of the Gordon Estate, to witness the landscape set out below like a patch-work quilt, but with many of the patch-squares missing, replaced by cleared blocks of land of houses that used to be there, and now branded with For Sale signs hammered into the earth.

Lessons from the past – *what makes a ‘community’?*

For any of our social work students, prior to understanding community development and engagement in community work, is for them to acknowledge the fundamental debate that revolves around our notion of ‘community’; a concept that is notoriously difficult to define. An aspect of this debate seems to appear on a regular basis in the idea that any definition is going to either describe community in an ideal sense or in terms of a community as it is experienced in terms of a taken-for-granted world (de Certeau, 1984). Wild (1981, p. 14) described this as the confusion between a “normative prescription” and an “empirical description” of any given community, that is, whether we engage with a community on the basis of what we are told of what ought to be going on, or whether we make conclusions based on what we see and hear from people who are directly involved.

Another aspect of viewing a community is to note how services are conceived and disseminated (Ife, 2002). At the macro level of engagement, there is relevance in the way people are perceived to come together in communities, as well as the strengths and weaknesses in what those models of community might be. This kind of insight gives some grounding for understanding how and why community workers for example, might approach their community work. Within the rural-urban continuum view of community espoused by early social theorists such as Redfield or Frankenburg (in Wild, 1981, p. 22) there are close-knit networks and integration on the ‘rural end’ to characteristics of specialisation of labour and organic solidarity from the ‘urban end’ of the scale. Another model of community – the social political network - was conceptualised as community members having subjective feelings of belonging together (Weber, 1947, p. 136) and having definite lines of interaction

(Barnes, in Bell & Newby, 1978, p. 52); sharing values and beliefs. The third model of community is especially relevant to this paper because it views communities as localised social, political or economic systems that always exist within geographical boundaries and as a “combination of social units and systems that perform the major social functions as having locality relevance” (Warren, 1983, p. 28).

However, “when the romantic rhetoric is stripped away” the political dimensions attributed to communities is much more interesting and within the New Welfare system, community development and engagement is often seen as the outcome of agencies brokering assistance (Cass & Brennan, 2002, p. 254). Community development workers can then be seen to broker assistance for community members, but they do not do this in isolation from the management models of those organisations that impact their existence. In terms of the focus of this paper, the suggestion is made here, that services (including development) are delivered based on a response to the internal community situation, the external environment, together with available strategies and resources.

One of the challenges for community development workers, and community members as a whole, is not only to know what to do *within their place* in the community, but also to find their *sense of place* (Chenoweth, 2004, p. 279). This idea relates to their self-efficacy and locus of control to be able to determine the degree to which they believe they are capable of doing their work and contributing to community concerns (Chaousis, 2000, pp. 29 & 87). A sense of place in this paper is taken to be an important part of the *structuration process* (Giddens, 1984), “both constitutive of, and constituted by, social relations” (Duncan, 2000, cited in Johnston et al [Eds.], 2003, p. 583). It is also implied here as coming from the improvisatory nature of *habitus* whereby actions are both governed, or not governed, by structures (Bourdieu, 1990). In other words, communities have often been at the mercy of government management practices; their development has always been based on the social/political settlements of the time, and furthermore, relationships have been redefined “between the state and citizen, between public and private, between

providers and recipients of social welfare, and between management and policies” (Clarke & Newman, 1997, p. ix).

The following three communities can be easily captured in the typical whiteness worldview of what it means to be a community as espoused in the previous ideas. However, there are cultural layers in the social action that determine and redefine these communities, and that push at conventional understandings of colonisation, participation, inclusion, and empowerment (Victorian Aboriginal peak and state-wide organisations, 2004). As Moreton-Robinson (2011, p. 75) suggests, “Whiteness establishes the limits of what can be known about the other through itself, disappearing beyond or behind the limits of this knowledge it creates in the other’s name”. There are still some Euro-Western debates questioning the Indigenous person’s claim of connection to country as some kind of elusive construct. But there is no denying that the connection of Indigenous peoples to land has a visceral quality that is felt deep in their bones and provides the essence of cultural perpetuity (Blackstock, 2007; Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005;). This produces a feeling of survival, spiritual connection, and sustainability through not just the embodiment of soul with the corporeal essence of people, but the tangible links with both animate and inanimate objects like the air we breathe, the soil, rocks, flora and fauna we observe and touch, and that no western worldview can easily encapsulate in an academic attempt to define community.

Saving Claymore

Before the community of Claymore in NSW became transformed by an initial Animation Program run by the Catholic Church, its residents lived in fear and isolation, deserted by industry that never turned up to provide jobs. This was a community of people from different ethnic groups who were “given a rotten start and found the courage to turn their lives around” (Compass, 2002). The irony of using the Animation program of community development strategies in a struggling suburban community like Claymore is that in a well-developed country like Australia, those

initiatives began from lessons taken from some of the poorest countries in the world (Boal, 1992; Freire, 1972).

Remembering Minto: Life and memories of a community

The stoic presence of the Franciscan Friars within Minto, NSW, created an enormous positive impact on that community. In one reclamation situation involving community development of a kids' park, members were supported in applying for and taking hold of the deeds to the actual place. Minto is in Sydney's far south-west, with nearly 5% of its population made up of Australian Indigenous heritage (Remembering Minto, n.d. [online]). It was built in the 1970s as a model public housing development based on the American 'Radburn' concept. Houses would front onto public parkland where residents would congregate and develop a strong community spirit. The idea for this development worked in cohesive and affluent communities in the United States and elsewhere, but in Sydney's western suburbs it was a disaster. The houses seemed back to front, because they were accessed from the rear. The Parklands, intended to bring people together, became suburban wastelands, and people in desperate need of different services. One of the service providers at the time related the following thoughts about the relocation of the Minto community members:

I have a special passion for Minto and its people. As a service provider, the redevelopment will have a huge impact. Whoever thought of the idea, "We'll just bulldoze these homes down and then we'll give you all new ones?" Peoples' lives are in those homes. People living 20 or 30 years in the area, to just be stripped like that. As a service provider, what does that do for us? We're there to provide a service for the community. Well they've just relocated half the community (Remembering Minto, n.d. [online]).

To a certain extent, Minto residents became 'animated' also, to save their community, but was it the right sort of animation in the end, to prevent the destruction of nearly 1,000 homes? That is, just as the community was starting to take control and transform those pockets of the community that were in need of resurrection, Mr Andrew Refshauge, Minister for Housing, said at the time:

We've got to give people in this community a better future and part of that is moving away, getting rid of these Radburn Estates. Bulldozing the past and giving a better future for our tenants (ABC Television, October 8, 2006 [online]).

The Minto Resident Action Group (RAG) had been formed for some time with the assistance of a social researcher, Dr Judy Stubbs, and was in repeated stand-offs with the Department of Housing to release a master plan about the relocation of their community; there was still a failure by the Department to inform Minto tenants openly about the issue of relocation. Judith Stubbs recounts from that time:

I think when the community started to really work on its own behalf, through participation in the various forums the Department set up with the support of the Franciscans and others. They became I guess not just objects of redevelopment, but they started to take some control over that (ABC Television, October 8, 2006 [online]).

Gordon Estate: Breaking down a community in Dubbo

Dubbo is in the central west of New South Wales, with approximately 40,000 people, including over 4,000 Indigenous Australians. The Gordon Estate in Dubbo is still 'there', but is no longer a designated place for Aboriginal people. The Estate was dismantled in 2006 as a response to address 'social problems'. The relocation of people in this case, to make way for others is a whiteness behaviour that is juxtaposed with the hegemonic practice of creating solutions for everyone, and racism at its core. It was seen as a culturally appropriate intervention that was in fact culturally insensitive, non-collaborative, and non-consultative. There is now a "property boom in a ghetto reborn" with Elders having lived on the Estate since its beginnings in the early 1960s forced to move to make way for "another bargain for a private owner/occupier" (Brisbane Times, August 2008 [online]). Furthermore, *The NSW Government won an award in August 2008, from the Urban Development Institute of Australia, NSW for its Dubbo Transformation Strategy, which judges called "a great example of courageous and innovative leadership addressing problems and perceptions in a notorious public housing estate". By about mid-2008, the Government was close to a third of the way through converting the 'public ghetto'*

into private suburbia. It had sold 63 public housing properties to private owners in the past year after relocating scores of Indigenous tenants - sometimes against their will - and renovating or demolishing their former state-owned homes. There were 304 left to sell by June 2012 (summarised from the Brisbane Times August 2008 [online]).

As already mentioned, community can be defined in many different ways.

Community as social construct is sometimes best understood after the community is no longer there; through the street stories that help to keep the history of the people alive. One of the competing challenges for historians however, is that in any community there are both visible and invisible stories.

In response to the issues around the relocation of people from the Gordon Estate, the Housing Minister at the time, Cherie Burton, had this to say,

We've got a whole program of redevelopments amongst our estates in New South Wales and we've already started a very successful program with the Minto Renewal Project. We're looking at renewing the Bonnyrigg Estate and also the Macquarie Fields Estate. So what this is about is building better housing for our people that are the good tenants and making sure that our bad tenants start to take some respect and responsibility for where they live, or then public housing won't be an option to them (ABC Local Radio, May 12, 2006 [online]).

Matapihi, Tauranga – a New Zealand Māori community example

In a current similar social engineering and sanitising exercise in my own Indigenous home community - Matapihi, in Tauranga, NZ - the Southern Pipeline sewerage project is seen as a way to 'improve people's lives'. Despite community objections, the Pipeline now invades the surrounding *moana* [sea area and locality], tracks through the community and actually does not service the people of Matapihi at all, because most of their homes rely on the use of septic tanks.

Research tells us that from an upper area in the urban part of the Tauranga township, raw sewerage is pumped across the seabed, through a small semi-rural local Māori village, to be treated in an adjoining neighbourhood 8kms away. Locality issues between the community members voicing concerns to the local council, included cultural and community concerns that ranged from: hydrological effects on

the surrounding waters, and the negative effects on harbour ecological communities, to rights of access over Māori land, and in particular, concerns relating to effects upon archaeological sites given significant occupation of the area, by Māori.

In one of almost 200 official Reports, applications, and drawings/plans found on the Tauranga City Council website, regarding the Southern Pipeline Project (see <https://www.tauranga.govt.nz/projects/southern-pipeline/pipeline-resource-consents.aspx>), the *Hearing Decisions Resource Consent Report* (New Zealand Government, 2009) submitted to the regional and local councils, as well as to the Minister of Conservation, notes that the local 'cultural community' was singled out in an interestingly segregated way. In several cases, it was reported that this Māori community harboured grievances and concerns, for example, in areas of: inadequate consultation around the principle of waste water transported over Māori land; the removal of soil from the locality, as well as importing soil to the area; the effects on *kaimoana* [food from the sea], sea food harvesting, customary activities, endangering estuarine ecosystems, altering tidal flows and the Harbour; a need to protect *waahi tapu* [sacred] archaeological sites, and of cultural earthworks protocols. In addition alternative methods for sewerage treatment disposal to be environmentally sound were not adequately addressed by the consortium for the Project (p. 28).

Despite the above numerous concerns and challenges for Māori, the Southern Pipeline Project was given the green light with the Report noting "findings of fact" (p. 32, 12.1.1 & 12.1.2), whereby the growth of Tauranga urban area has been continued and sustained and the existing wastewater system is not of sufficient capacity to cater for the projected and planned growth of Tauranga. Accordingly, there is a need to upgrade and expand the waste water network (12.1.1).

Furthermore, the treatment and disposal of waste water from the growing population of Tauranga is necessary to protect not only the health and welfare of the community but also the qualities of the waters of Tauranga Harbour.

Discussion

There are numerous definitions to offer in answer to the question, *what makes a community?* According to the New South Government, however, and the local government in Dubbo, the Gordon Estate did not 'make a community' worth saving. The tragedy of the 'dismembering' of that Estate causes anxiety and stress to this day. The legacy of banishment without consultation from a community lives on in the hearts of the Elders who feel shame and displacement, anger and heartache, on behalf of their people. However, what is it about social policy implementation that steals a community? The execution of power is an often insidious phenomenon that encroaches on personal well-being and the ability of people to articulate, especially Indigenous peoples who still carry the legacy of the effect of past colonisation into contemporary colonisation practices.

The physical landscape around this Estate at the time was peppered with For Sale signs. Again, this realtor action followed the forced removal after events of 2006, of over 1,000 Indigenous inhabitants [some of whom had lived there since the early 1960s]. The estate (now identified with a lower case 'e', because it was rendered insignificant) was later renamed 'Rosewood Grove', in a *sanitising exercise* by the local government which canvassed through the local media, for broader community suggestions to rename this part of Dubbo.

In the example from New Zealand, this could be seen as a story of affluence, influence, and effluence. It is a story of waste, and of wasteful and neglectful influence on people's lives. Paulo Freire (2004) inspired a pedagogy of indignation that seems to provide a relevant springboard for further discussion about the social engineering of Indigenous communities. His words have strong resonance in capturing the situation, that, "Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral" (p. 122). I often wonder how many social workers or students of social work participated in that government renaming process, at Dubbo, in an act of non-reflective complicitness.

Practising with a blended critical reflection framework provides a beginning axiom to deconstruct the injustice directed at communities to either conform, or miss out. This type of framework includes several elements depending on the positioning of the user but the following elements have become part of my own standard for analysis and reflection, as well as providing useful and relevant approaches to storying, including:

- *Auto-ethnography* inspires us to critically reflect upon our own life experiences of privilege and power within a socio-cultural context (Spry, 2001); perhaps through a psycho-dynamic lens to tap into the consciousness of feelings about the way that conflict and/or deep ‘interruptions’ in a taken-for-granted world, affect people.
- *Personal stories* informed by socio-cultural experiences (Pease, 2010b) are powerful ways to talk about patterns of privilege and oppression (Scott-Simmons, 2012); on the ‘borders’; and perhaps from a ‘conflicted base’.
- *Critical social theory* identifies class positioning through the influence and affluence of people and ideas, and our own part in that complicitness (Young, 2008).

There are some challenging ideas about what is a ‘community’? These lie in the stories we can share about social engineering that tend to locate Indigenous peoples and concerns *outside of* the mainstream, thus making them invisible. One of the limiting ideas about the homogeneity of communities is captured through a colour-blindness lens (Moreton-Robinson, 2011), which sees people as being the same people everywhere; until of course, we unpack notions of privilege, power and class. Some definitions are tied up in the ideas around social inclusion, and the building of social capital through a collective and synonymous gaze, but these thoughts originate from whiteness language that promulgates equity but which is really not available for everyone without the corresponding critique of access for people, as well as their levels of equality compared to others.

Whiteness language is akin to ‘white noise’, manifested in white sound that includes someone saying all the ‘right’ things; making the ‘right’ statements. This language is steady like rain, but is also dehumanising, unvarying, unobtrusive, drone-like, drip-

like, and masking or obliterating unwanted sounds. Whiteness is a socially and politically constructed behaviour. It represents a position of power where the power holder defines social categories and reality. It provides the stage for the 'master narrator' to perform. Furthermore, examples of unearned privilege are *denumerable* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013).

The *rhizomatics* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013) of privilege and critical whiteness here in Australia, are tied to the fact that White Australia has a Black History; and so does New Zealand. When we look at the dismantlement of Indigenous communities, there are ever-present comparative considerations that are part of the personal and political spheres: post-colonialism compared to ongoing contemporary colonisation; cultural perpetuity and responsiveness (O'Sullivan, Hill, Bernoth, & Mlcek, 2016) compared to cultural submersion; inclusion and acceptance compared to diasporic anomie (Mlcek, 2016); decolonising methodologies to claim stories compared to social engineering that annihilates the narratives of people. The problematic for many, is that there is often quietness associated with the arrogance of some behaviours rather than a shouting from the rooftops when systemic silence allows the perpetuation of stereotypes, tokenistic acknowledgement of 'community', and simplistic views on cultural difference. That is, "*... it is not difference that immobilises us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken*" (Lorde, 1984, p. 84). Up to the time of dismantlement and invasion into the above communities, there were several attempts made to animate the community members in inclusive discussion, but the original agendas were flawed and the trust of individuals was never quite attained. From a community development point of view, the type of animation (Smith, 2009) that is required for truly-inclusive self-determination comes from a compilation of ideas that have their grounding in a collective socio-cultural framework. This framework includes notions of working with people and groups so that they participate in and manage the communities in which they live, but interestingly enough for the first two communities, there has been benevolent and tireless intervention by caring supporters that offer no condemnation, that believe in the resilience of people to overcome adversity and the limit-situations of their lives (Freire, 1972), as well as in the transformation process engendered by communities

to impact changes in their circumstances (Pollo, 1991, in Green, 2009 [online]). In an Indigenous community, the challenge is to provide continuous opportunities for affirmation of identity, and to recognise and applaud the strength of the relationship between very young people and the wisdom of Elders to contribute to the cultural perpetuity within communities.

Consultation is at the heart of participation in Indigenous communities. For the original Aboriginal people who lived in west Dubbo, breaking down the Gordon Estate (ABC Radio National, April 1, 2007 [online]) on the instructions from the New South Wales Department of Housing, consolidated the constant despair in their lives to overcome lack of self-determination, the constant lack of consultation, the constant attempts to overcome marginalisation, constant racism, and the constant spotlight to perform to find ongoing solutions in a western timely fashion. Tensions arise from the mis-match of cultural expectations from a Western worldview, compared to that of an Aboriginal worldview.

Conclusion

This is a story from afar and from within. It is a story that began in 2006 and culminates here through further observation and analysis in 2016. As such, the story is a reflective piece about practitioner engagement, over ten years. But of course it is a story that has been centuries in the making, as is the pedagogy of the oppressed; a story of the legacy of hurt and displacement; of hands tied behind one's back; of frustration and anguish; of insurmountable loss and lost opportunity. The story feeds a broader narrative about the toll on individuals to withstand 'successful' social engineering in the guise of development, of communities. The story started out as yet another commentary in the long litany of questionable government engagements with Indigenous Peoples in Australia, but has become, yet again, another grief and loss story that is juxtaposed with non-Indigenous actions and feelings of puzzlement and 'shameful' helplessness (as highlighted in the Background section at the start of this paper). The story moves to incorporate another type of social engineering whereby interference in a New Zealand Māori community is portrayed as something

other; not to be concerned with, because deontologically, it has all been for the greater good.

This is however, a story of a way forward because abjectness is never a place to occupy for any length of time; the impact on the human psyche is too overwhelming and the power of individuals to move forward, some way, somehow, is fundamental to social work practice – even when things ‘get too close to home’. When social engineering of Indigenous communities happens, silence is never a good option. Being watchful to be aware of the appropriation and engineering of Indigenous communities is not an easy task, especially when the need to be alert is in relation to sometimes-co-opted behaviours and actions from those who are close to us within our own communities. The legacy of colonisation lives on in the cycle of brokerage and enticement, where those of the oppressed group can be easily-enticed to fit the shoes of the oppressor; as ‘agents of change’, and in many cases not even knowing that is what is happening. However, social engineering is a scourge; we cannot promote resilience, empowerment, safety and respect for others, if we are not constantly mindful of inappropriate and unchallenged behaviours towards communities; we cannot practise unknowingly when positions of power and privilege impact the social and cultural wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. We need to use a critical whiteness framework to interrogate and problematise those things we know to be wrong. When we try to engineer Indigenous communities – *we reap what we sow* in terms of continued loss and grief, as well as the disengagement of individuals from whole-of-community endeavours. We need to rethink the influences of a white ontological frame, a white epistemological frame, and a white axiological frame that, at their most basic levels, privilege the individual over the collective strength of Indigenous communities.

The challenge from this paper is to project the ideas posed in the previous sections to a place of realism that could be any Indigenous community in the future. The ideas from the successful animation project in ‘saving Claymore’ can be transformed into strategies to be used to build an Indigenous Framework for Cultural Perpetuity

within communities, so that whiteness behaviours are not privileged, but effective self-determined Indigenous communities are.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Space and Place for women in regional creativity

Tracey Callinan

Abstract

The creative and cultural industries have an image of being open, progressive workplaces. However statistics show that the sector actually has far less diversity in its workforce, including less women employed, and even less in management roles. This paper looks at the issues of underrepresentation of women in the creative and cultural industries and investigates how being located in a non-metropolitan setting can be both a benefit and a challenge for women working as creative practitioners. The paper will also investigate why this gender imbalance has, until so recently, been largely absent from creative and cultural industries discourse. By working away from the hothouse of city-based enterprises often associated with informal recruitment practices and connections, can working in the smaller scale of regionally based enterprises benefit women? Using an approach that moves away from the tendency to align the sector with a neo-liberal position, this paper will instead take a wider view of the way the creative and cultural industries can provide regional locations with social capital and identity of place in addition to the economic benefits that the sector can offer.

Space and Place for women in regional creativity

This paper focuses on bringing a feminist perspective to issues of employment within the creative industries, and in particular, the way that practitioners working in regional, non-metropolitan settings may have a different experience of the way gender issues manifest themselves. The perspective that I offer has emerged from my PhD research into regional creative industries in which I argue that creative practitioners located regionally operate differently to their metropolitan counterparts. It is therefore important to understand this way of working and support it differently, although current policy and practice does little to acknowledge this difference and associated needs. The place of women within this regional creative ecology was something that gradually emerged in the course of interviews and observations with creative practitioners from the NSW central west region. Place is therefore central in the research that has led to the themes in this paper.

Research Background

For the purposes of this discussion on creative industries, a standard definition is being used: those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent, and that have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property (Department of State and Regional Development., 2008). The sectors covers the following broad conglomeration of sub-sectors: advertising; built environment; design (including fashion, industrial and graphic design); visual arts; music; performing arts; publishing; screen (television, film, electronic games and interactive entertainment); radio.

It is also useful to clarify what is meant in this paper by the term 'regional, particularly as there are a number of different definitions of what regional means in Australia and even more on a global scale. One definition, the ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia includes all areas outside the major capital cities, but my interpretation is more influenced by the RRMA (Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas) index which excludes all centres with a population of more than 100,000. In keeping with this definition, for the purposes of my research I am concentrating on the region covered by Arts OutWest, the Regional Arts Development Organisation in the NSW central west. As the Executive Director of Arts OutWest I am very familiar with the region in which I am researching. The area includes two regional cities each of around 40,000 people, country towns and villages, agricultural land and wild bushland. The western end of the region is considered remote and around a quarter of the population there is Aboriginal, while the eastern end is only just outside the Blue Mountains which is considered part of Western Sydney.

Why a feminist perspective?

The starting point for this research did not include a feminist perspective and was more focused on the practical issues of running regional creative enterprises: the challenges of getting creative product to a market, isolation and lack of networks and clusters, access to training, lack of broadband and tensions between production and consumption (Flew, 2010; Gibson, Murphy, & Freestone, 2002; Henkel, 2010). However in the course of data collection, in particular, interviews with creative

practitioners from the region, the need to bring a feminist perspective became apparent. At the time of writing, eighteen creative practitioners had been interviewed, and in spite of the intention to ensure a balance across art-form, location and gender, I realised that fifteen of those have been women. Statistically this is very different to the employment numbers for Australian creative industries. Throughout an interview process which was attempting to probe questions of why practitioners were located where they were and the advantages and disadvantages of being regionally based, I started to realise that there were some gender issues emerging about the way these practitioners worked, their motivations and what they were gaining from their practice and from their regional location. It became apparent that the research required some feminist theory and awareness of gender issues in the theoretical framework to support what was emerging.

Feminist literature within the creative industries

There has been a large amount written about the creative industries over the past fifteen years and yet there is surprisingly little that addresses gender issues, with Angela McRobbie (2007, 2011, 2012) and Rosalind Gill (2002, 2014; 2008) being two notable exceptions along with geographers Doreen Massey (2013) and to some extent Jo Foord (2008; 1986) and several others. Recently this has become as somewhat hotter topic. A number of writers – both male and female - have explored the notion of the ‘precariat’ within the creative industries, that is, the precarious and often exploitative practices in employment more commonly associated with poorly paid unskilled labour but also rife in the flexible work environment of the highly skilled creative industries workforce (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; Miller, 2010; Murray & Gollmitzer, 2011; Ross, 2008) but McRobbie and Gill both interrogate the disadvantage of women within this precariat.

McRobbie (2011) identifies many of the attributes of women working in the creative industries sector and the reasons that their under-representation – especially at senior levels – needs to be analysed. McRobbie states that these include the fact that women working in the creative industries are young and mostly graduates, they

are the beneficiaries of second-wave feminism, many are childless and they are constantly changing to fit in with new sets of conditions in their industry. She also points out that female participation in the creative industries is predominantly white and middle class and have been influenced by their access to training and education. While other writers have acknowledged that the entrepreneurial environment is sometimes not an easy fit for women (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015; Nixon & Crewe, 2004), McRobbie raises the question of what a feminist politics of women's entrepreneurial activities ought to be. 'There is slippage in this account, rather than a confronting head-on of the reality of post-Fordist flexibility, along with enterprise culture as a recent mode of governmentality, both of which in the last decade become speeded up and intensified by the gains of neo-liberalism in political culture' (p73). McRobbie also raises questions about whether the creative economy has been good or bad for women, the effects of gendered neo-liberalism, and whether women are ambassadors of new capitalism or simply flexible workers in the new creative economy, in the 'permanently transitional' job market which has been the subject of extensive attention in recent years, where self-employment (or freelance work or even cultural entrepreneurship) is something quite different from being a conventional employer (2011, pp. 72-73).

Rosalind Gill (2014; 2008) also looks at the way women operate within the creative industries sector. In her work she goes beyond the excuses of child-rearing to identify some of the reasons that women do not enjoy either the participation rates or the success rates of seniority with the sector and barriers they experience. She outlines three areas of focus: Firstly she argues that there are new, mobile, subtle, and revitalised forms of sexism in circulation; secondly that there is a dominant post-feminist sensibility which suggests that all the battles have been won, and therefore renders inequality increasingly difficult to voice; and thirdly that the new forms of labouring subjectivity required to survive in the field of cultural work may themselves be contributing to the inequalities in the field, by favouring an entrepreneurial individualistic mode that disavows structural power relations.

Gill (2014; 2008) points out that the inequalities of gender as well as of race and class found in the labour force of the creative industries is at odds with the image

projected by the sector itself of being open, inclusive and progressive. In relation to the absence of gender debate in much of the creative industries literature, Gill argues that inequalities in cultural labour have been under-explored - particularly those relating to gender - almost as if academic research priorities are reflecting the wider post-feminist complacency that regards gender inequality as a thing of the past.

Picking up on Gill's concern with the image and the reality of creative industries, the word 'cool' has been associated with the sector in many ways. Several reports – most notably the Skillset UK report in 2010, have exposed the lack of both cultural and gender equality and although there is no equivalent report in Australia, even a brief look at the statistics here indicate that things are not markedly better. Part of the 'cool' image of creative industries workplaces include strong reliance on informal networks to get jobs, emphasis on out of hours networking in social settings, expectations that workers can work flexible hours, often at unusual times and informal workplace protocols. Although these features do not inherently contain any gender bias, it has been claimed that they inadvertently promote a 'blokey' culture that can disadvantage women (Conor et al., 2015).

Employment in the creative industries

Statistics over a number of years have consistently indicated that there are more men than women employed in the creative industries and that they are higher paid and more likely to be working full-time in the industry. For example, Australian Bureau of Statistics data from 2010 showed that the breakdown of male and female works in the cultural sector was 55% male and 45% female. Using the UK as an example, Gill has collated statistics from various sources to make this point about the differences and lack of gender equality:

In terms of gender, there is a more complex picture. In some industries (e.g. computer games), women are barely present at all—averaging 5% across the different component fields (online, multimedia, etc.). In others, the issue is one of occupational segregations. In the film industry, for example, women dominate in

wardrobe and make-up yet constitute only a small minority (average 15%) in key creative roles such as directors, screenwriters, and cinematographers (Lauzen 2012; Conor 2014). In television, women's representation is better, but primarily at more junior levels. Overall, women working in the media and cultural industries are significantly better qualified than their male counterparts, with a greater proportion being graduates and an even more significant difference in the numbers of women, compared with men, with higher degrees (Skillset 2010). Moreover, women are significantly more likely to have undertaken industry-specific training. Nevertheless, they earn on average of 15% less than their male colleagues and are much less likely to be promoted or to make it into senior positions (Skillset 2010). This marked pay inequality holds true even when other factors are adjusted (controlled for), e.g. the lower age profile of women in the workforce (Gill, 2014, p. 513).

Reasons for gender differences in regional creative industries employment

Bringing the discussion back to the subject of location and the factor of place in the creative industries scenario, based on the data collection and preliminary analysis to date in this research, the narrative for women is not all bad. It appears that regional places can in fact be kind to women practitioners. Several reasons for this are posited below, using examples from my research to support the claims.

There are four reasons that I would like to suggest may be the cause of a regional dynamic that does not work so negatively against women practitioners. Firstly, regional creative industries are already removed from the 'cool' milieu of the city. Therefore women working in the creative industries in regional locations are not having to compete within the 'blokey' culture that disadvantages many of them. Secondly, regional places often provide the networks of support that can make it easier for women to manage their commitments. This may be different to the professional networks of the industry and could mean friends, family or community. The third reason is that less financial pressure due to lower costs in regional locations provide women with more choices about the level in which they wish to engage professionally with the cultural and creative industries sector. Finally, many women move to the country for reasons that are not connected with their own work

or practice but they need to find their own voice and a place in a regional community on their own terms. Creative practice can allow that to happen. I will explore each of these reasons with examples from women who are regional creative practitioners.

Regional locations removed from ‘cool’ culture. I suggest that being away from the ‘cool’ of big city enterprises enables women to get on with achieving on their own terms. An example is Subject K who was a trained graphic designer who got a job in a large Sydney based firm.

I worked, when I first finished uni I lived in Paddington and I worked in Kirribilli, and that was an advertising agency where really I was the guy’s PA, I didn’t get to do a lot of graphic design, but it was nice to work in a studio. But that just told me to make up my mind, I really did want to be back in the country where ... it wasn’t going to take me forever to get ahead. And my pay I think was two hundred and fifty dollars a week and my rent was one hundred and fifty, but nobody can live in Sydney on a hundred dollars a week. So financially it wasn’t great, I wasn’t really getting any work experience in graphic design, so - , and it took so long to get to work. It’s just so crazy and, yes, it just wasn’t for me. (Subject K, graphic designer).

This, by itself, is not evidence of being disadvantaged by the male culture of creative industries, but it was one of the early interviews that started me wondering and which was then supported by other data collected as well as in reports such as the UK Skillset report (2010).

Another of the comments, this time by a theatre practitioner, also pointed to the fact that many women do not function well in the city-based pressure cooker environment in industries that have high demands and inherent power structures. She states: Originally I turned up here because it was really friendly. It was lovely. It wasn’t Sydney. I hated Sydney. I lasted about eighteen months in Sydney and it was about twelve months too long is what I’ve always said. I blame that on the events industry probably (Subject B, theatre designer).

Regional networks and support. Regional places may be criticised for not always providing networks of other workers, training opportunities, ways of collaborating and places in which creative output is highly concentrated. However the easier access to other support networks including family and friends can provide women with some of the more practical support that they need.

Below is an example, one of many, in which an illustrator talks about the benefits of being in a regional area close to family.

Well I was in New Zealand because my partner was working in the film industry and that's where I worked for a while. We had a child together, we split up and I didn't want to stay in New Zealand. It's beautiful, but I really wanted to be with my family. So I moved back here six years ago. So ... I'm only here because of my family. But, it's also, I guess it's double edged as well. Like I'm here because of my family but I'm also here because I can survive here whereas, I'm on a single income – a single creative income. There was not much chance of living anywhere in a big city. But I didn't want that anyway. I've done that and I didn't want to live... in Sydney again (Subject F, illustrator).

The benefits of networks between successful practitioners and the community go both ways and several of the women interviewed commented on the way that people in their regional community had embraced their practice with enthusiasm and generosity. Friends and community seem to get something out of being connected to a creative who is recognised for their work outside of the region.

I think they do like and ... I know I have a much bigger following of people here in Orange. In fact I generally feel that the people who keep me afloat are all the girls I went to school with who buy my books for everyone, which is great, and I'm very grateful (Subject F).

The word of mouth of small communities taps into the way many female practitioners operate and the way women network, as shown by another practitioner:

Yeah, I think a rural community is far more prepared to take a word of mouth recommendation than they are in the city. I think it carries more weight because of the smaller environment, so I'll – if they're going to recommend her, then they're almost putting themselves on the line, and I think people – I think people appreciate that. Say, they think: well if she says it's good then it must be alright because she wouldn't say it's good if it wasn't. So in that sense, that does build and breed that brand loyalty as well (Subject G, milliner).

Or from the theatre practitioner:

But the advantage of being in the regions is never mind the space, you have the opportunity, it's a welcoming community, a supportive community, and a friendly community generally (Subject B).

This recognition and acceptance by the community was echoed by a sculptor who talked about the fact that living in a regional and rural community has meant that people are there for her, things like a farmer volunteering to come and forklift her work up for transporting to Sculpture by the Sea, or a metal company providing her materials.

Benefits of lower costs regionally. The third posited reason for regional practice being 'kinder' to women was that creative practitioners often find the lower costs of living regionally attractive. This is the case for both men and women, but I raise it as a gender issue because women are trying to keep their businesses going around other family demands, or may have felt that the competitive city environment did not suit their way of working.

I guess you either choose to live somewhere lovely, and quiet, with your family, or you have a life working really hard to earn enough money to survive somewhere glamorous. I don't think it affects my income that much (Subject F).

A Lithgow based designer talked about costs, but note the way that she also looks at the importance of access to family, friends and community:

I guess the original reasons were we wanted two hours distance from Sydney so we could easily access our Sydney clients. It was budget. Budget was part of the plan. It was the business community. It was the train line. Direct access for our family and friends to come up and down if they choose to as opposed to driving (Subject S).

Creativity and identity of regional women. The final point about the way regional places offer different ways of operating for women is about the need for regionally based women to use their creativity as part of their identity. This is illustrated by the quote below from a rurally based professional photographer:

And it's soul saving I think if you -. I was probably the classic 'farmer wants a wife' type thing; I'm from the city originally and I come from a very artistic family background, so the whole idea of farming was completely new to me, and foreign, and so there's been a big learning curve, but I think, to keep a part of yourself in an industry and an environment that is just so different and it's so specific. I mean, you're either born into it or you have a passion for it and then you really go for it, but if you don't have those two of those things, it's really really hard to maintain your own sense of identity, 'cause it's such a strong identity – the identity of a farmer. It's a very strong image and if you're not, and I'm not, we're chalk and cheese but it works, so yeah, it's really really important. And I think you're right, that there are a lot of women that have married farmers that have a really strong creative, 'cause it's this force to keep yourself, so I think they put that into their art, and so it's quite strong actually (Subject K, photographer).

Conclusion

There remain barriers to any practitioner working in a regional setting. Being away from metropolitan centres means that practitioners may have different markets, they

usually need to find different ways to access their markets and they work off a regional economy that sometimes does not offer the same financial rewards that a city-based practice may do. They often feel isolated in their practice and don't have access to highly skilled networks, professional development or shared resources. However the non-cool, community networked environment of rural and regional Australia can offer opportunities for women and remove some of the gender-based barriers that women can encounter in metropolitan creative industries. In doing so it seems to shift the creative industries sector away from pressures of an industry too strongly associated in its policy with a neoliberal agenda and its economic successes, to one in which the social capital is recognised, the value of networks and community are maximised and in which some women are able to establish creative enterprises without the difficult power structures often encountered in the competitive world of metropolitan creative industries.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Beauty as a Warning: using a sublime aesthetic in photographic practice with a focus on climate change.

Denise Ferris

Background

Every winter for the last decade each Saturday and Sunday I have skied the cross-country tracks at the snowfield closest to my home in the Australian alps. There I've photographed continually and over time have observed the variability of the seasons, the upward creep of the snowline and the fragility of the snowfield's sustainability. With a sense of premonition and increasing foreboding at the season's melting end, I've kept photographing, almost as a placeholder- in the sense of a mathematical pattern and as a hold on memory.ⁱ

I've written elsewhere about my coming to terms with the coexistence of the national park and the ski resort, the inevitability of its stature as a company town, actually now owned by a U.S. ski resort. Day-tripper or elite athlete, downhiller or tobogganer I've come to recognise we're all in this together to quote a song, except of course as I've also written, some groups are perhaps more reliant on the economics of accessibility to natural snow from the skies, rather than machine made snow. These include day-trippers who toboggan, the cross-country skiers and those who will not be able to afford to purchase tickets to downhill ski on machine made snow in the future. Access will be about economics not the community's access to national parks.

My Purpose

Here I consider my photographs and the aesthetic strategies I use to offer both a sense of wonder, as well as a sense of diminishing possibilities in the face of environmental realities.ⁱⁱ First seeing then thinking and feeling—as if we could separate them. Like all photographs these are characterised by an abundance of information and conversely the visual emptiness of white; an expanse of display, contrasted with a visual reticence through tone. Summoning thoughts of global warming, climate change and the retreat of snowlines, these photographs are not a “visual archive of destruction”, as Wells observes is a familiar response to “the consequences of human invasion”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Taking quite a different tack largely, integrating diverse subjects and scenes I foreground the significance of the snow itself, it is the ground, the context, the reason, the space. Liz Wells articulates post-modern landscape photography as a

“grounded aesthetics” where formal and thematic perceptions are situated within socio-historic contexts.^{iv} Through disparate series and investigating diverse aspects of the landscape and site, over a significant timeframe I build this content in the social context of emerging realities about climate change.^v

The idea that a pictorial experience can push political and social change is well rehearsed. The sublime is utilised most famously by Peter Dombrovskis’s “Morning Mist - Rock Island Bend” <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an24365561>, which commentators have suggested in its ‘awful sublimity’ Geoff Batchen quoted as saying is “one of the rare photographs that has made an almost demonstrable political impact on its viewers.”^{vi} In Giblet and Tolonen’s chapter on Australian wilderness photography, Tim Bonyhady and Bob Brown are cited as confirming it “is still the most effective election advertisement they have ever seen”.^{vii}

Ernst van Alphen in *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, (2005) discusses philosopher and art historian Hubert Damisch’s position that art is only effectively addressed by considering it a form of thinking, art will only appear to full advantage in this realisation of something beyond the looking, in the ‘ideal’ viewing experience.

First, as a beholder, one is invited to think ‘with’ the work of art, which means that one is compelled to start a dialogue with it by articulating questions of a more general—for instance, philosophical, political, or social—nature. Only when the beholder poses these kinds of questions will the work of art release its ideas.^{viii}

Of course in this respect photography is a both a blessing (the Save the Franklin example) and a curse (distancing from the literal). Viewers often relate to Photography as what you see is just what it appears to represent, that representation rules and no correspondence entered into. Martha Langford through a discursive argument about Marian Penner Bancroft’s photographs raises another artist as an example of how we are looking. She says rather than essentialist readings a good example happens to be Mary Kelly, Langford says

Mary Kelly...(is) instead looking for the “underlying contradiction” that emerges from the representational image.^{ix}

How refreshing.

Place as Memory

Further Langford discussing just one aspect of multi-faceted long-term practice, that of “romanticism and environmentalism”, in *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art*, points to the Bancroft’s specific viewing points, her location as correspondent, for the mnemonic. Langford says,

...Bancroft’s work tries to answer questions of that nature (memories, histories of place, rights, representations) from where she stands, in terms of the personal, the familial, and the local.^x

The subjective position in Bancroft’s practice is often expressed through family archive photographs, the juxtaposition of different images and materials in installation and the disavowal of traditional photograph presentations (wall, framed, flat, series). Nevertheless and here I feel an alignment with Bancroft, Langford quotes curator Karen Henry as saying Bancroft’s is

“ a photographic practice that expresses autobiographical memories in terms of place. Her landscapes are personal sites of memory, or more precisely, sites whose recollection (recording and re-presentation) is shouldered by the artist, wholly taken on as part of her legacy.^{xi}

Jacqueline Milner in her book *Conceptual Beauty: Perspectives on Australian Contemporary Art* (2010) offers one chapter on the beneficial fusion of viewing pleasure and aesthetic value with critical and conceptual practice. Milner lists the various renunciations of aesthetic importance, citing issues such as perceived connections with suspect bourgeois taste and values, commercial non-critical interests and outsider status- apropos the “therapeutic institution” of art such as esteemed institutions are factors. Milner says while discredited,

Beauty...rather than being a frivolous or kitsch gesture that precludes political action, is a powerful aesthetic strategy that can nurture a critical disposition and facilitate a regeneration of our engagement with the world.^{xii}

Given the genre of landscape photography attaches to images of nature or the land, repositioning consumption is also perhaps more difficult than other forms of practice. The aesthetic organisation of my photographs, which is warts and all — snow fences, star pickets, ski resort paraphernalia, foregrounding human use — undoes their *unlandscapeness*. (I am not Steve Parish.)^{xiii} I am reminded of Catherine Bodmer's *Lacs*, where she inserts mountain chains around the edges of vacant lots, the disused land and its puddles constituting the everyday, has a gap between the high aesthetic of the peaks and the foreground grass and detritus.^{xiv} Langford notes ...by juxtaposing the banal with the fantastic or the surprising, Bodmer obliges us to reconsider our frame of reference. Her abrupt juxtapositions set the viewer's imagining in motion, opening up a multiple of possibilities.^{xv} Additionally the deliberate serial construction of photographs in groups is an opportunity to build the work's ideas and allows the viewer to engage with imaginative possibilities. Beauty can summons affect and that is needed from the viewer- do we care? Slowing viewing down for better reflection is also a central aspiration and with these strategies I hope to engage the emotions and the intellect.

Issues: Attention

I hope to force recognition of the order of careful attention revealed in these photographs, hope that the assiduous consideration in their initial making is replicated in their viewing and that viewing is also beauty of a kind. Philosopher John Armstrong considers that:

... in saying that something is beautiful we are saying that we find it worthy of love, of careful attention and that we find in it a promise of happiness..^{xvi}

The potency of these photographs is the suggestion of withheld emotion, held back by the use of restrained aesthetic. While feeling is curbed it is still most present and invites the viewer's reciprocal emotional response.

In *Conceptual Beauty* Milner employs a number of different perspectives on how beauty facilitates art's consumption. Pertinent to my argument is Milner's use of Elaine Scarry's observations,

For Scarry, beauty's critical power derives in large part from beauty's ability to acutely hone our powers of attention and thus invoke a sense of unselfing that enables us to see the world afresh...when we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentring...beauty requires us 'to give up our imaginary position as the centre'...beauty facilitates an appreciation of and awe for the particularity of everyday phenomena and other people...^{xvii}

Milner expands on this via Scarry's insights

...beauty can induce a somatic sensation that entails not just sensory stimulation, but the stimulation to thought—to a particular kind of thought that is marked by a sense of generosity and possibility.^{xviii}

This reiterates "art as a form of thinking" and invokes imagination, a vital facility in viewing the connotations of these photographs and photographic representation.

Developments:

A complex photographic regime delivers this capacity for being present, as a practitioner and viewer, promoting careful looking and active recognition. Aesthetic strategies construct the pictorial experience, making contact with viewers treading the fine line between epic artifice and subtlety without eschewing aesthetic impact. Or in a more mundane illustration, the difficulty reminiscent of balancing portentous meaning in the midst of overarching earnestness, "the poetry reading with bearded wonders reading poems, *of few words and many pauses, full of eked-out emotions*".^{xix} The site ekes beauty however evading the 'heroic sublime' the overly significant is continually in my thoughts.

Scale: giving blankness an emotional plenitude

Often at least a metre in width and height these photographs, command attention, a state clarified by Philip Fisher in *Wonder, the Rainbow and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (1998). Wonder on phenomenon is summoned not

just by the print's size and potential for viewer immersion, but by what Fisher describes as "the all-at-once of the visual".^{xx} I suggest this is achieved in two ways, the *apparent* accessibility of the entire image through the print's physical presence, and the *perceived* openness of revelation through a reductive, refined content. Flat light allows an essential evenness of detail and accessibility across the picture. Note I use *apparent* and *perceived*, for that ready accessibility is more complex than first encountered.

Detachment masks compulsion

Elkins comments on the conventional exhibition in the white cube, a space that baldly presents art. These photographs are rarely framed but mounted without matting or edging

A picture presents itself as an unapproachable object forever detached; ...exhibiting artworks in an appreciative but disinterested way makes them that more seductive.^{xxi}

The detachment does not just arise on viewing. The manner of observation is also a remoteness, the aloof picturing comes across as a "no harm done" approach to photographing a subject, the power trip of photography coolly evaded.

Michael Fried on Andreas Gursky's work describes "the severing that is basic to his art" where the viewer and the photographer often share a common isolation to the scene before them.^{xxii} Fried notes that photojournalist Luc Delahaye's practice gives

... a strong impression of deliberate non-engagement, not, one feels, in the interests of reportorial "objectivity" so much as in the pursuit of an artistic – ultimately an ontological – ideal of allowing the picture...to come into being of its own accord.^{xxiii}

This coming into being may sound like 'Fried speak' but my experience as a photographer attests to this— the sight that shows itself (witness) and that will show itself transformed gathered up rather than 'made' (though remade-artist,) and if you remain careful in looking it will show itself. I can't overestimate this compulsion of seeing and making. Its transfixing force requires a deadpan response.

The high-key tonal range, lightness, Blondenness, no harm and silence

Summarising his treatise on White in *Chromophobia*, David Batchelor remarks that the cold light of colour refinement is “where the illusion of culture without corruption can be acted out as if it were real.”^{xxiv} While colour may be “a kind of bliss (jouissance)”, as Roland Barthes is quoted as saying in Batchelor’s treatise *Chromophobia*, white has been used to engender ecstatic pleasure while maintaining an ascetic semblance.^{xxv} Batchelor, in *Chromophobia* again, sees the fears around white that writers Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad refer to in their work. Melville noting, “in many natural objects, whiteness refiningly enhances beauty, as if imparting some special virtue of its own.”^{xxvi}

This idea that colour is cosmetic, for example, as Melville is quoted as saying, suits my compulsion of pictorially obsessing on the colour of white, which is not superficial or shallow, as colour is purported to be here. Batchelor argues that both writers were suspicious of the white hue, seeing menace:

Behind virtue lurks terror; beneath purity annihilation or death...For both writers, one of the most terrible instances of whiteness is a still, silent ‘milk-white fog’, which is ‘more blinding than the night’. And for both, in the face of such whiteness, colour appears intolerably, almost insultingly, superficial.^{xxvii}

Indeed.

The photograph’s tonal paleness present as reserve however a surfeit of romanticism or the heroic sublime necessitates balancing. The kitsch baggage snow carries is offset by the inclusion of objects outside nature, of culture, made and organised by humans.

Like Jean-Marc Bustamante says

My aim is to make the viewer become aware of his or her responsibility in what he or she is looking at.

I’ve considered these photographs through a practitioner’s ‘applied prism’, and acknowledge other conditions, social historical, apply. Rather than last or least, referring to these material factors in conclusion I hope to reinforce their centrality to abiding connections between beauty, affect, thought and meaning.

However the question remains...is this collection of a receding island of white, the heart of my practice, activism or archive? Is it alerting others to the need for change or collecting memories of what remains, for now?

ⁱ Symbol representing term or statement: a symbol in a mathematical or logical expression used to show a pattern, e.g. by representing a term in an equation or a statement in an argument

ⁱⁱ Kant speaks of transcendental aesthetic referring to the senses and experience of those senses and more importantly finding meaning in that experience of sensing the world, a sense of wonder. Speculating about what happens in a viewer's pictorial experience to create wonder and *how*, concerns me. First seeing then thinking and feeling—as if we could separate them.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wells, Liz 2011, *Land Matters*, I.B. Tauris, London and New York p.142

^{iv} Wells, Liz 2011, *Land Matters*, I.B. Tauris, London and New York p.10

^v David Wroe, Environment Correspondent, Sydney Morning Herald, Monday October 10th 2012, "Australia's ski slopes could be completely bare of natural winter snow by 2050 unless concerted action is taken against global warming, according to a government-commissioned report that paints a grim picture of the effects of climate change on alpine areas. Snow cover has already declined by more than 30 per cent since 1954. ...cover lasting more than 60 days could be reduced by up to 96 per cent by 2050.

Some distance down the mountain from the present resort is the site of the original Kosciuszko Hotel 1909-1951, whose Grand Slam Ski run was the first commercial ski slope in the Snowy Mountains area. This site has no reliable snow now.

^{vi} Rod Giblett and Juha Tolonen, Australian Wilderness Photography, Chapter 7, in *Photography and Landscape*, Intellect, Bristol, P.94

^{vii} Rod Giblett and Juha Tolonen, Australian Wilderness Photography, Chapter 7, in *Photography and Landscape*, Intellect, Bristol, P.94

^{viii} Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 2005, p. 4.

^{ix} Martha Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal & Kingston, 2007, p.284

^x Martha Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal & Kingston, 2007, p.277-8

^{xi} Martha Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal & Kingston, 2007, p.277-8

^{xii} Jacqueline Milner, *Conceptual Beauty: Perspectives on Australian Contemporary Art*, Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Sydney, 2010, p. 186.

^{xiii} Rod Giblett and Juha Tolonen, Australian Wilderness Photography, Chapter 7, in *Photography and Landscape*, Intellect, Bristol, P.93-102 Chapter is a discussion of various nature photographers including Parish.

^{xiv} Martha Langford (ed.), *Image and Imagination*, Le Mois de la Photo a Montreal 2005, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2005, Page 244-247

^{xv} Martha Langford (ed.), *Image and Imagination*, Le Mois de la Photo a Montreal 2005, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2005, Page 244

^{xvi} John Armstrong, 'Beauty and the beast', *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 10–11 2007, reviewing Alexander Nehamas' recent book, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007, p. 18.

^{xvii} Jacqueline Milner, *Conceptual Beauty: Perspectives on Australian Contemporary Art*, Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Sydney, 2010, p. 179 - 180.

^{xviii} Jacqueline Milner, *Conceptual Beauty: Perspectives on Australian Contemporary Art*, Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Sydney, 2010, p. 180.

^{xix} Frank O'Shea review, Panorama, p. 24, Canberra Times, November 26th 2011, *The Cold Eye of Heaven*, Christine Dwyer Hickey, Atlantic Books.

^{xx} Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*, 1998.

^{xxi} James Elkins, "Just Looking", in *The Object Stares Back*, 1996, p.32.

^{xxii} Michael Fried's *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2008, p. 182.

^{xxiii} Michael Fried's *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2008, p. 184.

^{xxiv} David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, Reaktion Books, London, 2000, p. 112. Batchelor notes, Barthes considered colour for photography an add-on and spoke of it in demeaning terms, "an artifice, a cosmetic". p. 53.

^{xxv} David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, Focus on Contemporary Issues (FOCI), Reaktion Books, London, eds Barrie Bullen & Peter Hamilton, 2000, p. 32.

^{xxvi} David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, Focus on Contemporary Issues (FOCI), eds Barrie Bullen & Peter Hamilton, Reaktion Books, London, 2000, p. 15.

^{xxvii} David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, Focus on Contemporary Issues (FOCI), eds Barrie Bullen & Peter Hamilton, Reaktion Books, London, 2000, p. 16.



FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Can Groundwater Speak? Fictional Voices of Non-Human Entities.
Deborah Wardle

Abstract:

The vulnerability and loss of groundwater in areas of Australia and worldwide, due to climate change is, in the main, overlooked in fiction. Critical perceptions of the trap of anthropomorphism limit fiction writers' expressions of the agency of non-human entities. The paper examines human connections with non-living 'things', particularly water, in the context of the Anthropocene. New Materialist perspectives support claims for an agential voice for groundwater. Building on the work of Deborah Bird Rose (2004 and 2014) and Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010) the paper argues that inanimate entities can be given 'voice' when we escape the confines of Western rationalist traditions, and 'hear' the expressions of those non-human entities and beings we live with and rely upon. The paper explores how fiction represents human responses to threats to water supply. Analysing examples from Australian fiction, and building from my creative practice as a fiction writer, this paper illustrates fiction writers' capacities to write activist stories that give expression to the 'agential assemblages of things' (Bennett 2010) particularly water bodies, against the backdrop of the effects of climate change.

Introduction:

Many rural Australian towns rely on underground aquifers for much of their water supply, pumped from up to several thousand metres below the surface. It's shandied with its cousin – surface water – sent into the reticulation system, from where thousands of Australians drink and wash in it. Thousands of agricultural and urban businesses rely on groundwater daily.

Vulnerability and depletion of groundwater reserves in areas of Australia due to climate change is, in the main, overlooked in fiction. Human relationships with non-human entities, in particular water, are quickly emerging as a field of interest in cultural theory. Relationships with 'things' are usefully explained by New Materialist perspectives, which claim an agential voice for 'things'. Inanimate entities can be given 'voice' when we escape the confines of Western rationalist and Cartesian traditions, to hear and make expressions of those non-human entities and beings we live with and rely upon. By occupying the blurred spaces between human and non-

human entities, fiction writing creates the potential to expand understandings of agency and resistance. How creative writers express agency of non-living ‘things’ is under investigation in this paper. Starting with my creative practice as a fiction writer and analysing examples from Australian literature, I build social, political and artistic understandings of human responses to threats to water supply.

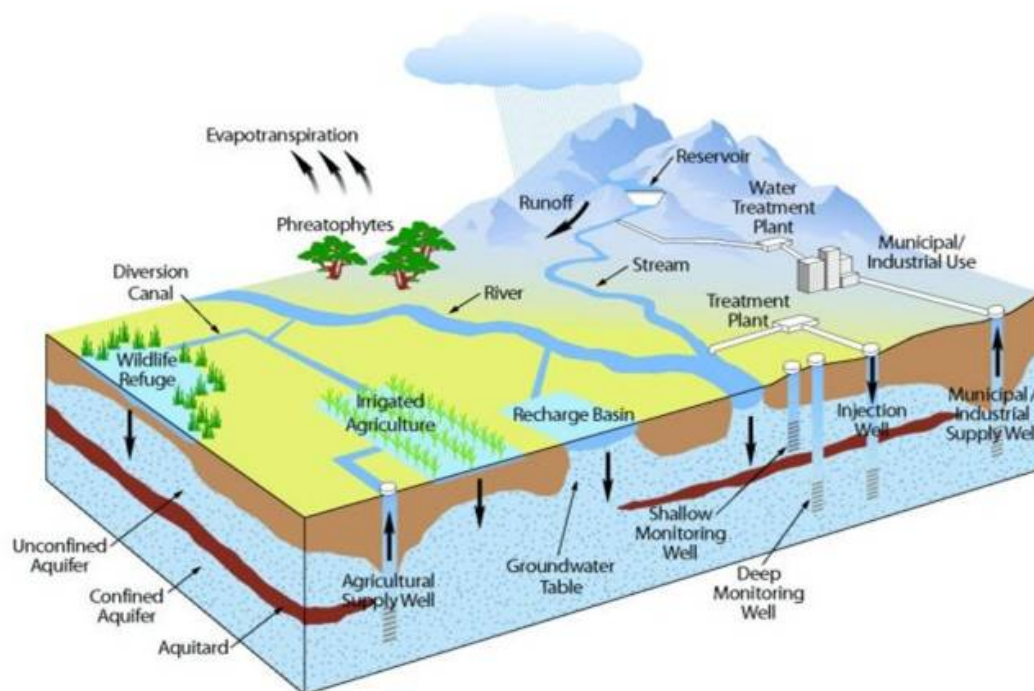
As a writer and a researcher, I begin by asking why fiction writers might give expression or voice to non-living entities, and how this “voice” might be represented in a way that acknowledges water’s agency, its responses to human interferences. I am wary of the distortions that often occur when writers attempt language that speaks for ‘others’, representing ‘other’ humans or more-than-human lives and entities from an anthropocentric perspective. Water represents a site where humans are having not so much a dialogue, rather we are *Dancing with Disaster* (2015), as Kate Rigby titles her recent book. The impacts of ignoring water are potentially devastating. By writing fiction that focuses on water scarcity as a result of climate change I join the discourse that embeds water conservation into Australian dialogues.

Fiction writers’ capacities to write activist stories against the backdrop of the effects of climate change in the context of the Anthropocene, and to write stories that give expression to the ‘agential assemblages of things’ (Bennett, 2010), are becoming known as cli-fi, or climate fiction. In this paper I introduce preliminary principles of groundwater in an Australian context. I draw together ideas from select cultural theorists and the fiction writers that inspire my creative fiction. I intersperse the paper with examples of my creative writing practice to illustrate expressions of groundwater’s voices.

Groundwater Basics

The science to groundwater, known as hydrology or hydro-geology, endeavours to measure the qualities of and understand movement of this enormous ‘resource’, for groundwater is predominantly seen as a natural resource – something for humans to

access, manage and use for our benefit. Groundwater is represented in science by simplistic line drawings, occasionally expanded to 3D illustrations.



Source: www.ecy.wa.gov

Water moves through underground aquifers and streams from depths of perhaps one metre to up to approximately fifty kilometres deep in the earth's crust. Groundwater's age, taken from when it enters its underworld domain, can vary from a day, to a month, to many thousands of years old, by which time it is usually saline, having absorbed minerals from its earthly passages. Groundwater is an essential, but less obvious player in the global water cycle. Rain soaks into the crust's surface, seeping through permeable layers of soil and rock until it reaches and is held by impermeable bedrock.

Groundwater re-appears at the surface in many ways, according to where the water table sits – these include springs, or soaks, mound springs, hanging swamps and through the base of creeks, streams and river beds. Groundwater has been dug, bored for and piped by humans for many millennium - ancient Mesopotamians, the Aztecs and Romans were famous for moving groundwater. Wells appear in many

biblical stories, and ancient indigenous cultures tell mythic stories worldwide of the creative and destructive forces of groundwater.

Influenced by Orhan Pamuk's expression of the colour red, written in the first person voice in his novel *My Name is Red* (1998) and Les Murray's poem "The Cows on Killing Day" (2007) where he writes of the slaughter of a cow in her herd as plural, excerpts of my fictional expression of groundwater follow.

Groundwater Speaks 1

"In the beginning, in ancient deep, deep time, we were voices, murmuring, stuttering, whispering. My ancients were an early part of the chorus. Footfall above followed our traces, seeking survival, through deep rift valleys, across deserts. Perhaps they heard rocks groan and growl as we passed, fathoms below. They fossicked, they found us, sipped from our springs. What happened to these humble scratchers? We knew them."

As recently as November 2015, an international group of hydro-geologists published the first global maps and estimates of ground water supplies worldwide. This international study confirmed that globally humans are using groundwater faster than aquifers are being re-charged. The study also shows that "less than six per cent of groundwater in the upper two kilometres of the Earth's landmass is renewable within a human lifetime" (<http://phys.org/news/2015-11-earth-hidden-groundwater.html> Accessed 17 March 2016). Hydrogeology is an inexact science with, as we could expect with water, many blurred edges. Only some aquifers have large and healthy re-charge zones and permeable flow paths, and are keeping up with increasing 'discharge' demands of :

1. The environments and ecosystems supported by groundwater through interactions with streams, rivers, swamps, and large deep rooted trees, and
2. The increasing human use of groundwater for crop irrigation, industry and stock & domestic use.

As drought periods increase in many Australian locations, aquifer re-charge diminishes. Human uses of groundwater are becoming more driven by profit motives, and the risks of depletion or loss of groundwater through contamination is increasing. There's potential for storytelling. By bringing science knowledge and fiction together the voices around groundwater's vulnerability may be more widely heard. Fiction enables such stories to be expressed in ways that are limited in scientific discourse. This scenario raises specific challenges for me as a fiction writer, including how to express the vulnerability of water sources due to the effects of population increases and climate change without falling into didacticism. How can fiction writers represent or give expression to non-human beings and entities, particularly groundwater's agential capacity?

Water Sites

I start to address these challenges by examining water sites, the places where humans and water meet. Water sites are, as Rose explains, at the same time cultural sites and natural sites (Rose 2014). They dispel the artificial divide, the myth of difference, between nature and culture. They are places where an eco-cultural dialectic can be merged, says Strang, in *Thinking With Water* (2013). There are infinite places where water and people meet. We may think first of taps, wells, the glasses or bottles we hold to our mouths, the oceans we sail over or plunge into, the rivers we dam and fish, the dewy, hydrogenous plants we chew, made mushy by our own liquid saliva. We soon reach our cells, the watery membranes that make us. Paradoxically, the skin that holds us watertight is itself made of watery cells. In my efforts to find language-based expressions with and around water, I draw partially on hydrological knowledge to give me words in this conversation. In addition I read non-fiction, such as Rachel Carson's iconic *Silent Spring* (1962, Re-print 2002.) and Michael Cathcart's *The Water Dreamers* (2009). More foundationally I look to philosophy, and listen for signs of water's cultural and social significance. I use an epistemological viewpoint, as proposed by Australian eco-philosopher, Freya Matthews in her article 'Thinking from Within the Calyx of Nature' (2008). Here she argues that humans can know and develop a moral ethic towards more-than-human

entities when they become engaged in synergistic relations. Such a viewpoint is not confined by Western rationalist traditions that have traditionally separated humans from the exterior objects they have tried to 'measure'. We cannot divorce ourselves from water: humans are comprised of 60% water. Our brains and hearts are over 70% water, our lungs are over 80% water. Water is our lifeblood. Why do we forget this? How might fiction open human consciousness to water, keep alive imaginations of our inter-dependence with water? Can a work of fiction remind us of our connections to water?

Groundwater Speaks 2:

"We move slowly through grinding crust's cracks and pores. We cry an array of symphonies, forms as varied as those composed by whales. There is not only one tune we sing. It does not reach human hearing, in the sound waves sense, more like perceptions. You water dowsers, diviners, probe our presence with pieces of wire, sticks, or the tingling skin of your hands. Something extrasensory. We move quietly but our magnetism escapes, for those who feel our presence, for your machines who read it. Search our imperceptible tones, go on. Find the places to prick us, to bleed us dry."

Ways of Knowing and Being Water

How we understand "things" in the age of the Anthropocene is increasingly under scrutiny. Particularly in the context of increasing human impact on planetary ecosystems and climatic patterns, a swelling tide of thinkers and writers are making a positive impact on relationships between human and more-than-human beings and entities.

Gaston Bachelard's (2006) phenomenological insights in "Poetics of Water" describe water as, 'the most receptive of the elements' invoking emotion and imagination, calling me to dream-like spaces (Cohen 2015, p. 311). New Materialist perspectives

support claims for an agential voice for groundwater. This approach opens the possibility of taking account of the meaning of matter from both scientific and cultural viewpoints. Interdisciplinary attempts to represent the material reality and literary potency of 'things' become important. Post-structuralist viewpoints, which focus attention on the effects of power relations, language, discourse, culture and values, have relevance but may, according to a New Materialist viewpoint, limit attempts to represent the material reality and literary potency of 'things'. Coole and Frost, in their text, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (2010), argue that we have perhaps, lost sight of matter itself, and its capacities, not just of being, but of acting in a material world (Coole & Frost 2010, p. 3).

As a way to understand the 'becoming' nature of matter Karen Barad states, 'ontological indeterminacy, a radical openness, an infinity of possibilities, is at the core of mattering' (Barad 2015, p. 401). Barad's 'transverse practices', provide useful foundations for artistic expressions of 'matter' previously expressed only in scientific terms. Similarly Stacie Alaimo's notion of 'Trans-corporeality', provides a place to write meaningfully with the processes of non-living matter. She places humans as 'substantially and perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments,' (Alaimo 2012, p. 476). This is a basis for writing fiction that draws upon these interconnected flows.

Human beings and more-than-human matter can be perceived on the same continuum: different, but subject to the same ways of becoming/being. This breaks the previously dominant pattern that holds humans as souled and sentient, separate from the non-human world, and inherently able to control and dominate it (Coole & Frost 2010, p. 8). Writing fiction where the non-human world has assumed agency and capacity for expression is based on these philosophical insights.

In his introduction to *Shock of Thought: Expressions after Deleuze and Guattari* (2001), Massumi discusses a theory of expression, describing expression as an event, an emergent composing force (Massumi 2001, p. xvii). Massumi extolls the perspective illuminated by Deleuze and Guattari, that we can know the world through

its expressions (Massumi 2001). It is this knowing of the material world of water that I seek through fiction writing.

Jane Bennett, in *Vibrant Matter* (Bennett 2010) also argues for the agential potency of 'things'. This perspective opens up possibilities of writing expressions of water in ways that subvert the dominant, human "I" of the Anthropocene (Bennett 2010, pp. 121-2). Water responds to human interferences – floods, droughts, shrinking aquifers, rising and lowering water tables. The question I ask as a fiction writer, which is unlike a question science could ask is - are we listening? How can we express water's responses?

If 'forces, energies and intensities' (Coole & Frost 2010, p. 13) are the language in New Materialist viewpoints, what are the affects of such perspectives on the representations or expressions a writer may give to groundwater and to the human characters who experience it in their lives? It is such self-organising properties of water that I seek to express in a creative form. Guattari's 'ethico-political articulations – *ecosophy* – between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)' gives a similar perspective to dealing with threats and transformations on planet earth and provides another avenue into writing practice (Guattari 2000, p. 28). The political and agential qualities of matter that emerge from this perspective are usefully explored through narrative fictions. Another avenue for fiction writers to utilise is the proliferation of new biological and environmental information, which opens questions of the nature of matter and human beings' relations to the slippery slide of what constitutes 'things' in the material world. It is not only the language of hydro-geology that populates my work. Chemistry teaches us that water is not simply H₂O in stasis. There are H₃ molecules and separate Hydrogen and Oxygen atoms floating, merging, becoming H₂O, splitting, and becoming H₂O again. Water is itself 'matter' constantly in the state of becoming.

So where is 'water' in Australian public dialogues? An equitable exchange, a respectful conversation that binds humans and their watery environments is, dare I

say, 'amoebic' in Australia. Government departments are drafting numerous water management plans, climate change strategies and reports about the critical role of groundwater. For example the recently released *Water for Victoria: Discussion Paper* released by the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2016) names the conundrums of increasing demands on water supply by humans in the context of climate change. Human water consumption remains the priority. In order for water's voice to be represented in public discourse, it is usefully mediated through artistic expression, and here I argue, specifically through fictional discourse. Fiction's place in public dialogue, fiction that explores and expands the potency of water sites, is potentially a dialogue where water is able to 'speak' for itself. In fiction this is achieved through use of the tools of characterisation, establishment of place and time in the narrative, and metaphor. To create a widely accessible, imaginative narrative, writers will need polyphonic voices to express the many sites, perspectives and expressions of water.

Deborah Bird Rose writes that;

In Australia, water has many voices; there is heteroglossia to the max: the butterflies, the women who dance them and the men who sing them; pelicans who arrive in the tens of thousands, and the people who sing their stories. All creatures, from frogs to birds to crayfish and brightly shining flowers sing up or announce their presence, testifying both to themselves and to the water that brought them forth. Water's entwined and multifarious voices are iridescent with presence and connectivity (Rose 2014, p. 442).

It is this polyphony that creative fiction explores. Bauer and McKinstry (1991) build on Bakhtin's view that a novel is necessarily 'double-voiced' and built on 'dialogism', and argue that this perspective is a useful strategy for feminist novelists. Voices of human and non-human characters can create a polyphony of perspectives, and highlight the importance of affect in developing an environmental politics concerned with water.

Fictional and Poetic Expressions of Water/s

Building from this theoretical base, I next look to contemporary poetry and fiction to examine how writers have addressed the place of water in Australian contexts. I take my gaze underground, to explore how writers and poets, are interacting with water. I here discuss a small selection of writers who contribute to a dialogue with water.

Elizabeth Jolley's novel, *The Well* (1986), has two sentences that link groundwater to the well, around which the story hovers.

'In the distance she saw the line of trees which, her father always said, must thrive on an underground water supply, and which marked the furthest end of what used to be her property and where the dog-leg was. Seeing the trees even though they were a long way off reassured her' (Jolley 1986, p. 146).

The well in the backyard of the rural homestead is where Jolley's protagonists, Hester and Katherine, dump the body of the ambiguous creature/human, and from where the young and vulnerable Katherine hears voices of the supposedly dead man/creature. Groundwater is presented as both a source of life and death, and given indirect expression in Jolley's narrative.

Several other contemporary Australian fiction writers explore the effects of climate change. For example, Alice Robinson's *Anchor Point* (2015), Christie Neiman's young adult novel, *As Stars Fall* (2014) and Alex Wright's *The Swan Book* (2013). The recent novel by Anson Cameron, *The Last Pulse* (2014), is a rollicking tale of man who bombs an enormous dam in Queensland, on a thinly disguised Cubbie Station, as a way to address the loss of water from the Darling River reaching South Australia. This portrayal of a water activist is Anson's response to the bluntness of government water policy and the hegemony of operators of the 'fictionalised' Cubbie Station, a mega-agricultural corporation growing cotton in semi-arid land, reliant on irrigation. Strang in *Thinking With Water* (2013) reminds readers that who controls water, controls wealth, and even democratic rights. Cameron fictionalises this idea to good effect in *The Last Pulse* (2014).

The recent Australian film *The Water Diviner* – actor, Russel Crow's directional debut - gives credence to the ancient skill of dowsing for underground waters, and shows the importance of groundwater to struggling early 20th century farmers. The book (2014) and the movie, (the book was written after the screen-play, by the film producers Andrew and Meaghan Wilson-Anastosios), focus attention on the grief of a bereaved father, and the conundrums of the ANZAC war in Turkey. Respect for the sensitivity of the water diviner in finding stories of his lost sons takes precedence. Water itself is a minor player.

Alexis Wright's two outstanding novels, *Carpentaria* (2006) and *The Swan Book* (2013) evoke mythic powers of surface waters. In *The Swan Book* (2013) The Swamp is an indigenous meeting place set in the years approaching 2088. Albeit degraded and rotting, as a consequence of old pollution and drought, it's a nesting place for swans, a gathering of human and non-human survivors. Wright's indigenous protagonist, the mute Oblivia Ethylene, moves through a future world of Australian politics and dystopian effects of environmental disaster. Wright gives characters mythic connections to oceanic, watery worlds and through them we hear the murmurings of time. Wright's work indirectly addresses water's potency, ascribing it politics and place in her writing.

Indigenous voices have spoken groundwater stories across many millennia. Australian indigenous people have a long-standing relationship with water and groundwater. Fighting for recognition of the concepts of 'cultural water' and 'cultural flow' is an important indigenous strategy, which acknowledges inherent connections to land and waterways, argues indigenous hydrologist, Bradley Moggridge (2010). Indigenous stories of groundwater vary widely, from those where tears of grief became springs, to those where the rainbow serpent brings life and nourishment to country by making groundwater accessible. Such stories are rich in dialogue with land and water.

Taking a colonialist perspective, Banjo Patterson's poem, 'Song of the Artesian Water', is set amidst effects of drought and human desperation to reach artesian

waters. Written in 1896 the poem tells of a shattering bore drill, 1,000, 3,000, 4,000 feet below. It gives dramatic descriptions of seeking water 'from the devil', 'deeper down'. Patterson knows of the conundrums and symbolism inherent in groundwater in his words:

'Sinking down, deeper down,
Oh, we're going deeper down:
And it's time they heard us knocking on the roof of Satan's dwellin';
But we'll get artesian water if we cave the roof of hell in --
Oh! we'll get artesian water deeper down.' (Patterson 1896)

Randolf Stow's novel *Tourmaline*, (First in 1963, 1991) recounts the appearance of a water diviner in the near dead, end-of-the-road township, Tourmaline. The dowser, Michael Random, takes on Christ-like characteristics as he stirs the townsfolk to life, primarily through his capacity to divine for gold, rather than water. The protagonist holds forked wire trembling in his hands but is unable to bring water to Tourmaline before he disappears back into the Australian desert. The potential of water again speaks through its absence in this novel.

I look to France's limestone country for an example of narrative fiction where groundwater 'stars'. Marcel Pagnol's novel, *The Water of the Hills* (1962) – the two-part saga of Jean de Florette and in Part 2, his daughter, Manon of the Springs – tells the tale of deception and greed for groundwater. Jean de Florette's neighbour, Ugolin, the novel's antagonist, secretly blocks their spring with concrete, with a view to forcing Jean away from the desired limestone land he'd inherited from his mother. Groundwater's value and effect has front and centre stage as Ugolin's plan unfolds. Without the spring Jean works himself to the grave, devastated by his failure to produce food on his arid plot. Through Manon's discovery of the spring and its re-emergence years later, Ugolin's deceit is revealed. Pascall describes the limestone springs in terms of their use for his human characters, as a scarce resource, with devastating impact in its absence.

Water disputes or 'water wars' are ageless and increasingly critical as water scarcity, water pollution and the impacts of population increases cross regional, state and

national borders. The silent place of water in these 'wars' means the debates or arguments, these battles for sustainable practices, for sustainable environments, are predominantly one way. Human need prevails. I seek to raise the prospect of a more two-way discussion – a dialogue with groundwater. As a writer my challenge is to learn the language, a way to write the murmurings of a silent underworld entity. Seeking new critical perspectives on voices of water, and drawing together themes from writers from diverse perspectives, contributes significantly to a new and emerging body of literature and literary and cultural theory in Australia that addresses concerns of climate change. Fictional and poetic portrayal of social responses to water scarcity in impoverished rural communities, and artistic expression or representations of water, contributes to a dialogue which addresses important environmental concerns.

Groundwater Speaks 3

“Deep, dark, slow, infinitesimally slow. We are liquid beneath earth’s surface, fluid-filled, saturating spaces, sometimes slurry. We flow through subterranean sands, gravels, between stones. Through sandstone we seep, slower than sleep, expanding life in the underworld. Deep, dark, underground dark.”

Conclusion

The endeavour to find the language of water takes me to politics as well as science and literature. It asks that water be conceived of a source and site of power. Gay Hawkins, has given consideration to water as a contested political site. In her analysis of bottled water, she states that

‘The bottling of water appears to disturb deeply held assumptions about the function of water in enabling human life: it foregrounds water’s symbolic role in delimiting a space of the political beyond economic processes. In this sense, then, the performative agency of the bottle involves its capacity to prompt political questions about the relations between water, sociality, and life’ (Hawkins 2011, pp. 2001-2).

In a similar manner my efforts to 'write water' examines how the potential of water, and the contexts in which humans bore and pump groundwater, will prompt political questions about humans relationships to water. It is not only in bottles that water has potency as a political entity.

I acknowledge, as Coetzee states, that it is 'not productive to discover the answer to the question of why one desires [to write fiction]: the answer threatens the end of desire, the end of the production of desire' (Dooley 2010, p. 9). Paradoxically, a project seeking to write with, for, around water can have no predetermined political objectives, no intent, other than perhaps to find artistic ways to connect readers with water's mythic and life-giving features. Fiction writing as a means of opening conversations with water has an underlying politics. The challenge for the writer is not to become didactic.

Fictional and poetic works, which express and expose the forces, the moods, the agency of Australian groundwater and the impacts of humans on groundwater's existence are rare. We know that many natural phenomena and non-human entities are responding to human interruptions, exploitations, invasions. The voices of water are seeking to be heard. It is a muffled and far-distant sound, difficult to capture, difficult to converse with. It is a voice with practical, soulful as well and life-sustaining tones. Writing polyphonic fiction that expresses water's agency is an important artistic dialogue, one that engages a philosophical standpoint that gives credence to material forces. Writing the voice of water in fiction engages an eco-critical standpoint and assumes a two-way dialogue with this life-sustaining element.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

A bushland view of an entrapped necessity.

Dr Bruce Fell

Between our parkland fountains and the ancient soak in the hill above my shack, the reality of irreversible Climate Change has waded in, and in so doing challenges the very nature of our nature.

While the abundant flow from our city dams' has quenched our thirst for a civilised life, ironically, they have also masked the taste of change. As I travel from the edge to the centre, from bush to town, it has become increasingly obvious how our substantial infrastructure has become a two edged sword. For standing between our ability to embrace peer reviewed ecological data is the phenomenological seduction of an efficient machine — instant communication, solar panels, shelves overflowing with produce. Surely, we have surpassed the Gods!

Much of the past two decades has involved a hosing down of climate data as scientists, researchers and activists struggled to communicate factual information in the wake of an emotional marketplace. And while there has been a trickle of lip service in recent times, core global climatic systems are now irreversibly unstable due to the current atmospheric CO₂ density of 402.26 ppm — a minimum 52.26 ppm above what is required to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed.

Within our contemporary moral ecology, notions of individualism and unfettered growth have burst their banks. Unable to hold back the flood, our ethical and moral infrastructure is increasingly muddied — clear thinking is required to address the rising ocean, the dust from the creeping desert and the legitimate cries for help, let alone the rights of the more-than-human world.

I argue that Acceptance is one raft we might cling too, and draw on the transformative language spoken in the face of mortal reality found in hospice environments, as one example of moving forward.

The science is in

The word is out

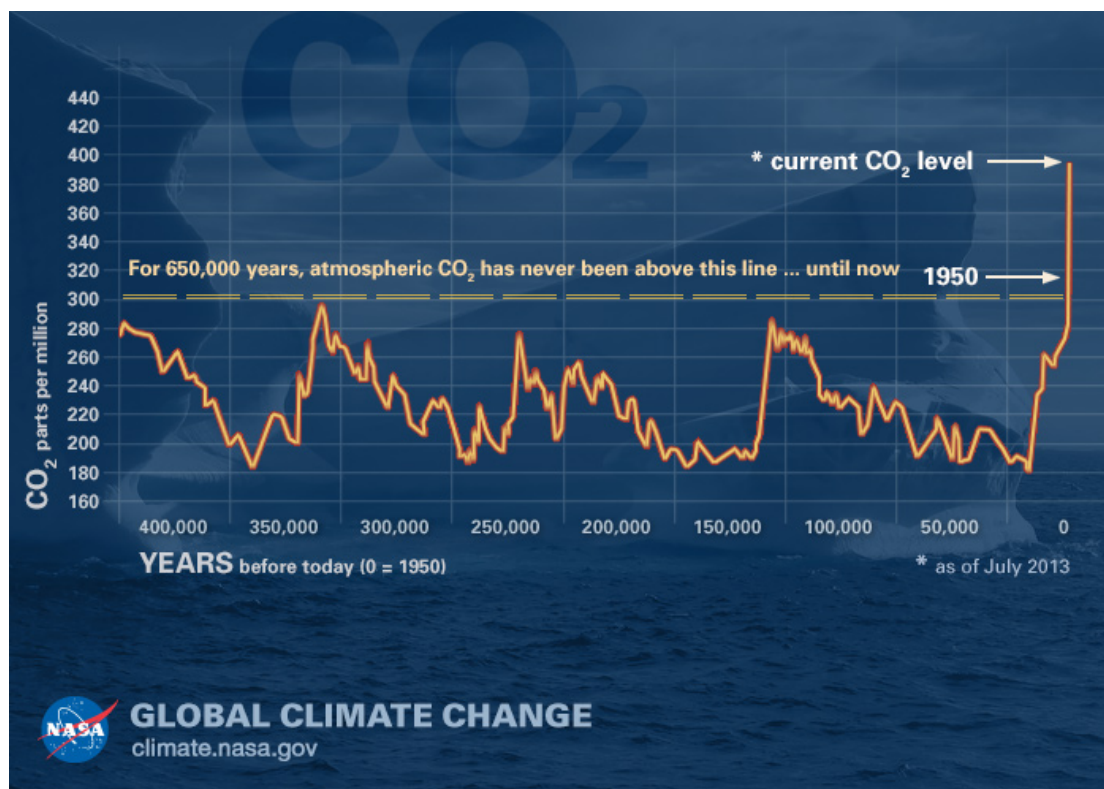
Don't matter if you whisper

No difference if you shout
The weather has changed
And with it, the land.

AS WE MOVE DEEPER into the 21st Century it has become clear that irreversible climate change is our new reality. What is not clear, is how best to adapt to ecological circumstances that are now out of our control.

When I began mapping out this paper in late March 2016, NASA had recorded the CO₂ levels in our atmosphere at 402.26 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide molecules to all other molecules in the atmosphereⁱ. As I read through my final proof, the reading has risen to 403.28 ppm.ⁱⁱ

The record high further emphasises the irreversible and increasing unstable global climatic conditions effecting present day human well-being.



Graphic: The relentless rise of carbon dioxide
http://climate.nasa.gov/climate_resources/24/

Since the beginning of human civilization our atmosphere contained about 275 ppm of CO₂. With the advent of industrialisation there has been a steady incline in atmospheric levels of CO₂ with a marked increase from the mid-1900s reaching a spike in around 1950. As climatologists James Hansen ⁱⁱⁱ points out:

If humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed and to which life on Earth is adapted, paleoclimate evidence and ongoing climate change suggest that CO₂ will need to be reduced from [current levels] to at most 350 ppm.

The above quote was published in 2008 when the atmospheric CO₂ level was around 370 ppm — a number considered concerning.

In response to the current CO₂ level, NASA released a series of comments from leading climate scientists.^{iv} Normally known for their measured statements, the excerpts highlight their concern:

It should be a psychological tripwire for everyone.

Dr. Michael Gunson: Global Change & Energy Program Manager.

CO₂ concentrations haven't been this high in millions of years. / Climate change is a threat to life on Earth and we can no longer afford to be spectators.

Dr. Erika Podest: Carbon and water cycle research scientist.

It will be a bumpy ride.

Dr. Gavin Schmidt: Climatologist and climate modeller at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

Scary scorecard: catastrophic climate change 400, humanity zero.

Dr. William Patzert: Research Oceanographer.

Over time, this number takes on greater weight.

Dr. David Crisp: Principal Investigator, Orbiting Carbon Observatory-2 satellite mission.

Reaching 400ppm is a stark reminder that the world is still not on a track to limit CO₂ emissions and therefore climate impacts.

Dr. Annmarie Eldering: Deputy Project Scientist, Orbiting NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory

These increases in atmospheric CO₂ are causing real, significant changes in the Earth system now, future increases will happen faster and will continue to be felt for centuries to come. Unless serious actions are taken immediately, we risk the next threshold being a point of no return in mankind's unintended global-scale geoengineering experiment.

Dr. Charles Miller: Researcher and Principal investigator.

Earth's climate [has] never had to deal with such a drastic change as the current increase, which is, therefore, likely to have unexpected implications for our environment.

Dr. Carmen Boening: Scientist, Climate Physics Group.

For me, as a teacher and researcher, the NASA quote I found most compelling is from Professor Laura Faye Tenenbaum:

As a college professor who lectures on climate change, I will have to find a way to look into those 70 sets of eyes that have learned all semester long to trust me and somehow explain to those students, my students – who still believe in their young minds that success mostly depends on good grades and hard work, who believe in fairness, evenhandedness and opportunity – how much we as people have altered

our environment, and that they will end up facing the consequences of our inability to act.

Laura Faye Tenenbaum: Oceanography Professor, Glendale Community College; Communications Specialist for NASA's Global Climate Change Website.

WHILE SCIENTISTS LAMENT that climate change is happening at such a rapid rate — the problem is, according to Harvard professor of psychology Daniel Gilbert,^v it is not happening fast enough to make an impression on the general public. Gilbert says that when scientists call for action, it falls on deaf ears. In terms of the general public, Gilbert argues that global warming occurs so gradually that it goes undetected by the brain.

Arguably, this is not the case for scientists in the field or activists and artists at the coal face where the phenomenological interaction with a rising ocean, ravaged landscape, species decline, coral bleaching and ongoing crop failure make a lasting impression.

I have lived in a shack in the Australian bush for the past twenty-five years. Over the past ten years in particular, the land has become dryer, the rain harder — it bounces off the hard dry land and rushes down the nearest gully: gone before you know it. Trees, older than me, trees that should out see my grandchildren, are dying.

For those who regularly immerse themselves in the land, Climate Change is no longer perceived as happening gradually. As 89 year old Peter Cundall AM, horticulturalist, conservationist, author and broadcaster argues: ^{vi}

I'm a gardener, I've watched it occur over many years, I've seen the changes that take place in plants, and of course like most people that garden or spend the time in the open, your always looking at the weather, you see what's happening, see the changes that are occurring.

It's not surprising then that 'the world's best green journalist' (Time magazine) and Gandhi Peace Award recipient, the person Foreign Policy magazine named as one of the 100 most important global thinkers, Bill McKibben, has a history of trekking through the wilderness, of observing firsthand the more-than-human world; observations resulting in the first major popular work on Climate Change, *The End of Nature* (1989) ^{vii}. Equally, Australian Humanist of the Year (2010) and Climate Change crusader, Bob Brown, ^{viii} not unlike many grassroots activists', has observed over the past decades the changing climatic, changes that the majority of our population have not noticed, have not been able to notice due to the circumstances of their lifestyle — one in which being immersed within an infrastructure that provides 24/7 access to nutrition, shelter and security has impeded an embodied awareness of ecological reality.

While no one theory can explain what underpinnings the general complacency surrounding Climate Change, Gilbert's argument has traction when applied to systems where infrastructure is able to shield inhabitants from the ecological depletion taking place at home and abroad. Gilbert lists four reasons why 'we' aren't acting quickly enough:

- 1) Global warming isn't tied to social intention or plotting.
- 2) It doesn't violate our moral intuitions.
- 3) Humans are masters at responding to immediate threats, but are novices at acting to resolve worries of the distant future.
- 4) Global warming occurs so gradually that it goes undetected by the brain.

IT'S NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM, polling undertaken in Australia by Essential Media Communications (EMC) ^{ix} in March 2016 would appear to speak counter to Gilbert's argument. EMC asked:

Do you believe that there is fairly conclusive evidence that climate change is happening and caused by human activity or do you believe that the evidence is still not in and we may just be witnessing a normal fluctuation in the earth's climate which happens from time to time? ^x

Of those polled, 63% said they believed there was fairly conclusive evidence that climate change is happening and caused by human activity — up on the previous EMC poll high of 57% in 2014.

The second EMC question asked:

As far as you know, do you think Australia is doing enough, not enough or too much to address climate change?

For 57% of the respondents, Australia is not doing enough — up from 53% in 2015.

xi

Activists and Scientists can be encouraged by the EMC poll, if for no other reason than it opens the possibility to have nuanced discussion concerning the implications of Climate Change, knowing that climate change denial is, theoretically, in the minority.

Yet research by *Isentia*,^{xii} a media monitoring and analysis services, and winner of a CODiE Award for Best Media and Information Monitoring, places a more nuanced understanding of the EMC Poll. For example, when in early 2016 the following news broke: **‘Ocean acidification is already harming the Great Barrier Reef’s growth’**(February 25)^{xiii}, followed by: **‘Great Barrier Reef in grip of worst bleaching event’** (March 29),^{xiv} the response to such News reports is counter intuitive to the EMC poll.

Drawing on data from *Isentia*, journalist Peter Hartcher^{xv} reports that in the first week of the news about the Great Barrier Reef, it ranked as the ninth most reported subject. The most reported topics for that week in Australia didn’t mention the Great Barrier Reef, rather they spoke of tax reform, the Twenty20 World Cup, the Socceroos, the Australian Building and Construction Commission and the Egyptian airline hijacking. At the time, the bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef did not make the

five most read on-line articles in The Age, the Sydney Morning Herald, The Western Australian and the Courier Mail.

It would appear, on the surface at least, there is a disconnect between Australian's believing Climate Change is happening, and our need to stay abreast of the issue.

Peter Hartcher's article resonates with my research into media coverage of Climate Change. I've been reviewing freely available News sources such as The Melbourne Age/Sydney Morning Herald, The Conversation, The Guardian, the Australian Broadcast Corporation and National Geographic News. All the news articles in my research draw on peer reviewed journals and/or credentialed environmental scientists and/or on-the-spot reporting. A sample of the articles can be found in the appendix.

The key words used by research scientists interviewed in the articles I've researched are:

Abruptness / bleak / catastrophic / dangerous / drastic / instability / irreversible / scary / serious / shocked / severe / threat / unabated / unprecedented / unstoppable and urgent.

Not unlike the NASA scientists, the scientists quoted in the articles have stepped away from speaking cautiously about the effects Climate Change.

ONE POSSIBLE WAY of gaining further insight into the conundrum between the type of data provided by the likes of EMC and *Isentia*, while taking into account Gilbert's argument that 'Climate Change is happening to slow', is to step away from talking about Climate Change for a moment and interrogate what underpins our contemporary worldview — what David Brooks names as our moral ecology: the set of norms, assumptions, beliefs, and habits of behaviour and the institutionalized set of moral demands that emerge organically.^{xvi}

Brooks argues that our contemporary moral ecology was born as WWII (World War Two) was winding down. At the time, there were legitimate concerns about economic stability and potential political unrest; that a failure to address such concerns could lead to further economic and political instability, and possibly World War (WWIII).

In an attempt to address these issues, financial emissaries from the Allied nations formed the famous Bretton Woods System,^{xvii}. They agreed that economic growth equated to human well-being. Pertinent to this discussion, at the opening of the 1944 session Henry Morgenthau, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and president of the conference read a welcoming message from President Roosevelt in which the purpose of the System was named as creating: ... a dynamic world economy in which the peoples of every nation will be able to realize their potentialities in peace and enjoy increasingly the fruits of material progress on an earth infinitely blessed with natural resources.^{xviii}

In part, a solution was sought through substantially stimulating internal Western domestic markets. To this end, the problem faced by governments and corporations was one of domestic confidence, that is, for the individual citizen to become a mass consumer, persons needed to have confidence in the future, a concept that didn't sit well with a civilization reeling from the living memory of two world wars and the Great Depression. For the world economy to grow, citizens had to learn how to go into debt to purchase non essential as well as essential commodities. We needed to learn to Buy Now and Pay Later, a mantra that is, in terms of Climate Change, prophetic. Hence, the post WWII general public needed permission to sanction and justify the idea 'that the hedonistic approach to life is a moral one, not an immoral one'.^{xix}

With the above in mind, retail analyst on the time, Victor Liebow,^{xx} proclaimed:

Our enormously productive economy ... demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and the selling of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction in commodities ... We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate.

For the majority of the seventy years since Morgenthau delivered Roosevelt's message it has seemed, in the West at least, that the Earth is infinitely blessed with natural resources. The earlier statements by NASA and other research scientists are responding to the worldview set in train at Bretton Woods (and subsequent iterations), research that is telling us that such a worldview has run its race.

Historian, George Lipsitz ^{xxi} argues that the Bretton System came to the conclusion that Western economic powers had to find ways to maintain economic growth as well as world peace. How to encourage a world to over-consume, a World that had experienced years of trauma, was a massive and nuanced undertaking. 'Commercial' television was seen as one device that could help set over-consumption in train. Lipsitz reminds us that commercial television, as we know it today, began as an agenda item, a legislated act orchestrated by the USA Government and corporations that dates back to the 1944 Bretton Woods System. The resources required to develop the fidelity needed by commercial television came out of tax concessions and government funding. To this end, Lipsitz provides a number of examples where early post WWII commercial television developed scripts directed directly at the type of over consumption that now dogs Climate Change.

In an early episode of the popular weekly soap opera *The Goldbergs* (1949 -1956), the central character, Molly (a wise mother of two, who had successfully negotiated the Great Depression and the WWII), expresses disapproval at her daughter-in-law's plan to buy a washing machine on the updated version of the Instalment Plan (one in which all forms of instalment credit disappeared).^{xxii}

Molly: 'Papa and me never bought anything unless we had the money to pay for it'.

Sammy (Molly's son): 'Listen, Ma, almost everybody in this country lives above their means and everybody enjoys it'.

Lipsitz says that Molly is expressing the concerns of a nation, while her son Sammy is expressing the hopes of government and industry. As the episode unfolds, Molly comes to learn about the new, Post-WWII, versions of the Instalment Plan. The episode finishes with Molly announcing to her family that she is going to buy two automobiles on the Instalment Plan in order to 'live above our means, the American way'.

THERE WERE OTHER ASPECTS of the 'American way' born out of Bretton Woods that would come to dominate our contemporary moral ecology. At the time of *The Goldbergs*, television was still in its infancy. Text held sway for the general public, it is here that David Brooks research adds weight to Lipsitz observations.

Brooks, like Lipsitz, argues that there was a need to put the horrors of the war behind, and as such people were ready to read literature that offered a more positive vision of life. *Peace of Mind: Satisfaction Guaranteed* by Joshua Loth Liebman (1946) encouraged a new morality based on setting aside the idea that you shouldn't repress any part of yourself. It remained on the top of the New York Times bestseller list for fifty-eight weeks. By the time it started slipping down the list, *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale (1952) was poised to climb, it sat atop the bestseller list for ninety-eight weeks: "The self-esteem movement was born" (Brooks).

Each moral climate, argues Brooks, is a collective response to the problems of the moment: 'When people shift from one moral ecology to another, they are making a trade-off in response to changing circumstances'. For Brooks, excess consumption and self-esteem found themselves in the same bed as the new economy kicked in.

OUR MORAL ECOLOGY, argues Brooks, sees seen certain virtues cultivated (such as going into debt), while certain beliefs can go too far, (such as unsustainable development) and certain important truths and moral virtues can be forgotten (such as ecological and community sustainability).

It is important to acknowledge that the initiatives coming out of Bretton Woods had many positive outcomes, all be they short lived. Brooks argues: 'it helped correct some deep social injustices. The culture of self-esteem encouraged members of oppressed groups to believe in themselves, to raise their sights and aspirations'.

Research, such as Andrew Smart's *Auto Pilot*,^{xxiii} support Brooks argument that the cumulative result of the past seventy years has seen most of us spending excess time, energy and attention climbing toward success (often equated with acquisition) and less time, energy, and attention devoted to the internal world, a world where one is more able to make contact with community and more-than-human world:

The much-vaunted work ethic is, like slavery, a systematic cultural invention that resulted from a commonly held, but mistaken, idea about human beings.

The marriage between economic growth and human well-being proposed by Bretton Woods and its subsequent iterations has run its ecological race, our potentialities for peace can no longer rely on increasingly consuming the fruits of material progress; for in the context of global population and the availability of remaining resources, the Earth is no longer infinitely blessed. Hence Victor Liebow's proclamation has contributed towards taking us above safe levels of CO₂ in our atmosphere — our success at creating a productive economy, one demanding that we make consumption our way of life has facilitated the CO₂ to rise to irreversible levels, causing unstoppable shifts in our environment. As we became ordained into the buying and selling of goods, as our spiritual ceremonies shifted towards the consumption of commodities, the psalms for the Earth fell silent — we consumed, burned up, wore out, replaced, and discarded at ever increasing rates from around 1950 onwards. As the January 2016 article in the Melbourne Age: **Humanity's impact on Earth opens Anthropocene epoch**,^{xxiv} reported:

Earth's system as a whole wasn't noticeably affected until the second half of the 20th century and beyond due to rapid human population growth, technological advances and economic growth altering the environment. Enough plastic is produced each year to wrap the planet, and enough aluminium to cover Australia, enough concrete has been produced to thinly pave the entire surface of the Earth. Half of which has been poured in the past 20 years. Half of the world's land surface has been transformed for humanity's use.

Brooks argues that we have undermined the “realist tradition that emphasized limitation and moral struggle, first by the romantic flowering of positive psychology”, transmogrifying into the competitive pressures of contemporary meritocracy.

Brooks draws on Google ngrams to point out that there has been a sharp rise in the usage of individualist words and phrases like “self” and “personalized” over the past few decades. Whereas there's been a sharp decline in words like “community,” “share,” “united,” and “common good.”

The Google ngram argument goes some way to explaining our media consumption habits, the articles we read and those we merely scan, what we purport to be interested in, as opposed to what we act upon.

Clearly, the forces that encourage our shift to positive thinking and debt driven well-being were arguably necessary and liberating in a post-WWII environment – we have now moved into excess. As the NASA data reveals, we are now out of balance.

Lipsitz, Brooks and Smart provide insight into our contemporary moral ecology, one that has, generation by generation, brought into focus a worldview that over emphasises self at the cost of community and the more-than-human world, resulting in our remove from nature to the point that we've allowed, voted for, and invested in national and global bodies that place quantity and profit ahead of quality and the biosphere — resulting in our tolerance and/or ignorance of the CO₂ concentration in the Earth's atmosphere. We are left with a moral ecology that creates an imbalance

— we are now vulnerable due to the contemporary misunderstanding of the biosphere's impact on our being-in-the-world.

ONE WAY TO ADDRESS OUR Climate Change dilemma is to consider Acceptance. The argument behind accepting climate change is not one directed towards *winning*, 'to beat Climate Change' — that is no longer possible. If we were to have cut all CO₂ emissions yesterday, the effects of the past seventy years would be felt for something in the order of the next two centuries, at a minimum. Our goal now is to accept individually and culturally what has happened, what is happening and what current research says will happen if we do nothing or what might possibly happen if we accept the data.

The challenge is substantial, the unsustainable moral ecology we find ourselves in is, for most Australian's, the *natural* order of things. It has been seventy years (three generations) since not going extensively into debt, and prudent consumption, have been a natural component within our moral ecology. Yet both research and activism tell us that a moral ecology of restraint, one counter to our contemporary *natural* understanding of being-in-the-world is what is required in order to find some resemblance of ecological equilibrium.

Significantly, in 2005, distinguished Australian Scientist Frank John Fenner, AC, CMG, MBE, FRS, FAA (1914 – 2010) oversaw a unique multidisciplinary two-day Symposium at the Australian Academy of Science titled: '*Science and Ethics: Can Homo sapiens Survive?*' Following the Symposium, with the endorsement of the organising committee, Fenner wrote to the Editor of The Canberra Times:

Drawing upon the expertise of speakers in a variety of fields including law, economics, medicine, politics, journalism, aboriginal affairs, earth sciences, religion, education, nuclear armaments, defence studies and ecology, [The Symposium, organising committee came to the following conclusion] civilization as we know it will not survive beyond a few decades unless there is a radical change in human culture,

from a society driven by the pursuit of material wealth to one focused on human well-being.

Fenner went on to say:

Although advances [in science and technology] open doors for improvements in human health, well-being, and an increasingly open society, they also increase imbalances in wealth and power, raise barriers and foster exploitations in societies, and cause major changes to ecosystems and global systems.

Excerpts from Fenner's Letter ^{xxv}

Some ten years on from Fenner's description of our contemporary moral ecology, Pope Francis wrote to the world *On Care For Our Common Home*. In the second paragraph of the Encyclical, Pope Francis described our contemporary moral ecology, using the language of his faith:

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (*Rom 8:22*). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. *Gen 2:7*); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.

Shortly before his death in November 2010 Fenner was interviewed by Cheryl Jones from THE AUSTRALIAN.^{xxvi} By then Fenner had consolidated the concerns raised at 2005 Symposium:

Climate change is just at the very beginning. But we're seeing remarkable changes in the weather already. The Aborigines showed that without science and the production of carbon dioxide and global warming, they could survive for 40,000 or

50,000 years. But the world can't. The human species is likely to go the same way as many of the species that we've seen disappear.

Homo sapiens will become extinct, perhaps within 100 years, a lot of other animals will, too. It's an irreversible situation. I think it's too late. I try not to express that because people are trying to do something, but they keep putting it off.

In the same article, Jones interviewed Fenner's colleague and long-time friend Stephen Boyden, a retired professor at the ANU and co-convenor of the Symposium:

There is deep pessimism among some ecologists, but others are more optimistic. Frank may be right, but some of us still harbour the hope that there will come about an awareness of the situation and, as a result, the revolutionary changes necessary to achieve ecological sustainability, ... I don't accept that it's necessarily too late. While there's a glimmer of hope, it's worth working to solve the problem. We have the scientific knowledge to do it but we don't have the political will.

Time will tell if Fenner, or his long time friend Stephen Boyden, are correct. My ongoing experience with the land and observations of our urbane culture helps me appreciate the challenges identified by Brooks, the 2005 Symposium, and the collective observations by a myriad researchers in the field.

As we have seen, the Climate Change challenge before us requires more than wanting the Government of the day to do something about it. I argue that we have to accept the readings from scientific instruments — the challenge being that those instruments are now speaking counter to our contemporary moral ecology, an obstacle that can't be underestimated.

One of the most poignant moments in my academic life came towards the end of the 2005 *Science and Ethics: Can Homo sapiens Survive*, symposium when Fenner stood at the podium of the Shine Dome and pleaded to the audience to do whatever is in their power to bring about change, as the Government wasn't paying attention.

At the quickly convened gatherings over coffee and cake the attendee's feverishly networked — they had the data, they had the expertise; what they didn't have was the secret ingredient, the means by which change can take place.

I walked out of the Dome realising that the answers Science has accumulated via rigorous measurement will be hard pressed to compete with a moral ecology that believes consumption is our natural way of life, a culture that has converted the buying and the selling of goods into rituals, one that seeks its spiritual satisfaction, its ego satisfaction in acquisition.

ACCEPTANCE IS CENTRAL to many faith, meditation and philosophical practices. The term "Kabbalah" means 'receive, accept'. The [first noble truth](#) of [Buddhism](#) says "All life is suffering", it speaks of accepting that [suffering](#) is a natural part of life. Kübler-Ross places acceptance as the fifth stage of dying, and *Alcoholics Anonymous* sight acceptance as central to the treatment of alcoholism. In short, acceptance means opening up and making room for what is — acceptance 'accepts' that we go through stages of denial.

Acceptance, as defined here, is the act of taking or receiving something offered — in this case scientific data. My approach to acceptance has its roots in acceptance and commitment therapy where [acceptance](#) and [mindfulness](#) strategies are used to increase psychological flexibility.

Institutionally, there are a range of examples in which corporate and Government bodies have moved somewhat towards the acceptance of Climate Change. For example, the Melbourne Botanical Gardens are now planting tree species that they envisage will be able to cope with the climatic conditions of Melbourne as climate changes becomes more pronounced.^{xxvii} Similarly, the proposed Melbourne underground rail network has planned for the entrances to its underground network to have a 0.8 meter rise above ground level in order to combat excess inundation due to future storms in an environment in which rising sea levels will add too the

height of flash flooding.^{xxviii} (Though suggestions are emerging that the entrances should be a minimum of 1.5 meters above street level).

Embracing the scientific reality of Climate Change is perhaps the greatest challenge each and everyone of us will have to face as we move through the 21st Century. How we will cope as each season becomes more extreme is an open book. How the thinking within our moral ecology erodes or flourishes is anyone's guess! Finding insight into how we might cope (are coping) as our contemporary moral ecology comes face to face with bio-ecological reality is challenging — perhaps we need look now further than our own mortality for an indication of how we will respond.

IN THE OUTSTANDING BOOK, *Life In A Hospice: Reflections on Caring for the Dying* by Ann Richardson,^{xxix} we can see the raw naked reality of acceptance; how acceptance can shift our worldview. For many of us, in the face of our personal mortality comes the realisation that many of the aspects of our enculturation are misplaced.

Richardson's work observes how those that have accepted their mortality gain a particular clarity, while those that are unable to accept their mortality, even in the face of imminent death, hold steadfast to the dictums of our contemporary moral ecology.

The lesson coming out of Richardson's work is that our ability to deny, even when faced with the immediate prospect of death (within days if not hours), is as equally insightful as those that accept their mortality.

The power and influence of our contemporary moral ecology does, for some, stay with us until our last breath. For those that are able to accept their mortality, their worldview changes dramatically. What comes through in Richardson's research is that acceptance brings about an understanding beyond the limitations of our contemporary moral ecology. Acceptance facilitates an awareness that one doesn't need to work so hard, that excess success is, in the end, superficial. That material

possessions are equally superficial compared to loved ones, community and the pursuit of emotional maturity.

Richardson's work reveals that the conversations within a discourse of acceptance moves away from talking about the material, away from concerns about superannuating and real estate, away from career and acquisition, away from overseas holidays and renovations. Such adherence to our moral ecology is seen as having taken up too much of life, to have cost us our living. It is as if acceptance in the face of mortality discovers what Fenner's symposium saw as the path we need to take if we want to develop a sustainable culture, as Fenner said, as Pope Francis intimated, we need a radical change in human culture, from a society driven by the pursuit of material wealth to one focused on human well-being.

How to sow the seeds of acceptance in the barren fields of our contemporary moral ecology is a challenge — ecological scientists, like ecological activist, artists and enlighten observers have made little to no real headway — the recent Paris Talks fell short in terms of the Science.^{xxx} The likes of Boyde have hope, Fenner had none by the time he died, their standpoints are reflected within the science and activist community.

Acceptance doesn't buy into pessimism or optimism, doom or hope, faith or denial. Acceptance accepts the science, accepts that it can be interpreted, acceptance takes one moment at a time, it has more in common with the observations of Richardson research, it accepts that some of us deny while some of us embrace.

Acceptance is located in a less material, less positivist mind set. Acceptance accepts that we might adapt, or that we might not adapt — either way:

The science is in

The word is out

Don't matter if you whisper

No difference if you shout

The weather has changed
And with it, the land.

Appendix

Eighteen samples of Headlines used in my research from March 2, 2015 through to March 29, 2016:

March 2, 2015.

Climate Change Helped Spark Syrian War, Study Says. National Geographic. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/03/150302-syria-war-climate-change-drought/>.

April 30, 2015

Adapt now to prevent poor health from climate change: report. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/adapt-now-to-prevent-poor-health-from-climate-change-report-40958>

May 28, 2015

Meet the Australian wildlife most threatened by climate change. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/meet-the-australian-wildlife-most-threatened-by-climate-change-42310>

November 3, 2015

Abrupt changes in food chains predicted as Southern Ocean acidifies fast: study. The Age. <http://www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/abrupt-changes-in-food-chains-predicted-as-southern-ocean-acidifies-fast-study-20151030-gknd2g>

November 9, 2015.

World

Bank warns climate change could add 100 million poor by 2030. The Age.

<http://www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/world-bank-warns-climate-change-could-add-100-million-poor-by-2030-20151108-gktwwa>

December 3, 2015.

Most

Kiribatian households are mulling climate migration – and that’s just the start.

The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/most-kiribatian-households-are-mulling-climate-migration-and-thats-just-the-start-51627>

December 5, 2015.

Greenland's melting ice: the scary truth.

The

Age. <http://www.theage.com.au/good-weekend/-gl297u.html>

December 17 2015.

This is what happens when the Arctic warms twice as fast as the rest of the planet. The Age. <http://www.theage.com.au/world/this-is-what-happens-when-the-arctic-warms-twice-as-fast-as-the-rest-of-the-planet-20151216-glop60>

January 5, 2016.

What scientists discovered in Greenland could be making sea-level rise yet worse. The Age. <http://www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/what-scientists-discovered-in-greenland-could-be-making-sealevel-rise-yet-worse-20160104-glzf7j#ixzz42YbHgdXj>

January 8, 2016.

Humanity's

impact on Earth opens Anthropocene epoch, scientists say. The Age.

<http://www.theage.com.au/environment/humanitys-impact-on-earth-opens-anthropocene-epoch-scientists-say-20160107-gm1nwt>

January 21 2016.

Rising global temperatures: when will climate change deniers throw in the towel. The Age. <http://www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/rising-global-temperatures-when-will-climate-change-deniers-throw-in-the-towel-20160121-gman2a>

January 21, 2016.

Paris

climate limit will see some parts of world warm by 6 degrees: Nature paper.

Sydney Morning Herald. <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/paris-climate-limit-will-see-some-parts-of-world-warm-by-6-degrees-nature-paper-20160119-gm9lgb>

February 2, 2106.

Seas are rising faster now than any time in the last 2800 years, say researchers. The Age. <http://www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/seas-are-rising-faster-now-than-any-time-in-the-last-2800-years-scientists-say-20160223-gn1s8j>

February 3, 2016.

Climate

change will remove birds' control over hatching eggs: study. The Sydney Morning Herald. <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/the-early-bird-catches-the-worm-gets-a-new-twist-with-climate-change-study-20160202-gmjjiy.html>

February 25, 2016.

Ocean

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

landSCOPE: deconstructing the myth or master narrative of the 'beautiful view' and the nature of representation in 'landscape painting'.

Bärbel Ullrich

INTRODUCTION

Where have I come from?

“My artwork has dominantly been concerned with the landscape, whether within a confined urban environment (garden), or, extended to include the wider countryside and bush lands. The landscape has been an escape, a retreat, the subject/object of and place for contemplation. From childhood, the bush has been a secret garden, a physical landscape and the landscape of the mind, which germinated and nourished my inner being.”¹

As a land-based artist I maintain that the word ‘landscape’ is not only inadequate but is laden and contaminated with historical ideologies and associations.

The landscape tradition paints a single view – this view is framed and contained. Early Australian landscapes generally depict man controlling and dominating nature. The natural world is represented as a usable ‘resource’ for economic growth to be exploited for the short-term advantage of humankind.

For the body of work for my MA Visual Arts I moved away from the traditional single ‘view’ of the landscape. I replaced the ‘scape’, denoting a view or the representation of a view, with ‘scope’ denoting a device looked at or through, an instrument for observing or showing; the extent to which it is possible to range; the opportunity for action; the sweep or reach of mental activity, observation or outlook. My work became landSCOPES² rather than landscapes to include a broader and more complex discourse about the depiction of land and our relationship to the environment. With the use of collage and mixed media, the surface became more complex and layered allowing for the interplay of ideas, images, materials and techniques.

The space in the work was also disconnected to ‘the view’ or any notion of perspective as it is an overlay and interplay of layers. The focus shifts within the

¹ Ullrich Exegesis MA Hons 2004.

² **See figure 1.**

work where the scale of the images shift from the macro to the micro, from the particular to the universal, from the natural to the cultural, from illusion to abstraction, from realism to stylisation, from denotative to symbolic. Small areas or fragments allude to a larger environment.

It became a landSCOPE which deconstructed the myth or master narrative of the 'beautiful view' and the nature of representation in 'landscape painting'. I found wherever I was in the landscape, including what appeared to be quite remote and inaccessible places, evidence of human or cultural intrusion. Images or signifiers of this intrusion became an integral part of my artworks whether subtly or quite directly. An anxiety about destruction or depletion of the land entered my work. The use of symbols also entered my work.

From my MA Hons thesis "*Landscape: Symbolism and Spirituality*" and the exhibition project "*100 Prayer Mats for Gaia*"³ I have identified 5 separate yet interconnected ideas/concepts/concerns that I will continue to extend and develop to address new areas of research and knowledge.

1. Images of landscape are not natural but cultural.

Landscape painting is a cultural construct and is laden with ideologies relating to people's/culture's perceptions of the land and their relationship to the environment. As cultural constructs rather than 'natural' images drawn from the environment they express or represent the ideologies of the time in that they are produced. Our ideas about the land and the earth are effected by our culture and by extension our religious beliefs and these in turn will influence the images and attitudes we create about the land, our place and our relationship to it.

"Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood, water and rock."⁴

³ See figure 2.

⁴ Schama. 1995. 61.

“For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock. ... Even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product.”⁵

2. The earth as a living organism – the Gaia hypothesis

I am interested in the relationship between science, ecology, spirituality and religion. The new science of Gaia is called geophysiology. It is the idea of the Earth as a kind of living organism, something able to regulate its climate and composition so as always to be comfortable for the organisms that inhabit it. The idea of Mother Earth or, as the Greeks called her, Gaia, has been widely held throughout history and has been the basis of a belief that coexists with the great religions.⁶

The concept of Gaia where the earth has a consciousness of which everything is a part of is not in conflict with Aboriginal mythology. They believe in the sacred relationships of the cycles and rhythms of nature that reflect the story of the earth’s metaphysical creation. Gaia, like the Dreaming “has continuity with the past back to the origins of life, and extends into the future as long as life persists.”⁷

For the Aborigines:

“The earth is the centre of the intelligence of creation; a symbol and memory of the primordial Dreaming; a receptacle of all seeds cosmic, metaphysical, and biological; the nurturer of all life, both visible and invisible. By listening to the songs and energies of the earth the Aborigines hear the voices of the universal dreaming.”⁸

⁵ Schama. 1995. 6-9.

⁶ Lovelock. 1995. *Gaia*. xi-xiv.

⁷ Lovelock. 1995. *Ages of Gaia*. 19.

⁸ Lawlor. 1991. 48.

3. Restoring the balance

In our materialistic culture nature is separated from human consciousness, it is inanimate and mechanical.⁹

“We have lost the roots which binds us to the earth. We have lost the sense of our dependence upon the earth and our responsibility in the maintenance of the natural order - the perpetuation of the balance. We are the caretakers of the future.”¹⁰

There is a need to see nature “as an interlocking whole”.¹¹

Suzi Gablik, also believes that we need a new world view to restore balance, a new idea of reality that expresses the notion of interconnectedness and an understanding of the organic and unified character of the universe. Gablik believes that a world view in this sense is not something found ‘out there’, but is something that individuals construct and create out of belief systems.¹²

The belief system embodied through technology and science has increased the mentality of domination over the world and the belief in unlimited progress and power.¹³ Gablik believes that the issue of what beliefs we hold is crucial; a new belief system, if accepted by enough people, will have the effect of stabilising the relations of dominance. She believes that our present values of growth, power and domination are not sustainable and we need a new world view that would support the creation of a future different from our present situation.¹⁴

“What we are learning is that for every situation in our lives, there is a thought pattern that both precedes and maintains it, so that our consistent thinking patterns create our experience. By changing our thinking, we can also change our experience. People give legitimacy to all social institutions, no matter how powerful

⁹ Sheldrake. 1994. 74.

¹⁰ Lyndall Milani in Voight. 1996. 209.

¹¹ Collins. 1995. 213.

¹² 1993. 22-23.

¹³ Sheldrake. 1994. 60.

¹⁴ Gablik. 1993. 23-24.

those institutions seem to be, and they also have the power to withdraw legitimacy.”

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Our belief and dependence on external material and economic values is beginning to be questioned and we are now experiencing a shift in our collective unconscious towards a renewed spiritualism and a fellowship with the earth. This is significant in a time of global environmental crisis, climate change and loss of biodiversity that threatens our existence.

Tim Flannery also maintains that it is not so much our technology, but what we believe, that will determine our fate.¹⁶

4. The idea of the need of a new mythology

A new myth to heal the planet and be inclusive of all nations and all living things – the interconnection of life on earth. Joseph Campbell believes that the image of the earth, as seen from space, is a significant symbol that signifies the unity of existence on this planet and the balance of chaos and order. He believes that this image will be the symbol for the new mythology to come.¹⁷

The notion of Gaia is intriguing as it begins to fuse scientific empiricism and positivism with mythology and mysticism. It is a new way of looking at humans and their relationship to the land and nature on a global perspective.

5. My own visual interpretation of the environment as informed by research

I am searching for new ways of looking at and visually interpreting the Australian natural environment that breaks with European pictorial conventions – such as ‘framing’ a landscape, controlling a view, power over nature. The search is for a spiritual connection with space and place – spiritual belonging.

¹⁵ Gablik. 1993. 23.

¹⁶ 2010. Xviii.

¹⁷ Flowers. 1988. 32-33.

The body of work **Sacred Land**¹⁸ completed and exhibited in 2010 is the cornerstone of the direction in which I hope to be heading.

My work will continue to explore my spiritual connection with the land and the environment. The unity of existence and the interconnectedness of life on the planet is the basis of my philosophy which points to and reflects a necessary ideological and spiritual shift that may be necessary for our survival.

My work will continue to focus on the human consciousness level – myth, symbols, cosmology and philosophy. I will continue to make representations of nature/land that challenge or reframe the European landscape tradition and its pictorial conventions. My work will also aim to address the spiritual, mythical and symbolic to reflect my personal philosophy that nature/land is sacred and that we are part of it not separate from it.

The 3 predominant questions for my PhD research are:

How can representations of Australian landscape challenge or reframe the European landscape tradition and its pictorial conventions?

How can visual images of Australian landscape address the spiritual, mythical and symbolic?

Can images of the Australian landscape reflect a particular place as well as universal characteristics?

Abstract

My proposed area of research is the representation of land within a specific area or place to which I have a deep sense of connection or belonging.¹⁹ I aim to depict the landscape as a manifestation of the creative force and as such imbue it with a sense of spirituality. My work intends to reflect the need for a spiritual shift in our attitude to

¹⁸ **See figures 3 & 4.**

¹⁹ **See figure 5.**

the environment as the unity of existence and the interconnectedness of life on the planet is the basis of my philosophy.

I will focus on the microcosm where images reflect the particularities of place but also have universal qualities. As such, an important element of my work will be the use of symbolism with emphasis on particular archetypal symbols drawn from both Christian and Pre or non Christian mythologies. The predominant symbol is the *axis mundi*, the symbolism of the centre with other symbols such as the elements of earth, fire, water and air to be used in my art making.

My work will explore and a new personal visual language that is in homage to Mother Earth, the Great Goddess and the Gaia principle. It will contribute to the current changes and 'shift' in representations of land from the past ideologies and cultural attitudes imbedded in the Australian landscape 'tradition'. This also means identifying with Aboriginal culture and spirituality, acknowledging past histories and moving forward in finding a personal sense of belonging to place and a new personal language of representing land that is not Aboriginal but also breaks with Western tradition.

The aim of the work is to show the primacy of land as sacred, the interconnection of all life on the planet and the evolution of our imagination towards inwardness and connection with a greater whole – a move away from our outward anthropocentric view and intense preoccupation with the human towards a focus on the world and environment where the earth is seen as the primary symbol of 'God' or Goddess' – the divinity, the transcendent.²⁰

The methodology includes the development of imagery and concepts by art practice and research, experimentation with materials and techniques. I wish to imbue the work with mysticism and a sense of the fragility of our eco system and the delicacy and complexity of the Australian landscape.

²⁰ The natural world is the primal place where human beings experienced the transcendent for many centuries before the advent of Christianity. Collins. 1995. 218.

I intend to use the artist's book concept utilising mixed media and printmaking on paper to create/develop a body of work/exhibition informed by research of the above and re presented from a personal interpretation of images of land in my environment.

Research AIMS

- I wish to research ancient archetypal symbols from Western culture and see how they can be 'found' in the environment. I wish to represent these symbols embedded/infused in or with reference to images of the Australian bush (a particular site) thus creating a universal meaning/content.
- To reflect some kind of relationship or understanding of my 'belonging' to this place rather than as a detached observer.
- To reflect in my work the sense of nature as alive, sacred and divine rather than as a mechanical, inanimate system that needs to be controlled and exploited for economic gain and profit.
- Through the creation of artworks I wish to create a deeper understanding of the mythical and archetypal underpinnings of spiritual life and my/our relation, spiritual belonging to the land.

Significance of the Study

The evolving tradition of landscape painting in Australia, and the body of critical writings about landscape, enriches our vocabulary of looking at the landscape and also contributes to changes in the way we look at the landscape. I would hope that my body of work, both written and visual, will contribute to and extend the discourse about Australian land based art, Australian identity, sense of place and belonging with a renewed spiritual emphasis.

Set in the climate of ecological crisis and global warming²¹ my work aims to emphasise a new and needed focus of cultural and philosophical thinking relating to our relationship and interaction with the environment.

²¹ Of which some people and politicians are in denial of.

Central to my philosophical approach to representing land is the primacy of the world as sacred, the interconnection of all life on the planet and the evolution of our imagination towards inwardness and connection with a greater whole – a move away from our outward anthropocentric view and intense preoccupation with the human towards a focus on the world and environment where the earth is seen as the primary symbol of ‘God’ or Goddess’ – the divinity, the transcendent.

On Spirituality

Central to my research are notions of ‘spirituality’, the representation of spirituality in art and the idea of the sacredness of land. The sacred is a basic category of human experience and the human cannot be separated from the non human and the archetypal – human nature can only know and fulfil itself in relationship to a transcendent other.²²

The concept of ‘spirituality’ is intangible and open to debate but in the context of contemporary Australian art it conveys more than formal religious faith or belief.²³ The spiritual dimension in art can be expressed in a number of ways and covers a wide spectrum of religious alliances and belief systems. It arises from individual spiritual awareness derived from personal insights and experiences which may include profound life changes, the universal quest to find out who we are in the cosmos, how we think about ourselves and our place on this earth, making sense of the world and the search for enlightenment. Spirituality is the basis of ‘seeing and being’ and is beyond the physical. It can be expressed in a number of ways ranging from overt mythic and religious symbolism, intangible and metaphysical resonances which arise within the work, ethereal modes of abstraction, images of transcendence and the resurgence of the recognition of ‘primal source’. Spiritual art is finally about “essence, about the intangible – and the sacred”.²⁴

²² Tacey. 1995. 1-4.

²³ Drury and Voight. 1996. 7.

²⁴ Drury and Voight. 1996. 8-13.

Magon describes spirituality as referring to:

“a looking beyond or deeply within the self, this world and the other, sacred and mundane, heaven and earth, our relationship to the cosmos, the visible and invisible, grandeur and transcendence through healing, suffering and death and our relationship to the unknown. The spiritual refers to a dramatic shift in experience in undoing and remaking ourselves.”²⁵

In much of the literature I am using there is a strong shared opinion that we are facing a great ecological and spiritual crisis where balance and harmony have been disrupted by human production and reproduction and that we should become ecologically aware and conscious of our relationship to the natural world.²⁶ The official ideology of the modern world is the conquest of nature for the sake of human progress and that we live in a desacralised world.²⁷ The worship of earth as source of creative and spiritual energy is lost in our present global culture.²⁸

“Only by remaking and restoring the sacred can we achieve individual and collective health, since the sacred stands at the very heart of humanity, and if it is repressed or ignored humanity must suffer.”²⁹

I agree with Campbell when he says Gimbutas’ work is relevant to the need in our time for “a general transformation of consciousness” necessary for us on this planet to live in harmony and peace with the creative energies of nature.³⁰

How do we extend our imagination and belief system to discover a common consciousness and essence that relates to the earth as a living organism that we are a part of not separate or superior to? This is where the art making becomes an important process.

²⁵ 1988. 38.

²⁶ Collins, Campbell, Gablik, Tacey, Magon, Sheldrake, Lawler, Merchant.

²⁷ Sheldrake. 1994. 10.

²⁸ Lawler. 1991. 57.

²⁹ Tacey. 1995. 1-4.

³⁰ Forward by Joseph Campbell in Gimbutas. 1989. xiv.

Aboriginal Spirituality

Aboriginal spirituality is widely believed to be a great gift to our culture as it is a different way of seeing nature and the land.³¹ David Tacey discusses an Australian spirituality that emerges as one becomes attuned to Aboriginality and the sacred bond with the land.³² Stockton also believes that there is a significant change working beneath the surface – “a powerful spiritual surge” where new concerns and values have been aroused including a greater sensitivity to the environment.³³ Life for Aboriginal people is sacred, and thus reverence for life is a fundamental characteristic of their spirituality which is extended to the earth, the original mother of all life and a living, conscious being in and of herself.³⁴

The Aboriginal people of this continent learnt to survive by entering into a caring partnership with the land which became a whole way of life, a ‘spirituality’.³⁵

Aboriginal spirituality is the belief and feeling within yourself that allows you to become a part of the whole natural environment around you. Birth, life and death are all part of it, and you welcome each. The belief that all objects are living and share the same soul or spirit that Aboriginals share is part of this spirituality. On death this soul or spirit returns to the Dreamtime from where it came. The Dreamtime is all around and still exists today, thus the land becomes a place of worship.³⁶

“The land for Aboriginals is the cornerstone of traditional religion³⁷, it is the physical link between living humans and all that is unseen and eternal³⁸ in their spiritual world. ...The land is not just a surface over which people walk, hunt and live out their lives. It is not the inanimate, unresponsive stage for the action play of separate individuals who are superior to it in being animate, sentient, intelligent, self-conscious, as the European instinctively views the land. Aborigines are confirmed by

³¹ Tacey, Stockton, Lawler

³² 38-39.

³³ Stockton. 1995. 3.

³⁴ Stockton. 1995. 78.

³⁵ Stockton. 1995. 18.

³⁶ Stockton. 1995. 83.

³⁷ I would argue that Aboriginal spirituality is broader and far more encompassing than the dogmatic and restrictive field of ‘religion’ as such.

³⁸ The idea of the Dreaming can be translated as ‘originating from eternity’ and the verb ‘to dream’ draws from the idea of seeing eternal things. Stockton. 1995. 52.

their religion with the conviction that the land, together with its people, flora and fauna, and everything else it contains, is a corporate organic whole, at least as animate, sentient, intelligent and self-conscious as any of its organic parts. The Aborigine feels part of this whole, enmeshed with the land in a real dynamic identity. ...The land is a sacred place, the locus of creative acts of the Dreaming, which persist into the present.”³⁹

“An expression of this oneness is the readiness to make physical contact with the earth, as a mystical experience and a deliberate harmonising with the environment.”⁴⁰

Land is dynamic and creative for Aboriginal people. It is not bound by geographical limitations it is a living place or entity, the spirit from which Aboriginal existence comes.⁴¹ Aboriginal people say that “I am the Land”. They describe features of the land as parts of one’s body – the land is their body. This is different to the way a European speaks of identity with the land, they may have affection or emotional response to it but they see themselves as ‘a discrete individual, separate from the terrain over which one walks’.⁴²

It is in this sense that European people (and other migrants to this country) cannot have the same sense of spiritual belonging as Aboriginal people. But it does mean that they cannot feel a sense of spiritual belonging? How then can this be manifest?

Approaches to creating the new body of work

Sullivan maintains that new forms of knowledge can be constructed within visual arts practice and studio based inquiry that is not only new but has the capacity to

³⁹ Stockton. 1995. 56. The land is like the bible, it has a story to tell and that story calls for a response – the ethical system and the law. 57-58.

⁴⁰ Stockton. 1995. 86.

⁴¹ Stockton. 1995. 82.

⁴² Stockton. 1995. 85.

'transform human understanding'.⁴³ He maintains that Visual Arts can be best located as a form of **individual, social and critical inquiry**. Artworks become an interpretive space where we construct meanings through the process and the purpose is to achieve understanding rather than explanation.⁴⁴ The **imagination** and **intellect** play an important role in constructing knowledge that is not only new but has the capacity to transform human understanding.⁴⁵ Sullivan says that "Artworks are an important source of new knowledge, personal meaning, and cultural experience."⁴⁶ For Sullivan the making of art is a quest for knowledge and understanding. He believes that making art has the capacity to transform us, and thereby change the world around us.⁴⁷ This is supported by Barrett and Bolt who argue that art practice in itself is research,⁴⁸ and Elkins who believes that:

"Art should be recognised as a source of one of the highest levels of meaning. ... studio art is a way of coming to understand ourselves and the worlds in which we live – an enhanced way of being and possibly enjoying – that is central to human intelligence, different from and complementary to science and the scientific which are incapable of doing the things that art does just as art is incapable of being scientific in any deep sense."⁴⁹

Visual thinking and 'material thinking' are important processes in the creation of artworks. The emphasis is on breakthrough, originality and new knowledge. Bolt writes that "the materials and processes of production have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist's creative intelligence."⁵⁰

⁴³ 2005. xi.

⁴⁴ 2005. 49.

⁴⁵ Sullivan. 2005. xi.

⁴⁶ 2005. 139.

⁴⁷ 2005. 223.

⁴⁸ 2010. 34.

⁴⁹ Elkins. 2014. 122.

⁵⁰ Barrett and Bolt. 2010. 30.

As the **experience** of the artist is the core element in the creation of new knowledge⁵¹ and personal experience is a way of **understanding** aspects of reality,⁵² I will undergo many field trips into the bush environment as a strategy to support my studio based practice.

Intuition, understanding and the visualisation of ideas are also related to experience, understanding and the ability to see things differently. **‘Seeing’ and ‘sensing’** are important in representing experience as the basis for compiling thematic patterns of evidence from which meaning is made vivid.⁵³

It is thus through the process of visual arts practice using ‘seeing’, ‘sensing’, ‘lived experience’, ‘subjectivity’ and ‘memory’ that will form the basis of my methodology to create a context for meanings, new knowledge and new understanding. And as Sullivan says “you are never quite sure of the outcome.”⁵⁴ This is supported by Barrett and Bolt who claim that the outcomes of creative practice cannot be pre-determined.⁵⁵ Elkins also states that an artist doesn’t know why they are doing something until after they have done it.⁵⁶

Methods

Drawing and printmaking become the dominant techniques/methods for producing images and the building up of layers. Visual metaphors are produced that create and transform meaning.

- **Site specific works.** The images for my work come from our property under Mt Bogong next to the Alpine national park. I endeavour to interact with the environment and use material from the environment. The methodology I use

⁵¹ Sullivan. 2005. 191.

⁵² Barrett and Bolt. 2010. 129

⁵³ Sullivan. 2005. 60.

⁵⁴ 2005. xii.

⁵⁵ 2010. 186.

⁵⁶ 2014. 236.

is “wandering and wondering”⁵⁷, collecting materials and making drawings, rubbings and shadow drawings in the environment,⁵⁸ maintain a sketchbook and journal(s). I will draw on this experience of working from the environment and in the environment as a key strategy for creating images and symbols in my work.

- The use of **archetypal symbols** in my work including the Axis Mundi. The axis mundi is not only a symbol but for me is a significant way of working as an artist. I interact with the environment and work from intuition – letting things happen and materialise from within/the centre. Other symbols include the shadow, the circle, stones, the spiral, the mandala and Jungian and Goddess symbolism.
- The structure of my work will be in the form of **Artists books**. These may not necessarily be bound but may be loose pages, also not necessarily displayed on the walls but in stacks with some form of containment such as cloth or a box. They require the physical interaction of the viewer on an intimate and personal level as they can only be viewed by one person at a time. They can also utilise the sense of touch and smell to evoke a response/reaction from the viewer. A work on the wall can be viewed by many people and it is unlikely that you are permitted to touch.
- The use of **text** in my work will be a strategy to locate different layers of meaning and interpretation in the work.
- The use of **palimpsest** as a process/methodology of making marks, drawing, erasing the marks, leaving traces of earlier marks, layering colour, removing colour is an important strategy in my work.

Nature is constantly in a state of change, there may be elements of permanence, yet the layers rhythms and movements of nature reflect cyclic developments. The idea of

⁵⁷ John Wolseley

⁵⁸ Peter Sharp

‘palimpsest’ encompasses the notion of time, growth and decay in nature as well as recording the process and memory of the making of the artwork.⁵⁹

Like Wolseley, I also like to think that the bits of paper with marks on them are directly connected to the physical world where they were made.⁶⁰

The resulting imagery is a matrix built up with complex layers which reflects the transience, flux and chaos of nature. Order (cosmos and permanence) is created by structuring the format with ‘horizon’ lines, delineated areas and the overlay of symbolic shapes.

- **The use of cloth and stitching.** The symbolism of binding and knotting is related to mending and healing and also has magical connotations. Binding and knotting also have universal spiritual connotations. In many countries the ‘thread of life’ symbolises human destiny. The goddesses of fate spin the thread of human life. The cosmos itself is also conceived as a tissue, as a vast ‘web’. In the Cosmos as well as in human life, everything is connected with everything else in an invisible web. Thus the tread or the cord in mythology symbolises the cosmic principle that unites all things and also the support, the power and the divine law that hold the universe together.⁶¹
- Through **photographic documentation** I have collected many images of the land that explore the essence of the place, its form, structure and surface appearance. The photos I take of the land do not represent a traditional ‘view’ of the land but aspects of the rhythms, energy and movements in the environment. The details explore the microcosm, fractal patterns, textures, colours and shapes, especially the local characteristics of specific places. This information along with the drawings/experiments produced on site, is taken back into the studio to produce and refine the works.

Artists Books

⁵⁹ John Wolseley has a fascination with sand dunes where the image of the desert becomes a palimpsest. “Sand is a metaphor for the palimpsest of life, concealing earlier layers of existence yet preserving their traces” Grishin. 1998. 79-86.

⁶⁰ Gishin. 1998. 95.

⁶¹ Eliade. 1991. 114.115. 116. 117.

As a land-based artist I endeavour to use the artist book as a 'discipline' in which to situate my work in relation to contemporary practice as it is inventive⁶² and part of a "diverse, tactile area of contemporary printmaking."⁶³

Although it is difficult to define an artist book because of the variability in the use and combination of papers and materials, display, unorthodox shape and fragility, a general definition could be "An artists book is a book made by an artist, and is meant as an artwork."⁶⁴ They also can be categorised as an independent art form and part of a "living, changing discipline" where a more specific definition would appear to be impossible.⁶⁵

The materiality and conceptuality is what intrigues and interests me about artists books. The artist book can explore the interplay of content and form⁶⁶ where, as a 'book', the role of text can be made integral to the work and the use of pages and sequences are used instead of a single sweep of an image. The use of text means that the artist can work in a 'poetic' way.

The artist becomes a storyteller sequencing images, text and ideas together or it may have no sequential narrative but may be thematically connected. Each page has the potential of generating different spatial formats, arrangements and the capturing of ideas. The reader/viewer needs to use their imagination. It is a book where you can go backwards and forwards and spend as much time as you wish with each image which remains open to various interpretations.

The importance of the artists book is the visual thinking, a means to convey ideas rather than just being about the craft of binding. It is about how to make a book

⁶² This is an alternative format to the traditional 'landscape' art format of painting, printmaking and drawing and working with prescribed images and media. **Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.**

⁶³ Selenitsch. 2008. 3.

⁶⁴ Selenitsch. 2008.5.

⁶⁵ Selenitsch. 2008. 5.

⁶⁶ Selenitsch. 2008. 5.

respond to a concept. Artists books are an ever-expanding field with a wide range of approaches.⁶⁷ It is also a means of finding new and different ways to work for myself as an artist.

In **Conclusion**, the artists book format, whether it be bound or loose pages, in series or displayed on the wall, is a strategy that can be used as a **landSCOPE** to investigate new ways of representing the Australian landscape and a vehicle to carry and transmit the complex ideas that are imbedded in the cultural, physical and personal notion of 'land' and 'place'.

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⁶⁷ Selenitsch. 2008. 11.

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List of Figures



Figure 1.

Bärbel Ullrich

***Intrusions* from the *LandSCOPE* series**

1993-1995. Mixed media on canvas.

200cmx100cm



Figure 2.

Bärbel Ullrich

#1 & #95

**From *100 Prayer Mats For Gaia*. 1999-
2001**

Mixed media on canvas. 78cm x 48cm.



Figure 3 & 4.

Bärbel Ullrich

From the series *Sacred Land 1-20*.

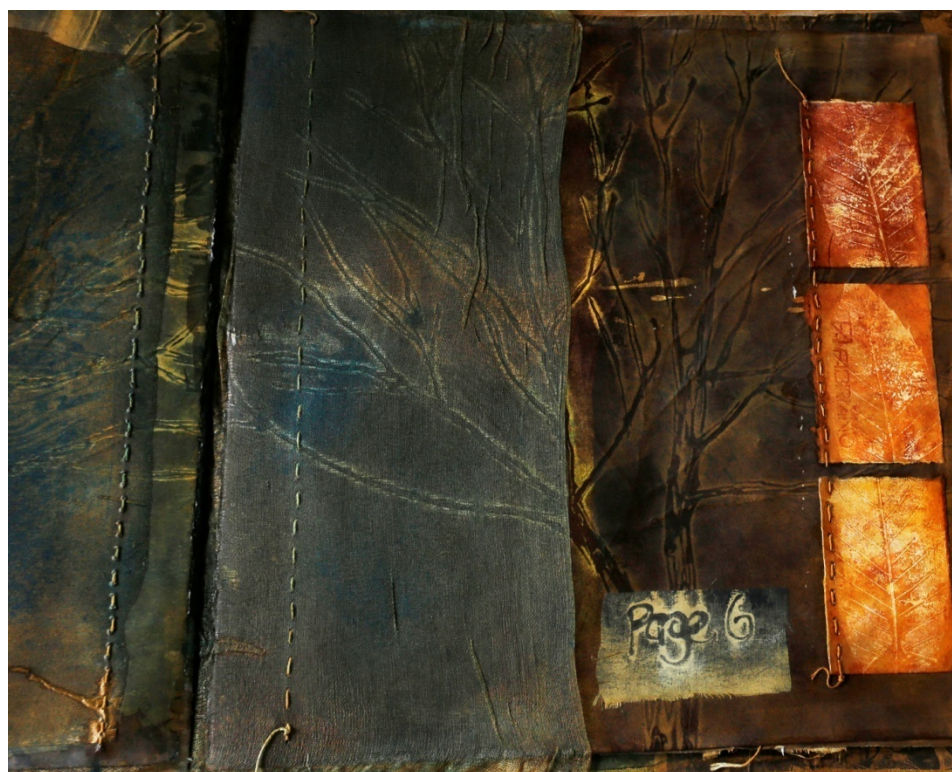
2009.

Mixed Media on paper. 77cm x 56cm.



Figure 5. Photograph Bärbel Ullrich





Figures 6, 7 & 8.

Bärbel Ullrich

From the Book of the Sacred Moon Tree. 2015.

Mixed Media on paper. 55cm x 55cm x variable.





Figures 9, 10 & 11.

Bärbel Ullrich

From the Book of Ferns. 2015.

Mixed Media on paper. 55cm x 55cm x variable.

A H u o n D i a l o g u e

Re-presentations of a Truncated River

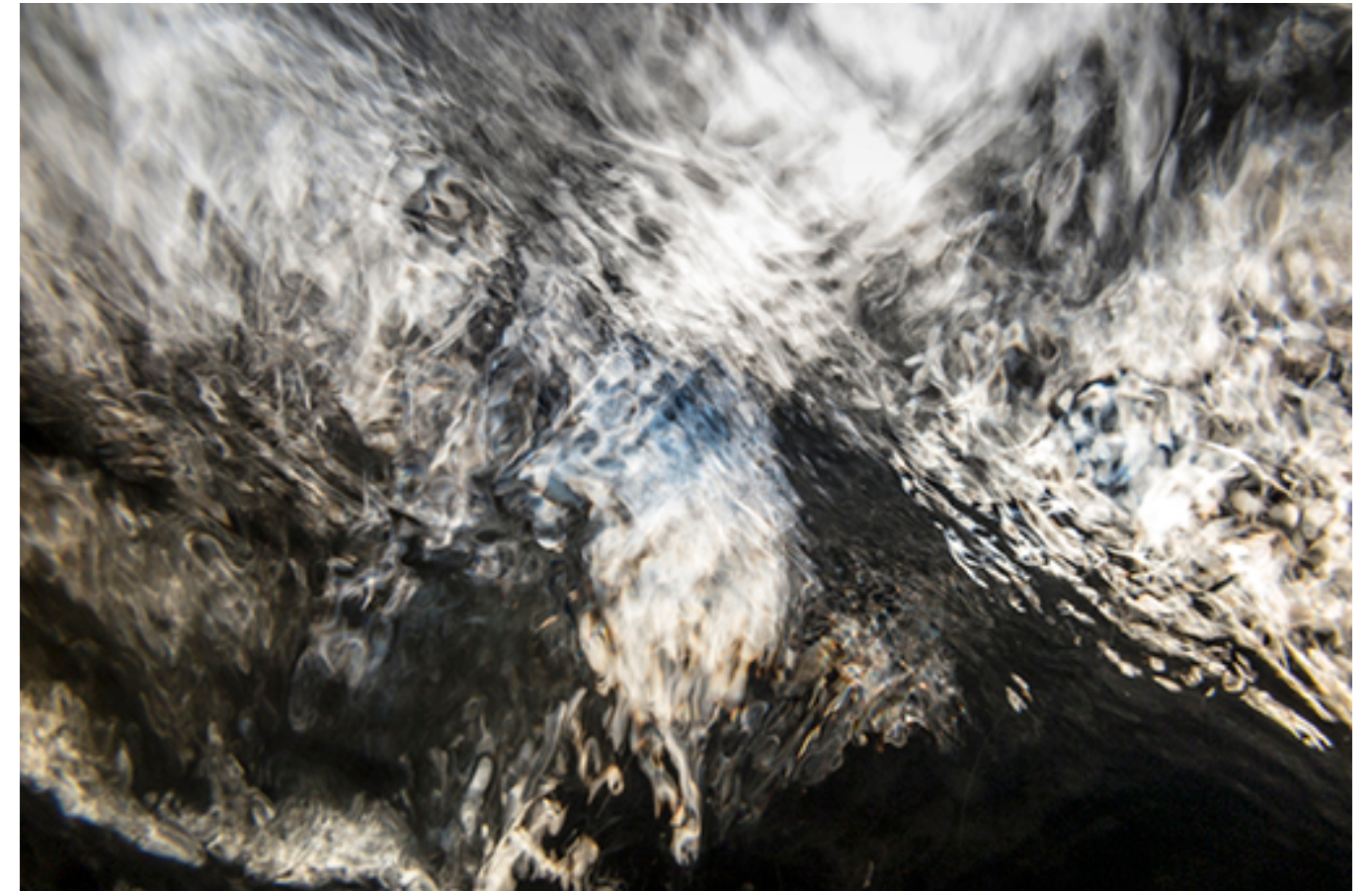
D a v i d R . B l ü h d o r n

Tasmanian College of the Arts
University of Tasmania
david.bluhdorn@utas.edu.au

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The experience of the Other as a void or an absence is a prelude to invasion and instrumentalization, whereas the experience of the Other as a presence is the prelude to dialogue.

Val Plumwood (1998: 681)¹



¹ Plumwood V 1998 'Wilderness Skepticism and Wilderness Dualism', pp. 652-690, in: Callicott, JB & Nelson P (eds.) *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, University of Georgia Press, Athens GA.

It's dark,
deep down in the gorge
where the Huon River runs.
Where I took this image,
traced in light.

Where the water swirls and darts,
forms and disperses,
creating and reconfiguring
the messages it carries
for those (things) that can sense them.

It's here I've come to listen
to the Otherness of place,
to perceive if I can,
and re-present
the stories,
the poetry,
the dialogue,
of a river excised from its headwaters.



The air over the river smells old:
not miasmic or putrid,
just... old.

Like it needs a good flooding
(like *that's* likely to happen soon).
That, of course, is my own interpretation.

I know that smell.
It's a river-bottom smell,
like you get in the Gordon River:
downstream of its dam,
when the power station is off,
and no discharge is allowed to escape;
to flow to the sea;
to be wasted.



You'd think the Huon would be over it by now.

It's been more than 40 years, after all.

The Scotts Peak dam has captured

all of the Huon's upstream flow:

appropriated it; diverted it;

purloined it; stolen it:

aqua nullius.

We did that, you and I,

in our desire for eternal energy:

for the hydropower we found in the water,

and coveted.

Only a small trickle escapes the dam:

leakage by another name;

an uncontrolled, wild incontinence.

Measured at a purposefully built V-notch weir,

as if turning it into data

could somehow return it

to the commodifying paradigm

from which it is fleeing.



You can see the joy, the life dancing
within the surface-tensioned constraint
of the coherent outflow.

Green ribbons of algae proclaim a return to vibrant life
from the realm of rusty iron
and cloud-grey concrete.

Life begun with the subversion of a paradigm,
splattered in expressive and enthusiastic greenness.

Gathering itself
for the task of river regeneration.

If only there were more flow,
to supplement this vagrant incontinence.
Perhaps even an environmentally relevant discharge,
deliberately (and regularly) released.

To give substance
to the paper-thin simulacrum
termed 'renewable energy'.

For the joy of respectfully giving back
some of the water we have stolen:
to flow to the sea;
to be 'wasted'.



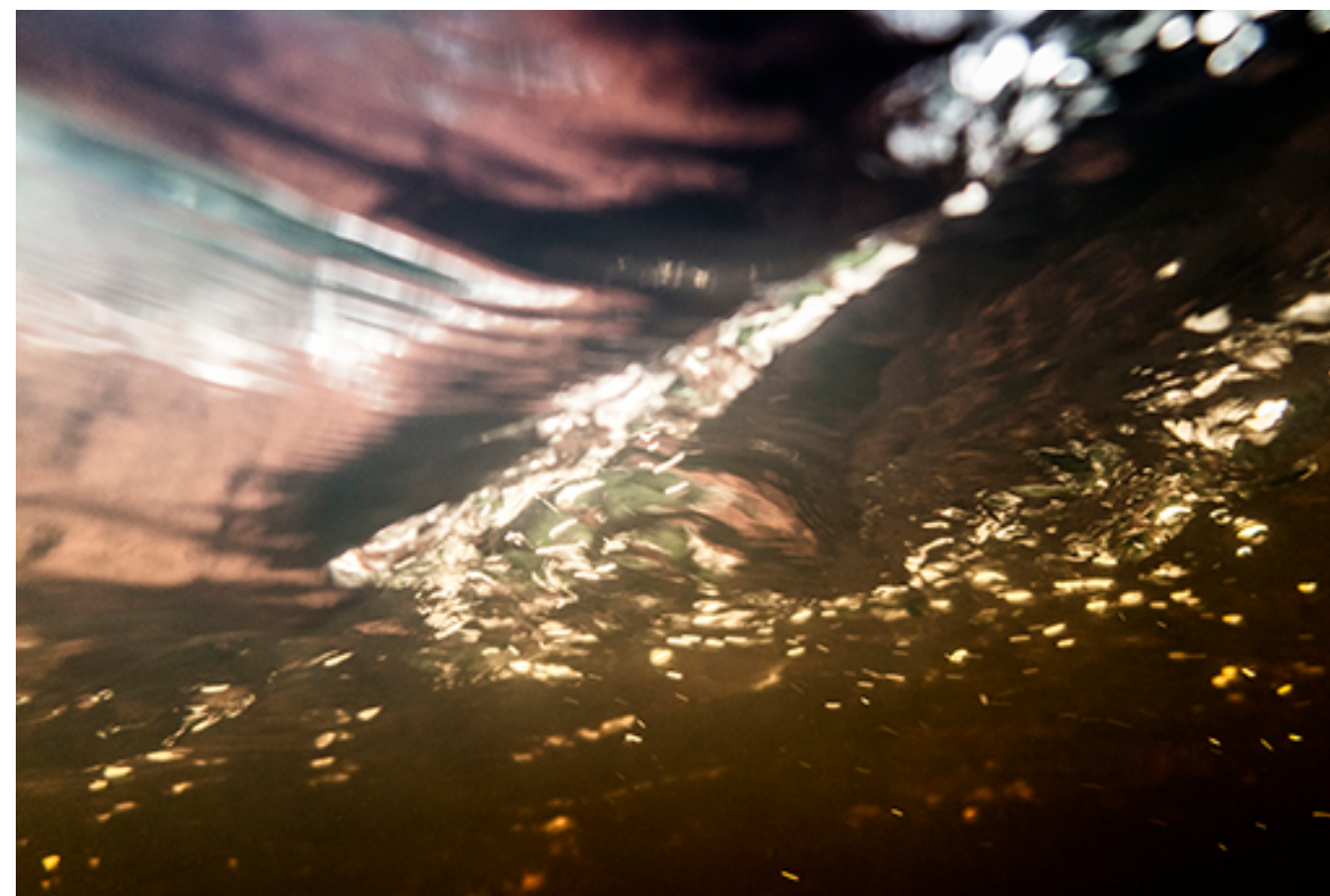
The diminished river in its downstream gorge
reeks of this hoary human parsimony.

It's a river-bottom smell:
a desolation;
a destitution;
an orphaned child sitting,
in need,
dark eyes glaring accusatively,
from a gutter of its own creation.

You'd think the river would be over it by now.
Instead, it continues offering its olfactory oratory.

To anyone who'll listen (or smell).

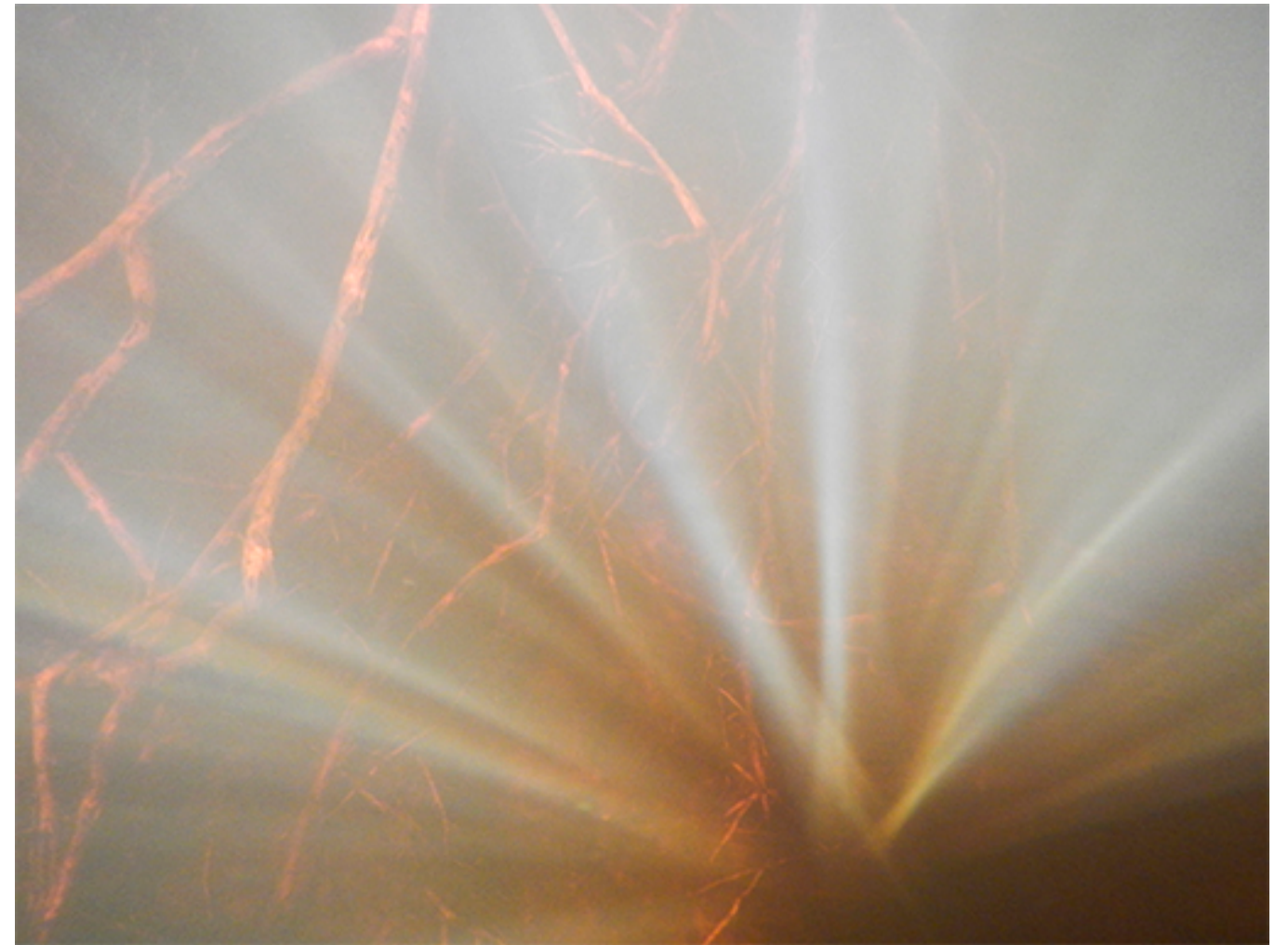
These days, there's only me
(and my complicity).



Upstream, it's different.

Beyond the wall of concrete and stones and electrical desires,
beyond the flooded plains that used to emerge,
drying (that's a relative term!)
in the summer sun.

The plains are still there,
continually submerged these days,
resolute in their peaty denial of the bleeding obvious.



The Huon's flow still directs, before it is totally subsumed.

The flood-deposited logs are ordered just so,
as they always have been,
even when they bordered a riverbank
rather than a lake.

Even in the long-ago time
when the Other humans used to sit on them
with their sharp sticks
and bark-fibre nets,
and talk about the fishing,
and tell, and re-tell, their old, old stories.

The logs remain,
Occasionally re-arranged, or added to.
Always aligned,
as time and tradition
and flood-current dictate.

Shags now sit (and shit) on the logs,
drying their wings,
discussing the fishing,
and telling their old, old stories.

As is only proper.



Further upstream,
above the flatland swamps,
with their biofilms and organic acids,
bogs, and button-grass,
primaeval
quickly becomes more personal
than its definition at first suggests.

Upstream, in the hills,
where gravity and slope limit the young Huon's meanderings,
while empowering its adolescent exuberance.

Where the air is charged
with ozone dashed from the water
as it cascades over and under
the logs that would impede its path.



Upstream in the deep forest
where the Horizontal grows thickly,
maze-like,
defiantly blocking the passage
of anything taller than a pademelon.

Veiling the stream, protectively.
Offering mud and bog in its place,
with a silent, green-whiskered smirk,
and a knowing wink to its interlaced neighbour.

Here the air has the metallic tang,
the anaerobic-clay smell,
of pure rainforest.

It's cool in here.
Some might call it cold.
And humid.

My camera lens fogs instantly.
My GPS won't work under the thick forest canopy.
My watch has the wet-battery blues.
And as for mobile reception...



I could be lost here,
where the sun's direction
is well obscured by thick foliage
and thickening clouds.

I could be lost here,
in the middle of a pictorial sentence,
searching for a visual predicate
upon which to pin my *punctum*,
and thus my photographic thesis
(for want of a lucent apostrophe, a nuance was lost...).



With syntactic aplomb, I besit a mossy log,
bum-wet from the moss community
that suffers its indignity in forbearing silence;
a resilient soft-green hospitality.

Leeches materialise:
beginning their anticipatory peregrinations
towards the warm, if inadvertent,
invitation of my body.

Their presence is forborne with less equanimity
than that shown by the mosses on which I sit.
Inhospitably, I refuse them their blood meal,
denying their future generations.

I return them empty-stomached
to the surrounding bush.
It's a personal thing:
a biological separation,
instinctively enforced.



Upstream, in the hills,
the river is fast and shallow.
Clearwater, full of logs and forest debris:
captured and pinned by the current;
held in store
to feed the grazers and shredders,
which feed the bugs,
which feed the fish,
which feed the fishers.

The stream bounces in its green-banked bed,
reciting a poetry of cascade and swirl;
at times linear and forceful,
at others indolent and wandering;
arcing its surface toward the light and air,
before swooshing it down,
with vertiginous vehemence,
at the stern insistence of gravity.



Downstream once again,
in the depths of its overshadowing gorge,
the river carries other messages,
other poetry.

My photographs show the river's tracings:
enigmatic, alien, mostly incomprehensible,
though not entirely.

I can see the colour of the water,
and the effect that depth has on it.

I can trace some of the forms
in which the water dances and cavorts.

I can explore its luminous pathways.



These are messages of fluidic diversity,
velocity, and turbulence,
that I'd need to hear if I lived there,
in the water column:
like a bug on a rock,
or a fish,
looking to eat a bug,
chance-found and rock-bound.

If I lived there, in the water column,
balancing buoyancy with gravity;
flow velocity with tenacity.
I might taste the chemical signature of riverbed,
or feel the electrical impulses
of potential prey,
or patient predator,
or hear the tonal soliloquy of rain
falling on the surface.

If I lived there, in the water column.



The water carries messages, to me (and my complicity),
as well as to other biota.

And I wonder...

Does the water provide this service under duress:
in the mechanistic thrall of gravity, and volume;
of slope, velocity, and turbulence?

Or is it just dancing?

Skipping its way to the ocean,
and the devil take the hindmost.

Inviting other waters to join in:
rain, snow, and tributary flows, nascent bankside ice.

Join the mix. Come dance.

And fuck this misbegotten, human-centred notion
of commodification and its so-called waste.

Come feed the sea with balance for its salinity,
with sedimentary grist for its oceanic mill.

Come feed the atmosphere with evaporated mist,

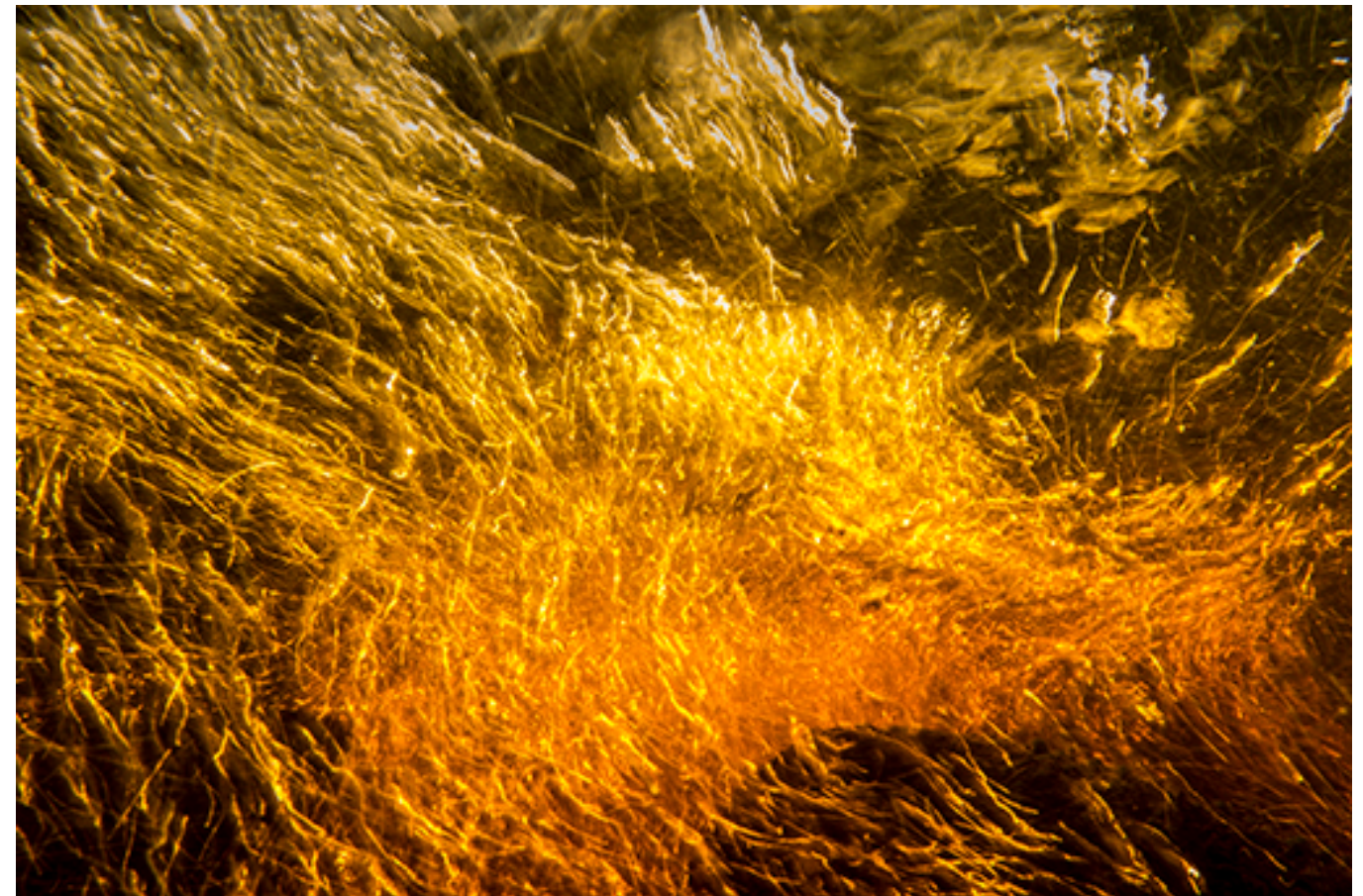
a latent storm;

celebrating a completion,

and a beginning:

a cycle even.

As is only proper.



I can withstand the river's flow:
deny its errant invitation,
its liquid lasciviousness.

I can stand, here,
in my waders:
withstanding.

Separated by more than a thin plastic membrane.

Separated by a rational mind, that knows things
(or thinks it does);

that counts and categorises, catalogues and commodifies
(is that binary, or decimal?).

By an imagination that conjures and conjectures
(or imagines it does).

By my instincts as a terrestrial organism that wants to survive
(or thinks it might not).

Encapsulated in plastic
(and parentheses).

That rationality knows,
with a surety that needs no elaboration,
that it cannot inhabit the stream;
cannot dance the river's dance;
cannot withstand the river's entrainment.

That's a separation of deeper-than-biological significance.



My photography may facilitate a closer dialogue with the river;
a clearer perception of its messages,
by re-presenting those dynamic fluvial aspects
that the unaided (human) eye cannot perceive.

I've displayed the aquatic calligraphy
and its (imagined) messages.
I've intimated the turbulent causality
of the liquid gesture that makes the mark.
And I wonder...

At the *gesture* that makes the mark.
And its significance...

My camera is a physical intrusion into the corpus of stream flow.
Could it deflect that gesture?
(Of a surety!)
Could my presence: my very being, physical or otherwise;
(here-now, there-then, surely-possibly)
deflect the gesture that makes the mark?

Is my representation more a delinquent graffito?
A foreigner's garbled mispronunciation
of the river's liquid language?



The beauty that I see,
that cohabits with my complicity;
in the dark-light of the truncated Huon:
that I consider to be *natural* in its implicit indifference.
Is this beauty simply the river's complacency at my intrusion?
Ever-responsive, sensitively chaotic, able to flow around, or over,
or under,
as it chooses?
As gravity dictates?
Move along! Nothing to see here!

That's an astounding freedom,
for a slightly smelly, water-starved,
human be-dammed stream.

And I wonder...
Could *forgiveness* be written amongst the messages it carries?
In the imagery that my camera records?
In the dialogue of the Huon's Otherness?





FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Bathurst's 200 Plants and Animals Project: Do-it-yourself climate change communication in a regional context.

Tracy Sorensen

Abstract

Engaging the public on climate change is difficult because it is often framed as a problem remote in time and space. This paper describes my own experiences as a member of a local environmental group, Bathurst Community Climate Action Network (BCCAN), as we sought to overcome this barrier by using community arts activities. Over six months, BCCAN worked with environmental groups and individuals based in the Bathurst region to collect representations (photography, visual art, biological specimens) of local plants and animals. These were then exhibited to the public for two weeks in an empty shop in the Central Business District. The project created a framework for participation for local ecologists, professional and non-professional artists and craftspeople and children. The development of this project took place as I embarked on the early stages of my PhD candidacy and following treatment for cancer. This paper correlates themes emerging from my reading in the field of climate change communication and autoethnography as research method.

Introduction

In this paper I will give an autoethnographic account of my own experience as a member of a local climate action group attempting to engage the attention of local people in issues relating to climate change through a community arts project. Auto-ethnography is a way of capturing the power of personal story in illuminating aspects of social science research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It reminds us that social life can never be separated from the individual, fleshy, situated human beings that experience it and co-create it.

First, I will give a little background on climate change communication and my local group, Bathurst Community Climate Action Network. Then the tone will shift, as I move from the realm of arguable facts into a more fluid realm, the realm of my own personal experience.

Background

Climate change is said to present a potent threat to the human civilisation that developed during the relatively benign climatic conditions of the Holocene period (Pachauri et. al, 2014). We are now, imaginatively if not officially, in an era being called the Anthropocene, in which human impacts on the giant systems of the Earth have become so great as to warrant a new geological era (Cook, Rickards & Rutherford, 2015). There is much to talk about, here. However, engaging the public - or publics - on climate change is very difficult. Many theories have been posited for this. One theory is that people will tend to have difficulty responding to a problem that appears to be remote in time and/or space. More pressing concerns will tend to get more attention (see Moser, 2010, p. 33). To overcome this barrier, it has been suggested that climate change communicators should use strategies that bring the problem into the here and now of people's lives (Scannell & Gifford, 2013).

An example of such a project can be found in a climate learning network formed among row crop farmers, scientists, researchers and agricultural extension specialists¹ in the south east of the United States (Bartels et al 2012). In a series of

workshops conducted with network participants over a two year period from 2010 to 2012, the various stakeholders discussed issues surrounding adaptation to climate change. Climate scientists listened as well as spoke. Primary producers were given space to tell their own stories of weather, climate and agricultural work. The workshops were described as “interactive spaces for knowledge coproduction” (p. 45) that might in the future support decision-making and adaptation. The workshops drew on a model of knowledge as something that is socially constructed through interaction rather than a thing amenable to the unidirectional transmission model (p. 46).

This notion of creating local interactive spaces for climate change dialogue is also discussed by Martin Mulligan (2014) in a paper on the sociology of climate change adaptation. In arguing for the importance of community responses, Mulligan acknowledges that the word community is problematic, and that communities are not necessarily inclusive, harmonious or collaborative things (p. 174). He conceptualises a community not necessarily as a thing ready to take action on climate change, but something that might be created through action on climate change. With that in mind, he argues the importance of people-place relationships, coupled with art theory and practice, to “promote imaginative constructions of the scope and scale of the climate-change challenge” (p. 177).

In an earlier paper, Mulligan (2012) argues that arts-based communication strategies might be expected to promote a deeper understanding of climate change because they can bridge the gap between cognition and affect - between what people think and what they feel. The next step, he says, is to find effective ways move from emotion to action.

“...the work that is yet to be done is to forge a link between affect and agency, with agency understood as a *capacity to act* at all levels ranging from individuals and households to the global ‘community’ *without losing hope* (p. 11).

These themes play out in the activities of Bathurst Community Climate Action Network², a climate action group in a regional centre with a population of about 40,000 in the agricultural region of Central West New South Wales, Australia. BCCAN was formed in 2007, in the aftermath of a local screening of the film *An Inconvenient Truth* (Ebert, 2006), which followed efforts by former US presidential candidate Al Gore to explain the science of climate change, and the need to act upon it, to ordinary people. The group quickly reached about 100 subscribers, with an active core of about twenty people attending meetings and about 60 in attendance at Annual General Meetings. BCCAN embarked on a range of activities ranging from personal carbon footprint reduction strategies to political lobbying on issues such as coal mining and carbon taxes to supplying a regular column on climate change and environmental issues for the local newspaper, *The Western Advocate*. The group organised two community-based arts exhibitions in 2009 and 2015.

I am not simply an observer of BCCAN in my community; I have been an active volunteer member since its inception. All of the threads of my own life are brought to bear as I co-create this group, which in turn, in a small way, is co-creating this place we call Bathurst.

In this paper I want to give an account of my own personal experience of a particular arts and science-based community engagement project we conducted in 2015. Questions of the project's efficacy - its success or otherwise in changing minds about climate change - are beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, this is a personal account of *what it is like* to be a local climate change activist communicator in a particular body, at a particular time, in a particular place. To be living here and responding to climate change with a sense of agency.

Story

I am in dialogue with and about my altered body, just as I am in dialogue with and about the altered landscape that it inhabits. The air I'm breathing today contains over 400 parts per million of carbon dioxide, a dangerous concentration. As I write this sentence, the number is rising, even if just by a few atoms here and there.

This paper is also written in the shadow of personal extinction. For me, as activist and cancer survivor, the numbers relating to climate change and personal mortality are not remote in time or space but situations in which I am enmeshed, to borrow Mike Hulme's phrase (Hulme via Mulligan 2014, p. 167). I live and breathe them.

In February 2014, I was diagnosed with Stage 3C ovarian cancer. My CA125 tumour marker, at diagnosis, was over 2000. Anything over 30 is considered problematic. My life, along with the lives of all beings on this planet, is being lived under the shadow of climbing numbers.

In talking about my cancer with others, I was immediately struck by parallels with talking to people about climate change. Both issues are difficult to talk about. Both are capable of producing a strange silence, a pause, a desire to change the subject. Both quickly uncover basic attitudes to science, technology, intervention, naturalness, wellness, responsibility, fate, faith, life and death. In both there are battle metaphors; in both, sometimes, there's the language of acceptance and surrender.

In clothes, on an ordinary day, my body seems unremarkable. Unclothed, it's clear that my body is a vastly altered landscape. Two lines run across the top of my abdomen in the places where my breasts were. There is a long straight vertical scar down my middle, from breast bone to pelvis. On the left hand side of my belly there's a strange beige bag. Yes, a colostomy bag.

The landscape around Bathurst, where my body lives, is also altered. Like my intestines, the vessels that hold and carry moisture - the rivers and creeks - have

been rerouted. There's a dam, a water filtration plant and a sewage treatment plant. Water and waterborne solids do not flow the way they did in the past, but, like my bodily organs, they are still working, still carrying and processing biological matter.

This is the body I brought to discussions in BCCAN in the early months of 2015 about how we would respond to a year of celebrations marking the two hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Governor Lachlan Macquarie on the banks of the Wambool River. In May, 1815, Macquarie planted the Union Jack and proclaimed the town of Bathurst. The bicentenary celebrations, led by Bathurst Regional Council, were focused on human achievements over the past two centuries. Two hundred liquidambar trees would be planted on the outskirts of town celebrating the town's living legends.³

I was aware that the earth others, the ground upon which all of these human achievements were built, was being left out of this story.

This cultural elision started early. In the [watercolour painting](#) by the convict artist John Lewin (Lewin, 1815) of the Union Jack waving over Macquarie's camp we see open grassland and trees, the suggestion of a river, but no animals, and certainly no trace of the Wiradyuri⁴ people who lived there. Those empty fields of grassland are a blank page, *terra nullius*, just waiting to be filled with sheep and bobbing heads of wheat.

Two hundred years later, Wiradyuri people were being reintroduced to the picture. Wiradyuri elder Bill Allen, also known as Dinawan, or Emu, spoke at length to the assembled townspeople at the exact spot, as far as anyone could determine, that Macquarie's Union Jack had been flying in May, 1815. (The exact location of Macquarie's flag was forgotten in the decades after he left, and the spot became a public toilet block. Rather than dismantle the conveniences, Bathurst Regional Council simply built the new 2015 commemorative flagstaff on top of them.)

The Wiradyuri were being written back into the story but the environment, the more-than human world of Bathurst, remained largely off-stage. In BCCAN committee we discussed how we might seize the opportunity of the 200th celebrations to focus attention on the earth others of the Bathurst region.

Mostly BCCAN meetings are the site of harmonious discussion, in which we furiously agree with each other, defining ourselves in opposition to politicians and publics that have so far failed to understand the world and act upon it in ways that we and the world's climate scientists think appropriate. But every now and then, arguments do break out. When I presented a proposal for a project to be called *200 Plants and Animals*, there was a dissenting voice. This member argued that we should stick to activities that were more directly connected to creating a low-carbon economy: solar panels, energy efficiency, wind turbines. Plants and animals were not our core business. However, the majority supported my proposal, and we went on from there.

I can't speak for the others, but for me, *200 Plants and Animals* was an opportunity to take BCCAN in a somewhat different direction to the one it had been traveling in. Is climate action only about carbon taxes, solar panels and wind turbines? Is it about a greening of capitalism, a promotion of the economic opportunities opening up in that greening? Or is it about promoting a more radical shift in our attitude to the biosphere and all of its inhabitants?

I'd had a year off active involvement in BCCAN as I lived through chemotherapy and radical surgery. In that time, I'd had an epiphany about the agency of natural processes. Scales had fallen from my eyes. I was seeing the world in a new way.

Let me tell you how this happened.

When I was told that I had two large tumours in my abdomen, one eleven centimetres, the other five centimetres, I collapsed into the classic fugue state that is now a familiar cancer story trope. I simply couldn't process the information. I needed

others to hold on to the things the doctors were telling me, and then drip feed the information to me later, in tiny increments that I could cope with.

As the dust settled I found myself in a new world, the world of the cancer patient. I was congratulated on being relatively young and otherwise healthy, capable of surviving aggressive treatment. I was to have chemotherapy to shrink the tumours, then an operation, and then more chemotherapy.

I had to make sense of it somehow.

As my hair fell out people gave me books with titles like, *You Can Conquer Cancer*, the *Liver Cleansing Diet* and *Cancer Positive - The Role of the Mind in Tackling Cancers*. I said thank you and didn't read any of them. Instead, I was on Google Images studying the shape and size of the organs within the peritoneum, all of which were threatened by my cancer. I was keen to discover the position of the liver, stomach, pancreas, gall bladder, spleen, greater omentum, small intestine, large intestine, uterus. Spleen, what is a spleen? What exactly does it do? Where does it sit in the abdomen, and what does it look like? Suddenly, this was relevant and urgent information. I toyed with going to the butcher, asking for liver and stomach. I was in the mood to dissect, to know.

I began to crochet a set of three-dimensional representations of my threatened abdominal organs. I mostly worked freestyle, but I went to YouTube to learn about useful techniques, such as bobble stitch to represent the lumpy surface of the pancreas. The work was absorbing. It both focused my mind on what was happening and took my mind off what was happening.

Before surgery, I took my bag of woolly guts in to the gynaecological oncologist, who admired them as much as I had hoped she would. She arranged them on her desk and used them to explain what would be happening during surgery, which she was going to complete in tandem with an Upper GIT, or Upper Gastro Intestinal Tract surgeon. He would work up around the stomach and pancreas; she'd take the area around rectum and vagina. This is going, she said, playfully picking up the pink crocheted uterus and throwing it across the room. The little yellow apron-like greater omentum also flew across the room. Spleen, that's going, too. The two tumours, which I had rendered in fluorescent greenish yellow and black wool, were similarly

dispatched. With the remaining organs, she traced her finger along their edges, describing possibilities of a nip here, a slice there.

After surgery, a couple of days of hell and hurling. A blur of pain and green vomit.

Then, at five am on the Tuesday morning following surgery, my epiphany. I was bathed in a sense of well being. Dawn light was filtering through the blinds. I felt a surge of creativity. I had been completely wrong about my body. It wasn't letting me down; it was absolutely amazing. It was where I lived and *how* I lived. I typed into my iPhone:

"The first place is this body, made up of the descendants of ancient bacteria, fish parts. This temple, made of fish parts."

How could I have failed to see it like this, before?

I read Val Plumwood's work on the agency of nature (see Plumwood, 2010). We act towards the more-than-human world as if it were dead, a passive thing.

And I read the ecofeminist Ariel Salleh.

Beneath this perfect man-made economic machine, nature is dead, merely a "raw materials warehouse". It is therefore no surprise that global climatic patterns fail, as living ecosystems are subjected to this anthropocentric vanity (2010, p. 119).

and J.K. Gibson-Graham:

Feminist critiques of hyper-separation are pushing us to move beyond the divisive binaries of human/non-human, subject/object, economy/ecology and thinking/acting. The reframing of our living worlds as vast uncontrolled experiments is inspiring us to reposition ourselves as learners, increasingly open to our interconnections with earth others and more willing to intervene in adventurous ways (2011, p. 1).

In early 2015, as I recovered from treatment and heard about Bathurst's bicentenary celebrations, I was thinking: If we are celebrating a place, let us celebrate the place.

All of it. Notice the things that are here. Know what they do for you.

We decided to put one thousand dollars of BCCAN money into our exhibition, *200 Plants and Animals*. Bathurst Regional Council gave us another thousand. Our budget would cover rent for an empty shop in a quiet arcade for a couple of weeks, plus printing and publicity. Everything else would be supplied through in-kind

donations, volunteer labour and a little bit of money from the sale of artworks. We did not have the resources to curate it professionally, but we were quite happy to curate it unprofessionally.

In his thesis on amateur arts as a differential practice, Steven Knott (2011) helps explain the source of some of the energy that DIY arts and crafts run on: joy. Knott notes that the word amateur is derived from the latin *amare* - to love (p. 13). People do these things because they love to do them.

Concentration on the means rather than the ends of production leads to human experiences of joy and play that are closest to resembling the utopian dream of unalienated labour. (Knott, p. 11)

These sentiments are echoed by Nicole Pohl (2011) in her discussion of a spate of books about stitching and knitting with social intent:

It is thus not skill or craftsmanship that is at the center of the process but the experience and joy of “making.” (p. 401)

The call went out for representations of one hundred plants and one hundred animals. Members of the public could contribute whatever they liked, and we would stop collecting once we'd reached a hundred in each of the Kingdoms of Plants and Animals. Representations could include any of the visual arts including sculpture and photography, as well as natural history specimens such as bone and feather. There was one important rule: each representation had to be of one *particular* plant or animal. The contributor was asked to look up and write down its latin name. This is how we mostly managed to avoid amassing generic, sentimentalised representations. Instead of “bird” or “gum tree” or “fish”, for example, it had to be a Grey fantail *Rhipidura albiscapa* or Yellow box *Eucalyptus Melliodora* or Murray cod *Maccullochella peelii*.

In his book *Micrographia, Or Some Physiological Descriptions Of Minute Bodies Made By Magnifying Glasses With Observations And Inquiries Thereupon*, English

scientist and Fellow of the Royal Society Robert Hooke (1664) urged the importance of “a sincere Hand, and a faithful Eye, to examine, and to record, the things themselves as they appear”. That’s what we were doing, too. We wanted people (including ourselves) to go beyond what we thought we knew about our local plants and animals. Let us bring a sincere hand, a faithful eye.

One of the first respondents was a woman from Kelso who saw our advertisement in the *Western Advocate*. She telephoned to say she had a magpie nest she’d found in her back yard that had a pair of wire spectacles woven into it - woven by the magpie. Was that the sort of thing we were looking for? Yes. Another woman emailed that she had taken a photograph of one of the resident Machhattie Park possums, the one that children like to feed. Yes, we’ll take that too. A horse skull. Yes. We’re not restricting ourselves to native animals but to all living beings that share this place. What about mushrooms? We were in taxonomic trouble, because we were only going to take plants or animals, and fungi is neither. But we let them in.

We set up a Facebook page called [200 Plants and Animals](#). Amateurs uploaded snaps they’d taken in the district, of a snake, a spider, tiny flowering plants. Professional photographers with long lenses uploaded birds, birds, birds.

We entered the shop a week before the official opening, working from 9am to 5pm receiving pieces and working out how to display them. Professional ecologists and artists worked with amateurs and school children to make the displays.

People pitched in, ferrying things here and there, wrapping and unwrapping. This was action on climate change. Some sort of action, some sort of engagement. I have decided not to name all of these people in this paper, partly because their names will mean little to those who don’t know them, but also because I’m telling my story, not theirs. There were about a dozen of us actively working, with many more coming and going. The contributor participants and their families and friends, extended the circle. The nature of the contributions brought about a levelling process. So for example one of Australia’s great authorities on the platypus, an adjunct professor and author of peer-reviewed papers on the subject, popped in with his fuzzy stuffed platypus. The lady from Kelso dropped off her delightful bespectacled magpie nest. To

contribute, you simply had to bring something, whether it was something representing decades of professional expertise or something you'd found in your back yard.

We were creating a sort of cabinet of curiosities, a conscious tribute to the gentlemen scientists and collectors of the 19th century, including of course Charles Darwin himself, who travelled to Bathurst in 1836 and made notes in his diary about our own ant lion. He noticed it was similar to his ant lions at home, and wondered about that (See Armstrong, 2002).

Lachlan Macquarie had a collector's chest. Images of it can be found on the State Library of New South Wales' website (State Library of New South Wales, 2007). It's a custom-built cabinet full of flaps and sliding drawers showcasing the natural bounty of Australia. The drawers contain brilliantly coloured dead birds tightly packed like sardines, their feet tied together with string. A flap lifts to reveal a painting of fish piled on the shore, so many different kinds of fish. Dead beetles arranged in exploding circles of colour and shape, from large to tiny. The specimens are not named or grouped taxonomically; the cabinet simply conjures the infinite riches of this new land for the taking.

In our empty shop, we displayed beetles on glass in a fan-shape, feathers in jars, native plants pressed and stuck down on pieces of A4 paper. We had a taxidermied animals including a grey falcon and a fuzzy platypus, and the tiny skeleton of a sugar glider tangled in barbed wire. A line-drawing of the Bathurst copperwing butterfly with its attendant ant and hawthorn was printed up as a colouring-in competition for children. Someone had to go out and beg for prizes from the local shops.

The space had been a workwear shop, and we were able to use some of the fittings. In the cube shelves on the back wall, once piled with sturdy workshirts and trousers, we installed bones and feathers. In glass cabinets in the middle of the room, we put a stuffed platypus and the skeleton of a tiny glider possum that had become trapped in barbed wire. There was a giant painted portrait of the smooth toadlet in a gilt frame, a sequined house cockroach and massed bird photography.

Pride of place went to an oil painting of the female albino wallaroo of Mount Panorama by Nic Mason. The white wallaroo lives there amongst the car races and crowds, sometimes glimpsed with her normally-coloured grey joeys. In the painting she sat on the wall in a gilt frame, looking over her shoulder at the viewer.

On opening night, Wiradyuri elder Bill Allen, also known as Dinawan or Emu, made particular note of the photograph of visiting magpie geese. Bill Allen, Dinawan, was particularly interested in the photograph of visiting magpie geese, not normally seen in Bathurst. He'd heard that the magpie geese were visiting Bathurst at the time of Lachlan Macquarie's visit in 1815. And here they were again, two hundred years later.

For two weeks our shop sat in a dim, little used arcade between Howick Street and the Coles supermarket, because that's all we could afford. Most supermarket shoppers parked their cars under the building, popped into Coles and back out. They didn't make the trip down our end of the arcade, despite our promotional efforts.

But many - I would say hundreds, but we weren't counting - did see us. Some came intentionally, others noticed us as they walked past. They would slow down, eyes caught by a bit of skeleton or wing. They'd wander in, ask what it was all about.

One autistic girl ran from piece to piece, joyfully naming each animal or plant. She greeted them as if they were special friends. She stayed for a long time, her mother grateful. The women from the acrylic nails shop opposite us came over at least once a day, to look at things and take a break from their chemical cocktails. A man with a French accent came past at about the same time each day, on his way from somewhere to somewhere. He was coveting the large portrait of the smooth toadlet (*Uperoleia laevigata*), for which he paid \$10 and eventually carried off as if it were a trophy.

The people we in BCCAN call the usual suspects - the well-known environmentalists about town - were frequent visitors. They caught up with each other, did some networking. Children coloured their butterflies on a low table and watched as we pinned them on display boards. The small print on the colouring sheets gave the scientific names of the butterfly (*Paralucia spinifera*), the blackthorn plant upon which it feeds (*Bursaria spinosa*) and the ant (*Anonychomyrma itinerans*) with whom it lives in a symbiotic relationship. Some of the older children copied the correct purple and copper colours from a photograph; others went for eclectic brilliance. Family and friends of the exhibitor participants came and went. The volunteer shop minding roster on the whiteboard in the kitchen was in a state of constant flux, but there were no blank spaces. People were keen to do their shifts.

Visitors constantly praised our efforts, and some came back again and again, singling out favourites. People were certainly noticing and studying the earth others that they lived with, earth others so often disregarded or taken for granted. Did anything shift in their minds about climate change? We weren't collecting evidence about this, so it is hard to say.

It took just a day to dismantle everything we'd set up. By the following Tuesday morning, the For Lease sign was back in the window. We had vanished seemingly without trace.

Reflections

Afterwards, I was exhausted. The logic of finishing what one has started had taken over my life for some months. Was it a worthwhile way to spend so much time? I think it was. I was sending out seeds, the way a dandelion sends out seeds on the breeze. The dandelion doesn't know exactly where they'll land, or whether they'll grow. But if there are no seeds, there are no more dandelions. That much is certain. A story is an open-ended thing, completed in the mind of the listener or reader; it is open to multiple interpretations. My story possibly reveals things I'm not aware of. I believe the literature of climate change communication will be enriched by the personal stories of working climate change communicators. To listen to such

accounts in all their peculiarity is to recognise that climate change communication cannot be separated from the communicator. We bring our whole, particular, embodied, situated, selves to our actions in the world.

Having written my story, I look back at the literature at the beginning of this paper, and try to think about how it correlates with my own experience.

Like the collaborations between the south-eastern US row crop farmers, scientists and professionals described by Bartels *et. al* (2013), our *200 Plants and Animals* project drew on a model of knowledge as something that is socially constructed through interaction. Our project did this by creating a framework for people to interact with each other in a semi-formal, egalitarian manner as they collaboratively assembled a representation of the biodiversity of the Bathurst region. We attempted to combat the problem of remoteness in time and place as discussed by Moser (2010) by making climate change closer and more tangible: These plants and animals in this place; these people, in this shopping centre, here, now.

The notion of a community as something that can be forged through action on climate change, as presented by Mulligan (2014) played out in the conversations and networking that took place as people spent time in the virtual ecosystem that they had constructed. The exhibition also created opportunities for bridging the gap between affect and agency as discussed by Mulligan. Among participants there was a continuous back-and-forth between the sadness of loss and a commitment to doing something - even if just this small, temporary exhibition - to promote and protect the local biosphere.

At the same time, my own personal practice of anatomical crochet, which then flowed into a direct engagement with my wider biosphere and local community, shows how one person is reframing herself as, in J.K. Gibson-Graham's words, a learner "increasingly open to our interconnections with earth others and more willing to intervene in adventurous ways" (p.

For me, curiosity, crochet and as sense of community really are carrying me through the shadow of personal and global extinction. No matter how bad things get, I have found something that I can do as long as I have the use of my hands. My PhD research will explore, in depth, why and how this approach is helping me to talk with others about cancer and climate change.

So, what about my own numbers? At the time of writing, my CA125 tumour marker number is 10, well below the threshold of danger. Tomorrow, I'll get the results of my most recent blood test. I'll find out whether my numbers are going up or down or holding steady. In the meantime, as consolation, as instruction, I have the last three lines of Gary Snyder's poem, *For the Children*:

stay together

learn the flowers

go light

Notes

1. An Australian equivalent might be agricultural liaison officers employed by the New South Wales Department of Primary Industry.
2. See www.bccan.org.au
3. For an overview of Bathurst's 200th celebrations in 2015 see <http://www.bathurst200.com.au/>.
4. "Wiradyuri" is the preferred spelling of the Bathurst Wiradyuri elders' group, and is the spelling I adopt in this paper.
5. The Bathurst plains in 1815 were not cleared country. In *The biggest estate on earth. How Aborigines made Australia*, Bill Gammage (2011) posits that such landscapes were created through thousands of years of Wiradyuri use of fire.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

**‘Back’ to Country? Socio-Cultural Identity and the Relationship
between Revering and Re-fashioning Landscapes and People.**

Rev. Karen Kime & Dr. Angela T. Ragusa

Abstract

How 'places' are constructed, experienced, shaped and perceived is strongly affected by socio-cultural histories and identities. This paper explores human relationships, specifically Australian Aboriginal peoples' relationships, with 'land', or 'Country', by conceptualising the role social identity plays in the dynamism between human and non-human expression. Conceived as a dialogue, an interplay, between competing epistemologies of land as nourishing and sustaining but often in competition with notions of 'progress' and 'civilization', humanity's relationship with its physical environment is a history bifurcating between struggle and admiration, resistance and co-dependence, yet, all the while, is a story of social change and renewal. Utilising an interdisciplinary lens, we explore rituals and narratives emergent over time to explore how social beliefs about 'Nature' confer connection to place, nationhood and, ultimately, identity. This exploration raises critical questions about the State's historical role and sovereignty in creating, legitimating or delegitimizing connections between land and people and the implications for both.

Introduction

For Aboriginal people, Country remains significant, permeating every aspect of life. Country is at the heart of Aboriginal spirituality and the Dreaming, governing how we understand and interact with the world and each other. It encompasses rich oral histories of one's people that recount stories of adaptation and survival living in a continuously changing landscape. Country also is what holds the stories of ongoing dispossession and life at the margins while contributing to the economic wellbeing of families and communities. While Aboriginal people's relationship to Country continues to be transformed and new narratives created, it remains the primary source of self-identity, cultural maintenance and hope for the future. In this paper, environmental studies and socio-cultural research are drawn upon to offer a conceptual contribution to dialogues about the way we relate to, and make use of, land and its resources. Through this examination, it contributes further insight into a relationship that includes a way of living with, and caring for, Country, which profoundly influences survival in rural Australia. The environmental crisis of mass species extinction and water scarcity demand a new way of living and working on and with the land. Indeed, Castree et al., (2014) argue an interdisciplinary approach is needed if we are to fully appreciate and reduce our environmental impact for the wellbeing of all.

Shifting Cultural Landscapes

For Aboriginal people, all relationships are derived from Country. When a child is born, they are born into a web of relationships that provide a sense of belonging, obligation and, most importantly, identity. This vast kinship system means people are

born belonging to country and related to all other living things, a notion that contrasts markedly from Eurocentric culture. These socio-cultural norms hold key implications for how individuals and communities relate to physical landscapes, particularly 'Nature'. Moreover, at the heart of Aboriginal spirituality and lore are beliefs that the land, and everything upon it, is a living, breathing entity. Whereas Europeans conceded a soul only to people, Aboriginal Australians perceive the soul is like the breath, permeating the whole of creation.

Perceptions and beliefs about what is held 'sacred', as classical sociologists such as Emile Durkheim theorised, deeply affect humans' relationship with, and connection to, each other and natural environments (Allan, 2011). In Australia, spirituality deeply affects what actions are condoned, or socially sanctioned, in relation to Country. Socio-cultural beliefs have profound implications for identifying, and nurturing, practices commonly known as environmental stewardship and natural resource management (Australian Government, 2016, n.p.). In an era lamented for an increasing disconnection between contemporary Western 'lifestyles' and 'Nature', a host of psychologists, ecologists and other disciplines exploring human-nature connectivity have commenced extolling the benefits of re-connecting with natural environments in our everyday lives (Laird, Wardell-Johnson, & Ragusa, 2014). Here, Indigenous culture may be instructive. Aboriginal law requires us to respect Country, care for it, 'grow it', and be co-creators of life. These ideologies, and importantly the practices they foster, mark a significant difference from conservation or sustainability ideology.

While Western environmental conservation and/or sustainability practices seek to encourage the preservation, and thus continuation, of nature, they tend to perpetuate a Cartesian dualism, a disconnection between mind/spirit and body, viewing humanity as external from its physical embodiment and connection with the land from which we all derive. Nature exists as an extrinsic variable to be manipulated, shaped, or influenced, not only for its own *a priori* needs, but often for androcentric needs. In contrast, Aboriginal beliefs, laws, and practices of co-creation offer an alternative conceptualisation. For example, the active management of species, such as native nurseries, fisheries, and 'burning off' to generate new life, are widely continued practices embedded within traditional and contemporary culture despite technological changes. The human-nature relationship is thus nurtured through rituals, for instance sacred songs where spirits that nurture the earth are sung to for a good season, food, thanksgiving and protection. Such rituals further embed the centrality of Country, reiterating its importance to everyday life.

In many Aboriginal communities the importance of being 'grounded in Country' begins at a very young age. Some continue to rub earth over their children at birth to connect them with 'the mother'. Adults continue to feel the earth of their Country, claiming it is what gives them strength and the aged often return to Country 'to die' so their spirit can find its way home. Indeed, the spiritual attachment to Country can be one of the most stabilising influences throughout one's life. These beliefs and practices manifest in cultural traditions old and new, as Geoffrey Yunnipingu sings of being conceived and carried by 'Wititj' (the Rainbow Serpent and Creator Spirit) while Indigenous singer and songwriter, Christine Anu, sings of her 'Island Home'. Actor Ernie Dingo speaks of Country as being central to 'who he is', while Vicki

Couzins, an Aboriginal artist and storyteller, reminds us that when Country is strong, so are its people. Country provides the road map for life where the Creator Spirit dwells. In Barkandji Country, one can see the footprints of the Creator Spirit `Biamee' who left an imprint of his journey at the time of creation, evidenced by consecutive plateaus, while in Wreck Bay the Yuin people continue looking to the skies, reassured at the presence of the `sea eagle', `the father' and protector of them all.

Although how Indigenous Australians use the land and its resources has altered dramatically, Country continues to be a priority. In Wagga Wagga, the conservation of bush food is seen through the establishment of native gardens, seed collecting and basket weaving. In Wreck Bay, the planting and conservation of bush medicines is an ongoing task while a vast range of wild fruit and berries continue to be planted. In Peak Hill, pigibilla continues to be eaten because it is good for the skin while Mount Gulaga continues to be a place where Yuin women gather. While contemporary Indigenous Australians' relationship to Country, with their land, and hence with their selves, both individual and collective, changes over time, lessons from historical lived experiences are instructive for guiding new relationships with Country. One particularly instructive lived experience for reconceptualising how contemporary human-nature relationships are affected by systemic conditions and varied ideologies is the historical experience of Aboriginal dispossession.

Narratives of Dispossession

Access to country remains central to a sense of `well being' and the mental health of Indigenous Australians (Kanowski et al., 2008). Given national statistics reveal Aboriginal Australians bear a disproportionate burden of mental illness by population size, understanding what contributes to their mental health is of great importance. Particularly noteworthy is the change in suicide rates from hardly any in pre-colonial Australia to double the rate of non-Indigenous Australians according to Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) data. With government reports attributing, "the disproportionate number of these deaths (over three quarters) [to] where there was a history of having been forcibly separated from natural families as children", and noting remote geographies and access to regional centres require consideration (Australian Government, 2013, n.p.), it is timely to reconceptualise what `well-being' entails.

Across Australia, many Aboriginal Australians continue to live in third world conditions if it allows them to remain close to Country. This is supported with national statistics revealing Aboriginal Australians have shorter life expectancies and experience "persistent and chronic disadvantage" (p.3) on a majority of socio-economic/demographic categories in contrast with non-Indigenous Australians; 75% live in regional areas or cities, not remote locations, a common misconception, although remote communities pose considerable health and well-being risks comparable with those in developing countries (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (AIHW), 2011). Despite known disadvantages of remote living, including

implications for mortality rates, the Australian Government reports, “rates of positive wellbeing were higher in remote areas than non-remote areas” (AIHW, 2011, p.37) and remoteness was associated with increased cultural identity and higher participation in cultural activities (ibid, p.43), a factor known to improve sense of well-being.

In light of the positive influence cultural identity has on Indigenous Australians' well-being, and the importance of Country irrespective of whether one's location is demographically described as urban or rural, combined with the deleterious effects from physical and psychological dispossession, it is unsurprising many Indigenous communities seek justice through reclamation of traditional grounds. Indeed, Country not only has great spiritual and economic importance, it holds the history of one's people. The rich oral stories of Indigenous Australians provide a key source of cultural identity and offer a history of life reaching back across generations, connecting people and landscapes. Many narratives include stories of living on the land prior to invasion. For example, at Brungle, a mission near the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, the Elders recall the location of violence with the Ngungawal of the Southern Highlands. “Over there is where we fought a war with the neighbouring tribe - over there between those two hills” and, in relation to the rivers, we recount, “Wiradjuri people are river people....it's our meeting place and always has been (Kime, 1999).

More recent narratives include often violent dispossession and describe life on 'the missions'. At Darlington Point in New South Wales, memories of mission life remain with the residents who are known for pointing to the location of significant buildings, such as 'the manager's house' and 'the rations shed', recalling where 'too many of our children are buried'. At Cowra, people continue telling the story of a life as refugees, as fringe dwellers, in their own country and stories of living in the 'red huts' under the railway bridge or in make shift shelters along the banks of the Lachlan River. These rich historical narratives include the regular passing of trains, a sight 'not to be missed' that provided short reprieves from grinding poverty and struggle for survival over diminishing access to land (Kime, 1999).

Lessons from the Dispossessed

Dispossession has often been driven by economic imperatives (McLean, 2013). The first one hundred years of European occupation saw Aboriginal people removed and/or killed to 'free up' land for colonial expansion and industries such as pastoralism (Nettlebeck, 2011; Reynolds, 2013). Missions and Reserves became convenient places where Indigenous people could be located to further such efforts. Stolen Generations were sent to 'training institutions' to be 'of service' and integration policies of the 20th Century saw Aboriginal people moved off these locations into larger towns and/or cities with false promises of employment and better housing (Broome, 2010). Today, the withdrawal of basic services to 100 Indigenous communities in Western Australia not only frees the land from human habitation, but, more significantly, makes the land 'available', coinciding with the

expansion of mining (Anonymous, 2014; Brueckner et al., 2013). Similarly, income management in the Northern Territory requires many Aboriginal people leave their community to access basic necessities at the 'identified' stores. Thus, Galloway (2015) points to a 'new wave' of dispossession, driven by the broader agenda to open up 'the last frontiers' of economic development.

Dispossession of Country has forced Indigenous Australians to undergo rapid change, while long held traditions manifest in new and dynamic ways. Country remains at the heart of Aboriginal identity, with dispossession marking grief and loss across generations. The resilience of Aboriginal people, and their ability to retain a unique identity as Australia's Indigenous people, gives pause for reflection. At a time when climate change presents major challenges to all Australians, and particularly those in rural and remote communities, we might ask, what can we learn from the dispossessed, including how they have dealt with change and environmental crises on the Australian continent? Hawke (2012) points to first Australians' lack of eco-cultural literacy and how early settlers failed to heed lessons of survival. Similarly, Weir (2011) claims Indigenous custodians' ecological knowledge is crucial in our era of climatic change and mass species extinction which is directly affecting the wellbeing of rural communities. Weir (2011) refers to a loss of connectivity and possibilities for existence. Long-term knowledge of caring for Country reveals intimate and detailed knowledge of flora and fauna, including care of a changing landscape. Moreover, it demands an integrative and holistic sensibility which some would argue requires a paradigmatic shift in conceptions of self, community and connection to the land, nature, sustaining all.

Stories of creation working cooperatively with humans are found in Aboriginal communities across Australia and concepts such as the 'common good' are broader and deeper than in Western societies. Within Aboriginal storytelling, animals are often referred to as having rights to exist that are equal to humans and far beyond the binary thinking and economic equations currently dictating broader debates. Survival depends on our ability to enter into this extra-human dialogue. Weir (2011) writes of the need to form 'ethical relationships with nature' which may expand our thinking about the economy to recognise the diverse labours and exchanges in the 'more-than-human-world'. For instance, the vital work of bee populations or the essential filtering system provided by crayfish in our waterways both contribute to the survival of human and more-than-human species. As noted by Rose's (2014) ethnographical work, every species plays a role in keeping ecosystems healthy.

If a relationship of respectful connectivity were to be embraced, it would demand change in land and water usage. For instance, the use of Western agricultural systems in Country too arid to sustain them and diversion of water from more-than-human-populations fail to equally appreciate the role of nature in the human-nature relationship, prioritising androcentric values. A paradigm shift towards a more synergistic relationship with Country by all Australians demands empathy with our environment and deeper appreciation of how human survival is dependent upon nature. As purported by Hawke (2012), it would demand a more expansive economy, one far beyond simplistic commodification of natural resources. Aboriginal spirituality, which undergirds such use and contributes to the common good, has much to offer, including the values of interdependence, cooperation, waste

avoidance and resource sharing that permeate Aboriginal ways of being and doing (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Many important lessons for survival and coping with environmental change may be derived from Aboriginal people's culture and experiences. Natural scientists now recognise the wisdom of Custodians and its significance for biodiversity with recent initiatives including increasing numbers of national parks jointly managed with Aboriginal communities and the growing number of Indigenous Protected Areas across Australia. Indeed, the importance of Indigenous ecological knowledge to survival in a changing landscape is not only recognised (Davies et al., 2013), but the potential for improved human health and conservation Indigenous biodiversity management offers is well documented (Nursey-Bray & Hill, 2010).

Conclusions

Aboriginal Australians survival of change wrought from colonisation is attenuated by a strong connection to Country as ancient as the land. Country embeds family history, contains stories of resilience and transformation, and, more recently, foretells survival of marginalisation. Country provides for Indigenous Australians by connecting cultural identity with a sense of 'place', 'belonging', and most importantly, acceptance. It facilitates unity through the shared experience of dispossession and a multi-layered identification system that is diverse yet central for Aboriginal people.

Human-nature relationships hold profound lessons for survival, particularly for rural and remote Australians. Aboriginal epistemology and ontology can help humanity confront the momentous biophysical implications of its own actions, including the necessary changes in land and water usage that must accompany it. Such change requires a cultural shift to transform how we live, work and play on Country. The relationship must be built on respect, rights and obligations in the care of our natural environment and prioritise fostering a deep understanding that the care of Country directly impacts our wellbeing and that of future generations in our human and more-than-human world.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Land is(land): Australian film lore

Neill Overton

Land is(land): Australian film lore

Loosely hinged doors flap in a blowfly haze; John Meillon slapping his wet dishtowel on the bar. A goods train unfurls like an endless necklace of rust, clanking out the minutes over the forever flat landscape. It is the opening scene of *Wake in Fright*; the indentured schoolteacher has done his best to scrub up besuited, hair slicked, suitcased, to make his holiday bid to escape Tiboonda, from salt-bush small town to... daydreaming of the sweat and sand of Bondi, and beers. It is a potent film image that dominates our conception of rural life, and evinces our eagerness to equate the small with the parochial. (figure 1) In art the parallel lies in the looming rib-cage trees Drysdale rudely parked in the uninhabited emptiness of small towns; all verandahs, brown sinews, and nothingness.¹ (figure 2)

Three competing mythologies have dominated Australian film lore; early Australian films projected concepts of Empire, defining our landscape in relation to a distant Britain. The narratives depicted parallels to painting tropes of an arid, hostile landscape requiring European conquest. Silent films such as *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927) construct visual landscape metaphors of Australia as both desert, and as island. (figure 3) Land is 'land' perceived as ownerless; terra nullius. The Antipodes rapidly became visually coded through film as the remote desert island upon which Britain's population detritus was marooned. Early major Australian films included *The Silence of Dean Maitland* in 1934, directed by Ken G. Hall, which offers a particular screen memory of an era of the British empire – against the historical memory of this period.

From silent rock-hewn prison, to *Walkabout* (1971) and *Wake in Fright* (1971) – the two key linchpin works of the Australian film renaissance of the 1970s, that visualised the interior of regional Australia as a place of unrelenting harshness and foreboding, into which white European settlers, and particularly children – simply disappear and become "lost". *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), directed by Peter Weir, epitomises Australian films echoing the visual codes of early Australian painting – established "the bush" as inhospitable predator, typified by Frederick McCubbin's painting *Lost* (1886), and embodying that which in 1876, the writer Marcus Clarke referred to as the "weird melancholy" of the Australian landscape.

(figures 4, 5) Since the 1970s, Australian films have been contesting these speculative fictions. Shifts in representations of the distant British empire in films that depict the past, became increasingly reflected in Australian cinema through concepts of “struggle” and the non-British story as history.

Professor Ann Curthoys is an Australian historian who has critically examined how objective history writing can purport to be, in particular towards representations of indigenous histories. In 2006, Curthoys scrutinized the divided “truths” of history writing through her propositions in *Is History Fiction?*, wherein she asks:

...is history fiction? Yet in asking if history is fiction, we are also seeking to explore (E.H.) Carr’s question, what is history? Like him, we ask about problems of historical truth, the relationship between the historian and the past, and questions of fact, value and interpretation.ⁱⁱ

There are reconstructions of differing periods of Australia’s history that have preoccupied our filmmaking, often as a reflection on the “immediate” past – usually about twenty years removed – and historical or period films paraded as a legitimizing “truth” of account, yet invariably they represent the time (and values) of the vantage point from which they were made... and how “Australian” or transatlantic our cultural identity was perceived as being.

Two Australian films shot fifty years apart featuring the same actor – Bill Kerr – are the platform of my discussion of shifting codes of representation of Australianness. *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1934) by Ken G. Hall, and *The Settlement* (1983) directed by Howard Rubie, chart how we identify the Australian voice in film, and our shifting view of the British empire in films representing the past. Bill Kerr was a child star from Wagga Wagga in musical theatre, revues, eisteddfods, and had early major film roles in Australian films. In 1934, he featured as the young son in *The Silence of Dean Maitland* – with cinematography by the lauded documentary photographer, Frank Hurley. (figure 6)

The Silence of Dean Maitland came from the book written by Maxwell Gray in 1886 in England, so it was already steeped in the mores of a bygone society that was being represented – from forty years previous. It was first made into a now-lost film in Australia in 1914 by Raymond Longford. The plot was of a young clergyman who seduces, or is seduced by, a young woman in the village who becomes pregnant. When her father finds them together, there is a struggle and Dean Maitland accidentally kills him. Circumstances arise whereby Maitland's best friend is accused of the murder, and Maitland allows him to be wrongly convicted for the crime and imprisoned for twenty years... Through his "silence".

Ken G. Hall described *The Silence of Dean Maitland* as "the film that saved Cinesound".ⁱⁱⁱ It was financially and critically a hugely successful film in Britain. It starred two imported British actors; John Longden had early success in England, notably in the first talking film released there in 1929 – Alfred Hitchcock's *Blackmail*, in which he had a leading role. He and his wife, Charlotte Francis, were touring the provinces in theatre productions for J. C. Williamson's in 1933 when Hall starred them in this film. According to Hall: "It was sold in England for a very big figure, far higher than any previous Australian film. Without ever saying the locale was England, I was able to suggest it very strongly by shooting the exteriors round a town which began as an early settlement: Camden, the birthplace of the wool industry, thirty miles south-west of Sydney. A long shot of the town, with its beautifully spired church on a hilltop, appears in the film as Belminster, which is a name English enough for anybody."^{iv}

And further Hall noted that: "John Longden, an experienced film actor dating from the late silent days, was tall, good-looking, with a good voice and, as you'd expect, excellent diction."^v This in the era where being elocuted to death was the barometer of breeding; and "excellent diction" meant drawing-room Britain. The generically veiled location of a church spire somewhere in a rustic corner of any imagined British village ensured its transatlantic success. (figure 7)

At Dean Maitland's death, his blind son sings "abide with me", as the windows open up towards a lofty cloudscape. It is British drawing-room melodrama. Noted film historian Graham Shirley, in *Australian Cinema - The First Eighty Years*, wrote: "After the wholehearted Australiana of the first two Cinesound films met with poor critical response in England, Hall had decided to feature a "reasonably glossy" look that incorporated settings and characters acceptable as either English or Australian."^{vi}

In his casting notes towards this film, Hall writes: "good diction, no accent". It is a film that readily disguises its Antipodean origins; aspiring to pass for British. It is only the immaturity of youth that is broadly strine of voice; as if the Australian vernacular is something one grows out of. It made far more money in Britain than in Australia – 40,000 pounds, a vast sum at the time – where it was released with no hint that it was Australian.^{vii}

Previously, Ken G. Hall's establishing films, such as *On Our Selection* (1932) traded on rampant Australiana. Yet the limitations of the Australian market caused him and other Australian filmmakers to seek transatlantic acceptance; the kleiglights of Hollywood loomed large in its melodramas. Hollywood and London offered us unfair terms of exchange, routinely requiring an imported lead actor or director to compensate for our presumed parochial taint.

In *Silence of Dean Maitland*, we strongly identify the Britishness of adult characters. The young boy played by Bill Kerr is allowed to be Australian of voice, like the working class men walking in to put ice in the ice-box. The "adult" voice is markedly British, it is educated, it is not the vulgar broad Australian tone crashing upon the ears. (figure 8) The object lesson is that when men grow up, they leave behind childish things such as Australian voice... a grown up is British, is white, is the cultured ABC voice aloft out of a bakelite radio. Coral Browne's voice was suitably transatlantic, as was Peter Finch's... shifting on occasion as he did from a very BBCed pukka ABC radio voice in the late 1930s, to the strine of *The Shiralee* (1957). In Peter Finch's first film, *Mr Chedworth Steps Out*, directed by Ken G. Hall in 1940 – even as a callow youth – Finch and his father (Cecil Kellaway) are British-voiced,

while working class people and boys are depicted as relentlessly unruly vulgarians yet to, or never to, “grow up”.

By way of contrast, the film *The Settlement* which was made in 1983 – is set in rural Australia in the 1950s, and relies rather more on “good accent, no diction”. The film begins with two drifters, Kearney and Martin, who have been on the tramp... wandering into the small town of Cedar Creek, working a con-game in the pub to swindle a few pounds. They move into an abandoned shack on the outskirts of town, and are soon joined by Joycie – the town barmaid with a past as a prostitute, and their unorthodox relationship unfolds. (figures 9, 10)

The “struggle” represented is not only against the unyielding Drysdale landscape, all skeleton rocks and parched bones of Cedar Creek, but against the still clammy hand of rural Catholic morality of the 1950s. The menage-a-trois taking place in the shack on the edge of town becomes the magnet for narrow minded prejudice. The white-gloved Catholic women of rural township as CWA mafia on the prowl. (figure 11)

John Jarratt, who may well end up best remembered for his Hannibal Lecter turn in *Wolf Creek* (2005), displays in *The Settlement* just how fine an intuitive, underplaying actor he always was. Lorna Lesley was nominated for an AFI award in 1983 for best actress for her role. One scene involves Kearney and Martin raising funds in a boxing tent-show, and like the end of days of the film *The Wild Bunch* (1969), this is part of the last smoke-trail of a disappearing culture. (figure 12)

It had taken an outsider, in Canadian director Ted Kotcheff, to take a cinematic scalpel to the Australian psyche in his film *Wake in Fright* (1971), and it coloured all the films that followed such as *The Settlement*... More directly than most, as Howard Rubie had been the first assistant director and Second Unit Director on *Wake in Fright*, which was shot in Broken Hill. So as a director, Rubie’s visual codes of seared landscape do stem from *Wake in Fright’s* palette.

ECO-HORROR

The term “eco-horror” gained credential in film criticism by 2010, disseminated through Catherine Simpson’s essay on Australian eco-horror in *Studies in Australasian Cinema*; it was Simpson’s stated eco-postcolonial position to define genres of Australian film where nature itself was responding to our trespass and intrusion. The landscape recoiled with killer crocodiles in films such as *Dark Age* (1987), relentless rain and hailstones in Peter Weir’s *The Last Wave* (1977) or in particular in *Razorback* (1984) with a giant feral *Razorback* pig. It goes without saying that the lead role in *Razorback* of the wild-boar hunter, Jake Cullen, was played by Bill Kerr... my theory being that everything in the known world is only one degree of separation from Wagga Wagga. (figure 13) In *Razorback* the killer boar is a largely unseen terror of shuddering tin sheds, wreathed in blue smokey haze, or the kinetic clang of windmills in a blur of farmyard mud. 900 pounds of tusks and trotters. But the true eco-horror of *Razorback* may well lie in the Broken Hill landscape itself where it was shot. In effect; it is the landscape as protagonist. (figure 14)

Catherine Simpson sees the film *Razorback* in terms of the relationships which evolved between co-existing animals and inhabitants, rather than the landscape itself. She writes:

Razorback’s pigs have morphed into monsters that exist in a sinister symbiotic relationship with the workers at the Pet-pak factory whose livelihood depends on the slaughter of kangaroos (O’Regan 1996).^{viii}

The *Razorback* pig becomes at once outback yeti, abominable and mythological, disappeared the way of the Tasmanian tiger... or rather of conjured creatures. Its threat is that of Jurassic Park, a shudder of louvre blinds in the seeping orange night, or the heft and rattling of corrugated tin as its dumb weight charges towards an open shed under slashing overhead fan blades... It even features a highly surreal kangaroo hunt at night, part grand guignol and part kinetic homage to *Wake in*

Fright's seminal, real horror of spotlight kangaroo hunting at night. There is a fluid conjoining of landscape as primal monster, and mythological Australian beast at work in *Razorback*. (figure 15) It is an underrated film, for which Dean Semler justly won the AFI award for best cinematography in 1984, prior to his going on to win the Academy Award for cinematography for *Dances with Wolves* (1990) directed by Kevin Costner. Suffice it to say, he is the quintessential cinematographer of eulogies to landscapes fading into history's forgotten wells.

According to Simpson:

Using what I call an eco-postcolonial framework, I argue that, first, in their attitudes to foreigners, tourists and/or trespassers as 'prey', these films extend postcolonial anxieties over settler Australian notions of belonging. In the second section, drawing on the work of Val Plumwood, I argue that the existence of large predators like the crocodile challenges the notion of human mastery over nature.^{ix}

This uncomfortably conflates two separate types of engagement with the tropes of "the inhospitable landscape" theatre of Australian art – the landscape as sentient entity rejecting the European voice and footstep pervades *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), and the Aboriginal as black-boogiemán shadow of *The Last Wave* (1977), an overrated early work by Peter Weir that mythologises the urban Aborigine as voodoo-mystic. Terra-terror is invested here in the creeping horror of rain and flood, but the film is so immersed in tone that its narrative grinds haltingly, and then inconclusively peters out by film's end.

The landscape as narrative spur does not always fit the convenient definitions of "eco-horror" from Simpson, which tend to fall over when ascribed too liberally to other genres of Australian film, including *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). The landscape itself at Hanging Rock is not an "eco-horror", it merely resists our colonial view of the Australian landscape as a place to be fenced off, subjugated, or

manicured. The film is held suspended in its mythical leanings by the cinematography of Russell Boyd, whose palette consciously recomposed Australian Impressionism's Mentone painting strokes of saturated heat haze, and dream-states. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* never animates itself in any horrific means; rather it is we, the white settlers who are completely misplaced, as the film sinks further into a buttery somnambulism.

Given the largesse with which the term "eco-horror" has been so widely applied by film critics, I prefer the term I myself coined of "terra-terror"... Wherein the earth itself rails against human intervention. The harshness of the landscape rebounds, and its marked resistance to European settlement and roping off, is in marked distinction to genres of mutated beasts or conjured science fiction scenarios. "Terra-terror" applies to *Burke and Wills* (1985), and any film whereby European ignorance and underestimation of the land prompts their own destruction.

"Terra nullius" is the Latin term for land owned by no one, which may be "claimed through occupation". It rests on the premise that the occupier is absent. In film critique, in proposing the term "terra-terror" – which is fear of the landscape itself, and the reprisals it enacts – this echoes the peculiarly Australian condition of European invasion from the British based on their prevailing doctrine of "terra nullius". The ecology is not predator in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975)... rather it is we who are displaced in this environment, just as in the film of *Burke and Wills* (1985) or *Walkabout* (1971) for that matter, beginning as it does with John Meillon's odd, nervous breakdown demise and a VW in flames leaving the schoolgirl and her brother walking off balefully into the interior. We represent white colonists who have ventured too far. To the point where arid red desert folds back like a crumpled bed-sheet to reclaim itself. It is a desert teeming with animal life, writhing under a celestial microscope; at once intensely visual and hallucinatory. (figure 16)

JEDDA

Both films, *The Silence of Dean Maitland* and *The Settlement*, albeit fifty years between, position organised religion as the dark enemy on the hill – whether Anglican or Catholic – both denoted by their unadorned hypocrisy, which in turn leads to downfall. Ken G. Hall's 1930s film was a document of religion's gradual disappearance from social dominance, that by the 1950s of *The Settlement's* time period is reduced to a shopfront of cucumber sandwiches, frocks and white-gloved suppression.

Religion and white settler moralism is the pervading undercurrent which governs the film *Jedda*, directed in 1955 by Charles Chauvel. The importance of *Jedda* as a first in Australian film is its casting of not one, but two Aboriginal leads, who carry the narrative of the film. Ngarla and Tudawali, and its central theme is of miscegenation; of a young Aboriginal baby girl Jedda, adopted by the white wife of the station owner, and by the time she is 16 years old is increasingly stranded between two different cultures. (figure 17) The film's perspective of land is a patrician one, of needing to protect the young girl Jedda from "going native" and being lured away by Tudawali's seductive tribal song-cry echoing plaintively across the empty night. Tudawali as Marbuk is depicted in fearful tones as a purveyor of dark magic, all antipodean voodoo doll rituals on screen. In stark opposition is the role of the half-caste foreman Joe, who is portrayed as attempting to civilise and better himself in shirts and trousers, and with a thoroughly Eton accent, as opposed to Tudawali who refuses to wear white clothing, and proudly displays the marking of tribal scarification, and is lurking at vision's edge as a mesmerising, stone-age savage.

In England, the film was released under the title of *Jedda – the Uncivilized*, with the poster campaign of: "The magic of the native mating call was stronger than the habits of civilization." (figure 18) This zombie-brush has been lushly applied to the Aborigine in Australian film lore. It is part of what the Bundjalung curator and art historian Djon Mundine referred to in 2014 as Australian films that are Aboriginal gothic; with indigenous characters lurking there as the dangerous creature from the Freudian Id; the shadow-other.^x

Yet importantly the film *Jedda* does convey the different perspective to landscape that the Aboriginal view encompasses. The land is seen through assertions of its spiritual significance. It mounts our first filmic speculative narratives about Aboriginal anchorage to place; which more recent films including *The Tracker* (2002), *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002), *Ten Canoes* (2006), *Samson and Delilah* (2009), *Charlie's Country* (2013) and *Mystery Road* (2013) have built upon. The land itself in the film *Jedda*, is characterised as if it is a sentient siren call to primitivism, and more so to "those people". The Aborigines on the property play in the dirt and ready themselves to go walkabout, and "civilisation" begins and ends at the flywire screen door on the wide board verandah.

If the attitudes of the stockman's wife, Sarah McMann, in *Jedda* are a view of the inability of the wild Aborigine to assimilate, then these views find equal voice in Elsa Chauvel's own account of the film's making. Elsa Chauvel was Charles Chauvel's wife and collaborator in production of his films. The 16 year old "Ngarla", (Rosalie Kunoth, who played *Jedda*), lived with the Chauvels during the making of *Jedda* for six months, of which time Elsa Chauvel writes in her biography:

On Sundays Ngarla would wear her pretty blue dress and go to church with us. She looked so attractive with not a button or a bow out of place. She would arrive back home and within five minutes would be tumbling and rolling all over the lawn like a wild puppy, until her dress was a rag and her brown legs a mass of scratches from the shrubs and rose bushes.^{xi}

This statement from Elsa Chauvel could slip seamlessly into the film's scripting of the character of the station-owner's wife, and undoubtedly did mirror that character's role, in the equating of pristine cleanliness as a white virtue, racially undermined by the seemingly ingrained Aboriginal disposition - in this case romping like a "wild puppy". Or as author Jane Mills specified in her book on *Jedda* in 2012, Sarah McMann institutes her separatist protections across *Jedda*'s life, to pry her away from the "uncivilised" trappings of her Aboriginal tribe:

Here, as throughout the film, cleanliness and propriety stand for whiteness, while dirt and disruption stand for Aboriginality.^{xii}

Mythologies of transgression and of “otherness” depicted in relationship to the (absent) parent country began to embrace regionalism. The film *Jedda* (1955), from director Charles Chauvel, identifies differing indigenous/white European concepts of landscape as protagonist – and of our sense of ownership or occupation of land. Current filmmakers are actively interrogating our colonial past – excavating Australian film lore’s perpetuating visual notions of Australian landscape as unused, dormant; awaiting European intervention. Themes of miscegenation were prevalent in Hollywood by 1946 – notably in *Duel in the Sun* with Jennifer Jones as a “half-caste” Native American girl, and Chauvel had visited Hollywood with every intention of making an epic “kangaroo Western” back in Australia that might bestride Katherine Gorge in the way that John Ford was casting his sweeping, horizontal lens across an unrelenting rocky Utah and Monument Valley.

ALTERITY

David Stratton reflected on the wave of Australian cinema between 1980 to 1990 (some 270 feature films) in his book *The Avocado Plantation*, to provide a strategic insight into what genres were funded and why in this period. Of which he wrote:

During the 80s, it became fashionable in some quarters to denigrate the historical Australian film. Some commentators referred, derisively, to the ‘AFC films’ – whatever that meant – to attack films dealing with the country’s past. Some filmmakers, funding bodies, even critics were intimidated by this misplaced aversion to the historical subject, and yet some of the best, and most successful, films of the decade were stories based on historical events.^{xiii}

He then cites *Gallipoli* (1981), “which remains, for many, *the* Australian film. It was a subject Peter Weir had been trying to make for several years.”^{xiv} This film legitimized historical “narratives” about the past as a viable Australian lore.

This is why the discourse put forward by Ann Curthoys is so vital to the current 2015-2016 reassessment of the ways in which we view history as enacted speculation, and additionally why Catherine Simpson's positions regarding horror/genres and how we attach these modern myths to Australian films, particularly those in Australia since 1970 – is wrenched wide open in this current dissection. We remain seduced by the grand mythologizings of the infinite pioneering Western movie, which turned since the 1940s for fresh blood to the unknown deserts of inland Australia as untapped, dark story mines.

Notably, regarding reviews in Britain of *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975):

David Robinson in *The Times*, 21st May 1975, found the qualities of John Ford in the film's perception of 'a sort of grandeur in people of the most limited horizons and spirits'. The film was also compared by film reviewer Ken Wlaschin in *Films and Filming*, August 1975, who likened the view of male companionship to the work of Howard Hawks.^{xv}

This comparison to the two key American directors of Westerns underscores the pictorial use of severe, endlessly horizontal, clay dust saddle-tramp vistas as a template for Antipodean western lore.

In considering film as if it is some type of iron-clad vessel of supposed truth about history – it is worth invoking Jean Baudrillard's views regarding the photograph, as the ghost-trace left behind; the disappearance of everything else but the photograph itself as memory-resonator. It is the bullet casing discovered at the crime scene. In short:

Every photographed object is simply the trace left behind by the disappearance of everything else. It's almost a perfect crime, an almost total final solution, as it were, for a world which projects only the illusion of this or that object, which the photograph

then transforms – absent from the rest of the world, withdrawn from the rest of the world – into an unseizable enigma.^{xvi}

This Baudrillardian concept transfers itself to the forensic evidence shards left behind by “the film” as a document of a privileged, or rather “separated out” trail of truthful account. For every filmed object – the historic reality is identified only through its simulated reenactment on screen; as the object carrier of this virus of knowledge.

WAKE IN FRIGHT

Wake in Fright is permeated by shifts in the heat betokening the lead character John Grant’s emotional decline; locked into immobility within the land as prison; as isolated island exactly as it had been for Marcus Clarke’s *For the Term of His Natural Life*. (figure 19) The type of mateship on trial in *Wake in Fright* (1971) to the stranded schoolteacher is one of sun-bleached Broken Hill recast as “the Yabba”, where the constant question to any outsider is:

“New to the Yabba?”, he asked, inevitably, holding a great stem of yellow flame to Grant’s cigarette...^{xvii}

It is not *Gallipoli*’s mateship forged in adversity, but of fierce, white inland xenophobia and of perceived intruders. Welcome and inclusion comes at grave cost, in a town either beyond law, or ruled by its own straitjacketed codes. David Stratton also noted, in terms of mateship’s leathery underbelly, that: “The Mad Max films use the landscape of the Australian outback with extraordinary imagination.”^{xviii} And elaborated on that with: “And the links with Hollywood westerns (with the classic plot of Indians attacking the fort) are strong.”^{xix} In fact, Australian film history could not have gestated a more neo-Shane figure as lone western hero than Max Rockatansky; albeit set in a pocked, scorched dystopian future.

In terms of the constructed “otherness” of Australian cinema, Tom O’Regan identified that:

Every feature of Australian storytelling discussed so far ‘fits’ to some degree this othering of the Australian: its situation between the melodrama and the art film, its centring types and social observation, its freaks and monsters, and its subsidiary stream of excoriations of Australian lifeways. All these turn on establishing relations of alterity between the audience and what is on-screen.^{xx}

Not enough credit is accorded by film scholars to Chips Rafferty’s commitment to maintain filmmaking in this country in the 1950s. The cattle station or rugged, individualist bushman films he made included *The Phantom Stockman* (1953), and *The King of the Coral Sea* (1954) produced by Chips Rafferty’s own determinedly Australian based company, and directed by his collaborator Lee Robinson. They also co-produced *Walk into Paradise* (1956), committed to resuscitating the ailing Australian film industry. *Walk into Paradise* (1956) pits an ill-fitting band of travellers against unrelenting nature. It is fitting that Chips Rafferty’s last on screen film performance was to give us the seminal figure of the police sergeant in *Wake in Fright* (1971), marking as that film did the canonic rebirth of the Australian film renaissance. As the director Ted Kotcheff noted in 2009, “It was the last film of the great Australian cinema actor Chips Rafferty and the first film of the outstanding Jack Thompson.”^{xxi} A more symbolic handing over of the torch could not have been choreographed – given how astoundingly brilliant Chips Rafferty’s last, valedictory screen performance was. Some future film historian may well write similarly of Jack Thompson’s performance in *Mystery Road* (2013) as marking another generational changing of the guard.

WESTERNS

The Antipodes as a place of mystery, dread... imagination’s last repository of seared earth. In painting and then film, it was encoded in images as another type of darkest

Africa that could be sent back to Britain. Later, this otherness was in relation to America, who saw the exoticness of inner Australia as another frontier landscape of pioneers triumphing over the harshness of desert and hostile natives. Charles Chauvel was markedly in thrall to the American western film when he made *Jedda* in 1955. It is known as a first in Australian film history for two key reasons; it is lauded as the first colour film made in Australia. Yes and no; the film *Kangaroo* (1952) preceded it by several years, but was not an Australian production. It was made in Australia, featuring American leads in Peter Lawford and Maureen O'Hara, and was directed by the American director Lewis Milestone.

For Chauvel, the second distinctive factor of *Jedda* was in its boldness of casting Aboriginal leads – which was undoubtedly fuelled by Hollywood genre trends towards exploring the “half-caste” in Westerns, and his sense of courting transatlantic success by representing on screen the exotic, tribal wildness of the uniquely Australian aborigine. That said, the patrician landowner's motives espoused in the film towards caring for the Aborigine are also editorial views of Charles Chauvel's own genuine intent towards the Aboriginal people. It is a considerable advocacy for respect for Aboriginal cultural mores, as muddled as the film *Jedda* becomes by gothic demonising.

Regarding Ivan Sen's more recent outback noir, *Goldstone* (2016), the critic of *The Guardian* newspaper Luke Buckmaster, writes:

Goldstone belongs to a suite of Australian films that contemplate land ownership in memorable ways, from 1932's *On Our Selection* to 1950's *Bitter Springs* and even 1997's *The Castle*. But it has more weight than any of them, because the film's spiritual roots hark back to the traditional owners of the land. In a small but moving role David Gulpilil plays a man who cannot be bought; his soul is connected to the ground and the sky.^{xxii}

Australian landscape is a place not only of competing mythologies, but conflicting histories. It has been constructed through speculative fictions that “model” its history

for us in literature, painting, film, theatre, and in history writing itself. “The Antipodes” was framed as a place of nameless dread; the bleached bone terrors of an arid, inhospitable inland desert that would consume the jettisoned convict, or pioneering white settler in its unforgiving, orange dust maw.

Riding parallel to this shadowed psyche of “land” were the suppressed histories of indigenous relationship to country and place. Our colonial culture, tea-stained by anglophilia, pursued unsustainable farming and mining practices that led to degradation of the land itself. Hindsight, that rear-vision mirror we seldom bother to glance at, tells us that we have strip-mined the land through blind deference to the false gods of petrol and coal. Slag heaps, tailings and toxic waterways are left as if inevitable scars of “progress”; to the extent that *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and *Razorback*’s Pet-pak factory are spreadeagled documentaries of degradation, cosy mangles of scrapyards left rusted out in the sun of an inevitable Australian near-future filmscape. (figure 20)

The deeply iconic film *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975) also stages itself in an historic period that has recently elapsed; the outset of the shearers’ strike in the mid 1950s. Made to reflect upon an Australia only twenty years removed, the film trades and treads in the mire of nostalgia; the longing for a disappeared clarity left tantalisingly dry on the memory shelf; of still living recollections of an FJ Holden car rolling and tumbling wildly in the dirt – nary a seat-belt in sight. The “fin de siècle” is an oft revisited theme in Australian film, or rather in the sense of aspects of rural culture becoming rapidly lost; firmly underlined in *The Settlement*’s use of the boxing tent show travelling regional Australia as history metaphor of eclipsed societies. In *Sunday Too Far Away*, it is the ennobled worker on the land, and dogged realisms of drink and male mateship; its pictorial codes plainly shuffle the cards of Tom Roberts into view. It was said of *Sunday Too Far Away* that: “it is a romantic glorification of the Australian itinerant worker, the shearer, but it is a glorification of him as he really was.”^{xxiii} This is a rather prescient description of the see-saw of historical truth and fiction in its film incarnation. Is this depiction of the shearer’s life a history, or is it as romanticised as various odes to bushrangers and convicts? (figures 21, 22)

Charles Chauvel's motives were arguably less to do with evangelical zeal about Aboriginal regard for the meaning of land, than his own then recent trips to America. He saw in *Jedda* the opportunity to make a film of great appeal to the American market – a “kangaroo western”, which after the success of *The Overlanders* in 1946 with Chips Rafferty, had become the term given to this genre of cowboy western pasted upon the weird melancholy of the Australian bush as its exotic backdrop. For Ealing studios, the British producers who made *The Overlanders* here, the Australian desert was one which could readily be seen as a marginal outpost of Empire, with heroic white settlers struggling to assert essentially British values in spite of the relentless droughts, and skirmishes with hostile natives. In *Jedda*, Charles Chauvel could construct a western chase epic of the young kidnapped girl Jedda, being tracked by a white posse hunting the renegade native warrior Tudawali. (figure 23) The shadow of John Ford's epic American westerns looms large over the style and structure Chauvel sought. Katherine Gorge was to Chauvel the landscape as intervening protagonist, in the exact and exacting way that John Ford has inscribed Monument Valley in Utah on western films as more than picturesque backdrop, but the vast instigator of events – from *Stagecoach* (1939) with John Wayne on into celluloid elegy. Like Ford, Chauvel was essentially a locationist director intent on landscape realisms and the scale of nature.

If Chauvel's hand was firmly on the pulse of Hollywood success, the opposite of this was to be found in Ken G. Hall's gaze towards London and British film. In the 1950s, Cinesound pictures and indeed all filmmaking in Australia cranked rapidly to a halt – barring Chips Rafferty's three film productions. But Australian film post World War Two lacked sufficient government support, and local audience. In the mid 1950s, Ken G. Hall moved on to become the head of Channel 9, and to produce our early television shows here.

Film historian Andrew Pike refers to this ebb tide of the Australian film industry as a clear “boom and bust” cycle preceding the 1970s Australian film renaissance:

The past, in terms of Australian feature film production, is a distant one. After a short burst of activity between 1910 and 1912, the production of feature films declined sharply and continued at a level of rarely more than 10 features a year until World War II. Efforts to revive production after the disruptions caused by the war failed, and during the 1950s and 1960s only a few locally made features were completed. This period of inactivity ended abruptly, however, in 1970; new people had come to dominate production, beliefs in the nature of a viable industry had altered, and the films being made bore little resemblance to earlier work.^{xxiv}

My essay deliberately draws upon the bibliographies of this post 1970s resuscitation, of Australian film histories of the 1970s to 1990s, to realign them with the more recent endeavours by film scholars to find differing conceptions of Australian film genres in this period of scrutiny of landscape as eco-horror since 2010. It is mistaken to view eco-horror as other than a fashionable international cycle towards zombies, the undead, mutations and morphing, werewolves and cyborgs, in varying incarnations. In Australian terms, terra-terror is far more appropriate in identifying a localised Australian film genre. We have no monsters, other than *here*.

From Tracey Moffatt's more arthouse films, to the current expansions of indigenous film which changed markedly with *Ten Canoes* (2006) by Rolf de Heer, first placing indigenous language on film, and to contemporary Aboriginal filmmakers such as Warwick Thornton directing *Samson and Delilah* (2009), and his focus on present day survival issues for youth in remote Aboriginal communities... there is a shift in the gaze of this land, and of being in country. Current indigenous directors such as Warwick Thornton and Ivan Sen are markedly challenging the colonial white filmmaking paradigms and its "ownership" of white history. Warwick Thornton views film as still a relatively emergent media, and one best suited culturally to be made in and of the landscape, and as such to recalibrate indigenous oral histories. According to Thornton:

Cinema is a very new thing. We can use it to create a new 'Dreaming', and turn our oral history into celluloid to keep our culture alive. Culture needs to move, it can't be

chiseled into rock. I made *Samson and Delilah* to show how resilient and strong Aboriginal children are.^{xxv}

The landscape iconography perhaps registers strongest in a film such as *Mystery Road* (2013), where director Ivan Sen addresses an indigenous police officer estranged from his own community. Aridity, and the status of the “half-caste”, continues in the wake of *Jedda* to perpetuate themes of displacement – or in this case an Aboriginal man straddling two cultures – his heritage with his own people, and that of being in the police force, subject to that culture of European law and privilege. This displaced Aboriginal detective is played by Aaron Pedersen. It continues to retrace the *Jedda* sense of miscegenation, and of an Aboriginal character held transfixed between two cultures. *Mystery Road* (2013) continues the Chauvel engagement with the “kangaroo Western” although Ivan Sen is a deft, genre crossing filmmaker sliding albeit effortlessly into outback crime noir, taken further in his sequel of *Goldstone* (2016). (figure 24)

In terms of speculative fictions, wherein a film casts itself as being an historic narrative, depictive truth of an earlier time-period, or retelling of a known narrative – the film by Rolf de Heer of *The Tracker* (2002) achieves a multi-layered perspective that is at once “white settler”, but subverted throughout by the stronger iterations of competing indigenous truths regarding memory, fact, and the positing of lived memory, in its use of the living land as more than backdrop but catalyst in actions transpiring there. And not inconsequentially, its lead actor David Gulpilil, who since his first screen role in *Walkabout* (1971) is now more than a “film actor” in terms of the indigenous authority of his presence both on and off the screen.

In reflecting on the legitimacy and intention of history as “faction”, (itself a rather terrible term alluding to fiction generated to fill gaps in otherwise real, factual, historical accounts) in 2011, Ann Curthoys summarised the essential enquiry, as “history dead and live”, in short:

A perennially troubling issue for historians is, ‘how can we understand the

Past from the vantage point of the present?’ How do we both acknowledge our present day standpoint and at the same time fully recognise the alterity of the past, its profound otherness?^{xxvi}

Ultimately, she links this to Benedetto Croce’s proposition that:

Accounts of the past that do not relate to an interest in the present are, in Croce’s view, mere chronicle. This idea, that we write history out of the urgent concerns of the present, has been taken up by a variety of subsequent thinkers about the nature of history, notably Collingwood and Foucault.^{xxvii}

Do we only ever write history out of its symbiotic, urgent mirroring of concerns of the present? Is Peter Weir’s *Gallipoli* (1981) only written (by David Williamson) in the solid shadow of the Vietnam war? Is the motive in the surge of late 1970s period piece Australian films to find some firmer, legitimised, in fact Europeanised cinematic pacing more in line with then-prevalent European arthouse films? Undoubtedly, it was the local film industry’s need to find “serious” or literary adaptations, such as *My Brilliant Career* (1979), or *We of the Never Never* (1982) – to balance out the perception of Australian film as only being of the knockabout early populist *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972) and *Alvin Purple* (1973) kind. The film that best straddled the literary and broad ocker comedy genres was the wildly inventive *Stork* (1971), written as it was by David Williamson, with his acute vernacular ear for language and real situations.

Greg Clarke writes somewhat in rebuttal of Curthoys that:

Historians also realised that the majority had adopted a specific form—that of the historical novel. Could historians use other forms while still writing history rather than fiction (e.g. first-person narration, multiple viewpoints, commentary on photos)?^{xxviii}

The implications of this transplanted to critique of film culture has been to the speculative fictions assembled on screen purporting to detail real historical events, such as the Ealing imported directors working on *Eureka Stockade* (1949), with Chips Rafferty. This is history writ large, or Brit large, dragged with a rather wildly miscast finger through the facts. Clarke raises a telling concern regarding why history writers bridge fiction in the manner they choose to do – the historical fiction novel can avoid fictionalising “the gaps” in account and take on the need for investing authority in one, singular “authorial voice”, or as Clarke states:

Historians who write are implicated in the histories they write. In other words, one author’s history is not the same as another’s. However, this authorial involvement need not be determinative, nor does it stop their account from being historical.^{xxix}

ECO-HORROR II

Eco-horror films in Australia, black hand in white glove, exist uneasily with the demonised celluloid Antipodean voodoo of the evil or untamed “other” represented by Aboriginal presence. It is also the Antipodes as the last great untamed western frontier. The term Aboriginal gothic is referred to by Djon Mundine, in accounting for depictions of the film variants of Aboriginal presence as “suppressed primal fears that surface in celluloid dreams. From Fred Schepisi's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) to Tracey Moffatt's *Bedevil* (1993).^{xxx} It began with the character of Marbuck as played by Tudawali in *Jedda*, and found further form as some kind of Aboriginal witchdoctor-bone-pointing in Peter Weir’s *The Last Wave* (1977). Aboriginality is in Australian film lore since the 1970s always lurking at the edges of screen, as the dangerous, partly seen creature from the Freudian Id. Primitive, primal, unsanctioned by the governance of society.^{xxxi} Djon Mundine notably related this to the Ray Bradbury book, *The Martian Chronicles*, wherein the colonisers had

removed all trace of the inhabitants, yet they still remained there as a shadow presence.^{xxxii}

The Last Wave (1977) tends to be retrospectively revered because it is a Peter Weir film; from this director whose filmmaking skills parlayed into international success through the contemplative *Witness* (1985) and *Dead Poets Society* (1989). But *The Last Wave*'s reputation rests on its thematic inclusion of Aboriginality in urban Australia. As daring as the film is, it is not successful as cultural tract, in that its depictions of urban Aboriginality careen into the voodoo-mystic realm way too wholeheartedly. Sudden hailstorms in the desert, and downpourings of black rain herald some magic supernatural event; intimated but never realised. It is a tacit blaxploitation film. Weir's films of this period all seem to be diversely seeking a philosophical undercurrent of mysticism and strange magic in and through nature and the land. (figure 25)

Film theorist Andrew Pike summarised Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*'s presence as invoking: "The awe-inspiring power of the Australian bush, which alienates some and hypnotically absorbs others."^{xxxiii} It is a cinematography of hypnosis, of a vaselined lens and smoke-stained disappearance as the white petals of girls slip forever into gaps in the rocks. It is the low keyed palette of the Australian Impressionist paintings remade into moving picture; as if a Frederick McCubbin camera panning through muslin.

Peter Weir's first feature film *The Cars that Ate Paris* (1974) was actually a schlock drive-in theatre picture, marinated in its own bush township horror genre – certainly not terra-terror, but more crazy townsfolk mass killers... *Deliverance* (1972) without the banjos. Weir only fully realized his epic vision as a history/speculative fiction filmmaker in *Gallipoli* (1981), where every aspect of this film coheres in the assured stature of script-as-history-truth, narrative resolve, acting and an emotional power of *place*.

In Ross Gibson's chapter *Formative Landscapes*, in Scott Murray's anthology *Australian Cinema*, he examined the role of "the landscape" as societal map in depicting our competed Australian histories in film.^{xxxiv} Film representation has been motivated by the concept of an identifiable nationalism. There is something quite flawed and phoney in Australian films using "landscape" as the rally cry of an homogenous national myth. As Gibson states:

The landscape-cinema has asserted Australia's difference from the rest of the world, and it has also asserted the nation's singularity of constitution within its own boundaries. That is to say, there has been an attempt to portray 'us' as one people growing to maturity and confidence 'together'. Films such as *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *The Man from Snowy River* (1982), and *We of the Never Never* (1982), have said, 'Here is the key to our identity... Here are the myths that we need.' They have been presented as 'generically Australian.'^{xxxv}

CONCLUSION

The genre term "eco-horror" arose by 2007 in relation to semi-documentary films of ecological horror, but Simpson confirmed it further in application to fictional horror films, or ecology overturning. This was the "nature gone wild" genre of mutated rats, rogue crocodiles, killer sharks of *Jaws*, or piranha – either real or mutated. The natural horror of the rugged Australian inland has generated a ready post 1970s identification with the horror genre of filmmaking; much in the manner that the remoteness of Antarctica gives rise to films like *The Thing* (1982) of mutated invasions locked down in a distant base in the snow. Australia is a naturally arid Petri dish for this type of film of lost world isolation, or of landscapes presumed to be removed from modernity. The problem or rather inaccuracy with this which I identified earlier is that it bundles together very dissimilar films indiscriminately.

In arriving at a philosophy of Natural Horror as a contemporary worldwide film genre, Ben Woodward writes:

Natural horror has become an unremarkable part of the larger horror canon - giant animals terrorizing humankind has been part of horror film for almost a hundred years. The films generally fall into Hadot's Orphic/Promethean split: either nature or one element of nature is 'unbalanced' by humanity or it centres on scientists playing god with nature.^{xxxvi}

Contained in this is the forefront question of horror film narrative as either intervention in the land, through the intrusions of science or strip-mining, fracking and slagheaps... or the primal, untouched, terra nullius concept of the seemingly unbuilt environment of pristine landscape rising up with volcanic revenge against being despoiled.

In both cases humans are set apart and we reap the disruption of our existence in, yet separate from, nature due to our lack of understanding or our over-understanding of it.^{xxxvii}

Ann Curthoys had this later reflection on her earlier work (of 2006) to offer in 2011, namely:

In a book I wrote with John Docker, called *Is History Fiction?*, we argued that history is both like and unlike fiction, in that it has a double character. History is on the one hand a rigorous search for truth about the past based on a study of the traces that the past leaves behind, in documents, memories, visual images, landscapes. On the other, it is a form of narrative that shapes accounts of the past in particular, culture-specific ways, the narrative form being not embroidery or decoration but an integral part of the search for truth about how and why things happened the way they did.^{xxxviii}

But our selections as to *which* histories/fictions we will write is inevitably always through the lens of what we are compelled to evidence about the *present*. Our hindsight is a mirror with a written warning that things in it may seem closer than they are. Film as the only speculative fiction that will survive in our virtual libraries weighs

in heavily through its evident, depictive verisimilitudes: as Jean Baudrillard would have us see, as the remaining barometer of history-truth. The film *Gladiator* (2000) may yet prove to be the only “library tract” or “visual text” left in our collective inheritance as a history of the Roman empire. Moving image and 360 degree rapid editing trumps vellum bound written tome every time in this false contest between history and fiction. Australian film history has little manifest truth housed in its back catalogue; it offers us instead since 1906 varied, skewed parades of discordant interaction with this land and its inhabitants, largely lit up by fear and xenophobia – the image of the endlessly tall, rangy Chips Rafferty as the lean drover... may well be all that winds up jutting out of that 39th century future beach next to the half-buried Statue of Liberty. (figure 26)

FIGURES



Figure 1: Unrelenting shimmering heat of *Wake in Fright* (1971) d: Ted Kotcheff



Figure 2: Russell Drysdale *The Rabbiters* 1947 oil on canvas 77 x 102cms

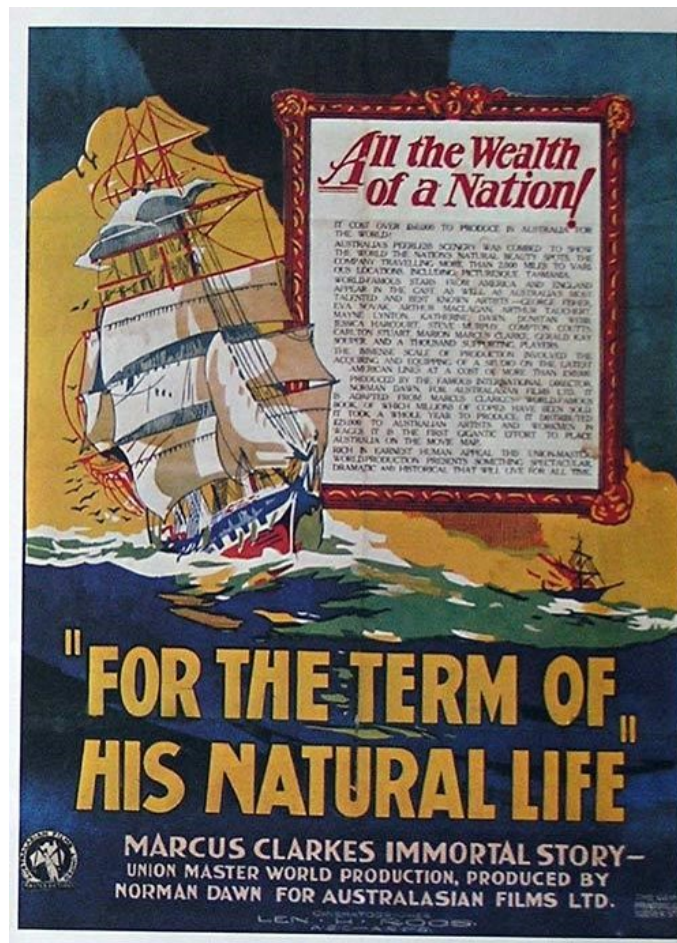


Figure 3: Land (is)land. *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927) d: Norman Dawn



Figure 4: *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) d: Peter Weir



Figure 5: Frederick McCubbin *Lost* 1886 oil on canvas 116 x 74cms



Figure 6: Bill Kerr (as the blind boy) in *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1934) d: Ken G. Hall. Cinematography by Frank Hurley.



Figure 7: John Longden in *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1934)



Figure 8: John Longden and Billy Kerr in Ken G. Hall's *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1934)



Figure 9: Bill Kerr and John Jarratt in *The Settlement* (1983) d:
Howard Rubie



Figure 10: Bill Kerr and Lorna Lesley in the shack at the edge of town in *The Settlement* (1983) d: Howard Rubie



Figure 11: Russell Drysdale *Shopping day* 1953 oil on canvas 59 x 75cms



Figure 12: Bill Kerr and John Jarratt in *The Settlement* (1983)... the end of days of the travelling boxing tent shows.



Figure 13: Bill Kerr as hunter Jake Cullen in *Razorback* (1984) d: Russell Mulcahy



Figure 14: Bill Kerr as an obsessive wild boar hunter in the AFI Award winning horror film *Razorback* (1984).



Figure 15: Terra-terror of the landscape itself at Broken Hill.
Razorback (1984).

d: Russell Mulcahy, cinematography Dean Semler.



Figure 16: *Walkabout* (1971) d: Nicholas Roeg. Starring David Gulpilil, Jenny Agutter and Lucien John.



Figure 17: *Jedda* (1955) d: Charles Chauvel. Starring 'Ngarla' Kunoth, and Tudawali.



Figure 18: The advertising of *Jedda 'the Uncivilized'* in Britain, much against director Charles Chauvel's objections.



Figure 19: Inland Australian township of Tiboonda which begins *Wake in Fright* (1971).

d: Ted Kotcheff, starring Gary Bond and Chips Rafferty.



Figure 20: The lineage of the Antipodean Western... *Razorback* (1984)



Figure 21: Jack Thompson in *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975) d: Ken Hannam



Figure 22: Tom Roberts *Shearing the Rams* 1888-90 oil on canvas
122 x 187cms



Figure 23: Tudawali as the rogue Aborigine, Marbuck, luring and kidnapping Jedda, in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* (1955).

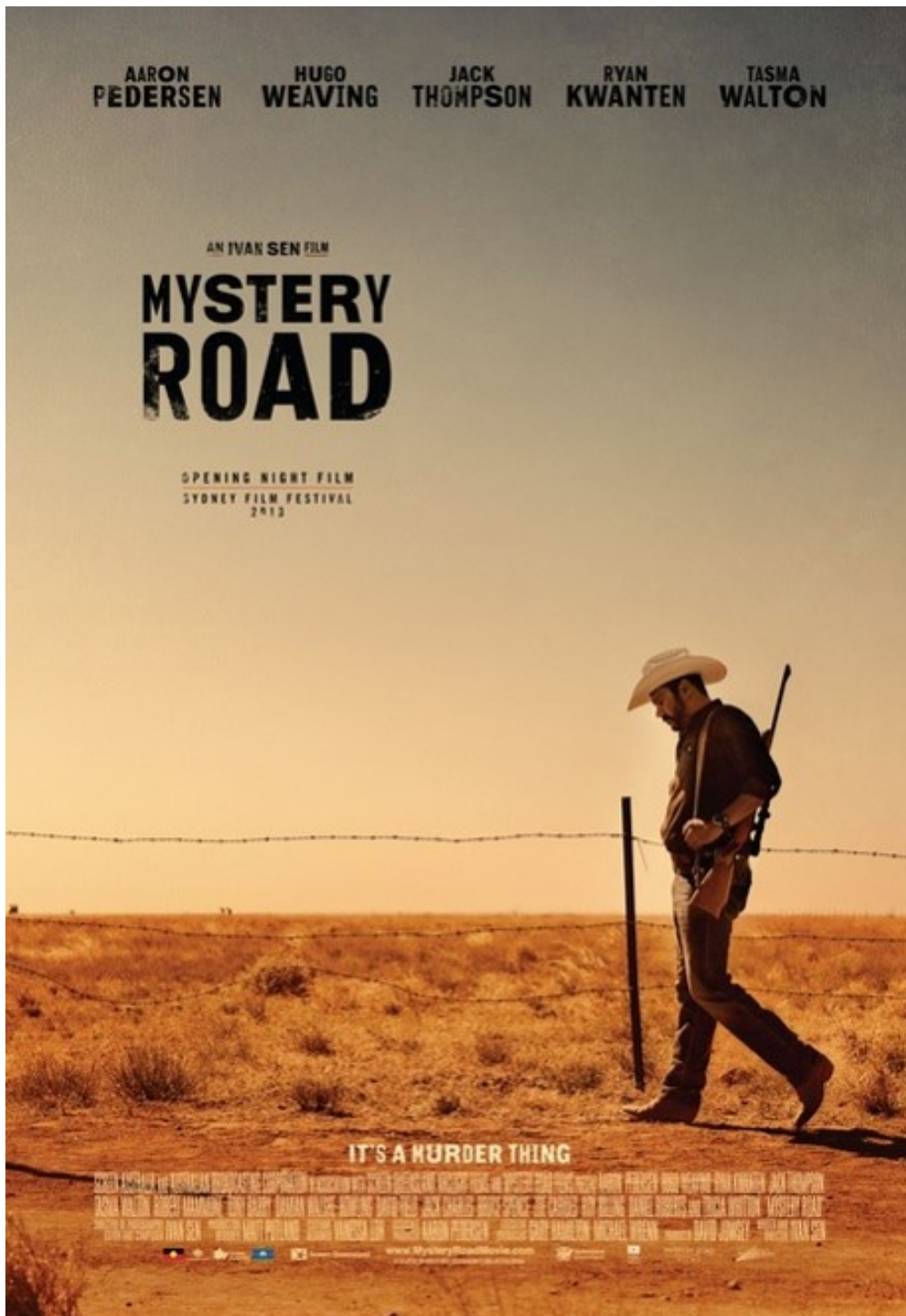


Figure 24: The lone anti-hero of outback Australian ‘kangaroo noir’ in *Mystery Road* (2013).
d: Ivan Sen, starring Aaron Pedersen.

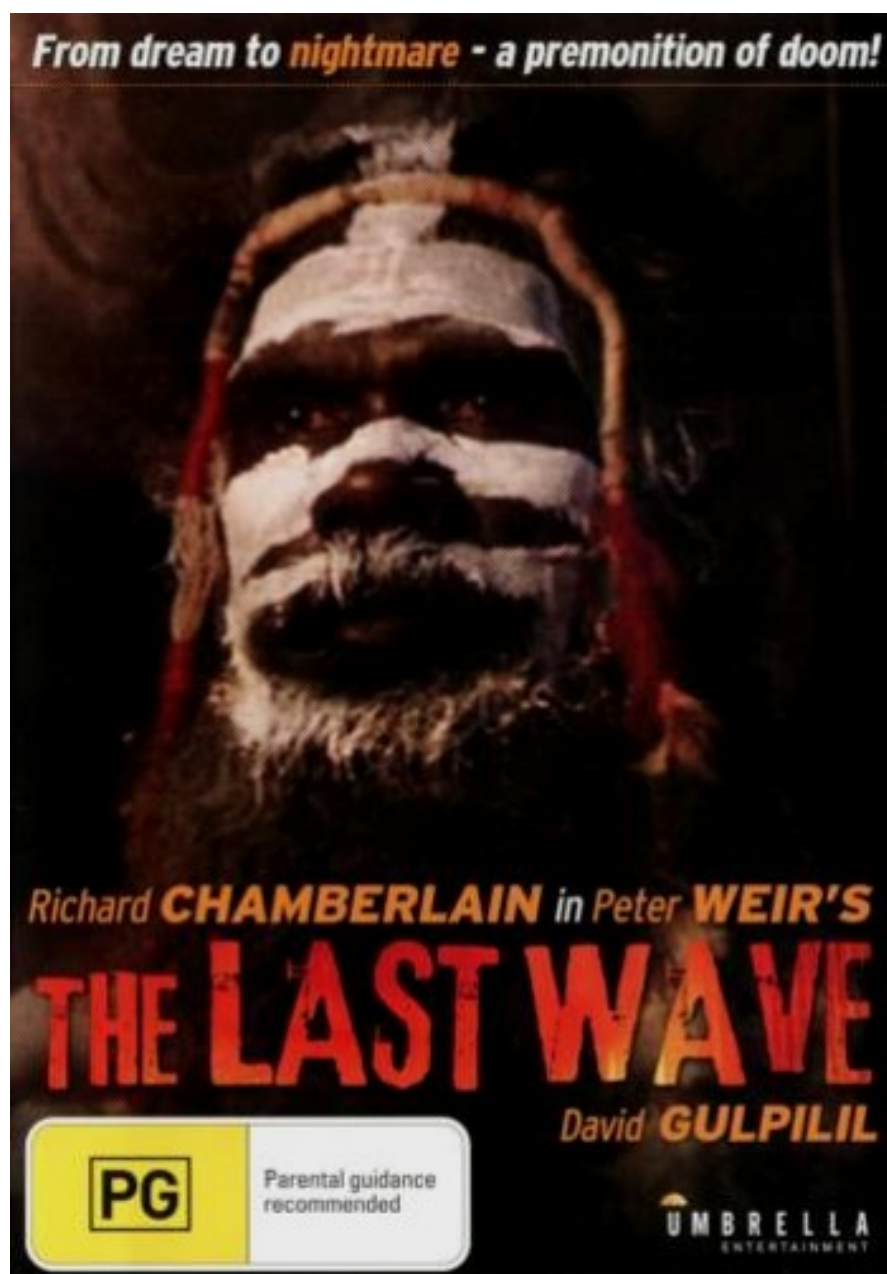


Figure 25: David Gulpilil in Peter Weir's 'Aboriginal gothic' *The Last Wave* (1977).



Figure 26: Chips Rafferty stretched out across the vista of the elongated Antipodean Western of *The Overlanders* (1946) d: Harry Watt.

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- ⁱ Reference is made here to earlier essay/s by the author on regionalism, in *Transference*, 'Beyond the Black Stump', catalogue essay, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery pub., 2000.
- ⁱⁱ Ann Curthoys and John Docker. *Is History Fiction?* University of New South Wales Press Ltd. Pub., 2006, p. 1.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ken G. Hall. *Directed by Ken G. Hall*. Landsdowne Press, 1977, p. 87.
- ^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- ^v *Ibid.*, p. 85, 86.
- ^{vi} Graham Shirley and Brian Adams. *Australian Cinema – The First Eighty Years*. Angus and Robertson, 1983, p. 145.
- ^{vii} Ken G. Hall. *Directed by Ken G. Hall*. Landsdowne Press, 1977, p. 87.
- ^{viii} Catherine Simpson. *Australian eco-horror and Gaia's revenge: animals, eco-nationalism and the 'new nature'*, *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 2010, 4:1, p. 46, quoting Tom O'Regan.
- ^{ix} Catherine Simpson. *ibid.*, p. 45.
- ^x AWAYE. ABC Radio National, 15th March 2014, Djon Mundine, presenter Daniel Browning.
- ^{xi} Elsa Chauvel. *My Life with Charles Chauvel*. Shakespeare Head Press, Sydney, 1973, p. 139.
- ^{xii} Jane Mills, *Jedda*. Currency Press, 2012, p. 31.
- ^{xiii} David Stratton. *The Avocado Plantation*. Pan Macmillan Pub., 1990, p. 22.
- ^{xiv} *Ibid.*
- ^{xv} Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper. *Australian Film 1900-1977*. Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 1998, p. 289.
- ^{xvi} Jean Baudrillard. *The Art of Disappearance*, in Jean Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg, Institute of Modern Art pub., Brisbane, 1997, pp. 28-31.
- ^{xvii} Kenneth Cook. *Wake in Fright*. Penguin Books, Australia, 1961, p. 18.
- ^{xviii} David Stratton. *The Avocado Plantation*. Pan Macmillan Pub., 1990, p. 88.
- ^{xix} *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- ^{xx} Tom O'Regan. *Australian National Cinema*. Routledge Pub., London and New York, 1996, p. 250.
- ^{xxi} National Film and Sound Archive, Ted Kotcheff, <http://nfsa.gov.au/collection/film/wake-fright/>, 2016.
- ^{xxii} Luke Buckmaster. *The Guardian* newspaper, 9th June 2016.
- ^{xxiii} David Myers. *Bleeding Battlers from Ironbark: Australian Myths in Fiction and Film: 1890s-1980s*. Capricornia Institute, Pub., Qld., 1987, p. 46.
- ^{xxiv} Andrew Pike. "The Past: boom and bust," in *The New Australian Cinema* (ed. Scott Murray) (Melbourne: Nelson, 1980), p. 11 and see also Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*.

(Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980).

xxv Warwick Thornton. *Inside Screen Worlds: Warwick Thornton*. ACMI, 2014.

<http://www.acmi.net.au/acmi-channel/2014/warwick-thorntons-mother-courage/>

xxvi Ann Curthoys. *Harry Potter and historical consciousness: Reflections on history and fiction*.

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xxvii Ibid., p. 12.

xxviii Greg Clarke, http://www.case.edu.au/images/uploads/03_pdfs/clarke-is-history-fiction.pdf, 2016.

xxix Ibid.

xxx AWAYE, op. cit.

xxxi AWAYE, op. cit.

xxxii Ibid.

xxxiii Pike, op. cit., p. 290.

xxxiv Ross Gibson. Chapter 2, in Scott Murray, ed., *Australian Cinema*. Allen and Unwin, 1994.

xxxv Ross Gibson, *ibid.*, p. 49.

xxxvi Ben Woodard. *Naught Thought, Natural Horror/Ecological Horror*, 2015.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

***Topologies of Practice: reconsidering the legacy of Western
Australian textile artist Elsje Van Keppleⁱ***

Julie Montgarrett

This paper aims to re-contextualise the work and legacy of Elsje Van Keppel (1947 – 2001), Dutch-born Australian Textile artist, in light of the problematic perspectives that framed Studio-textiles of the 1990s which inherited the unresolved tedious sophistry of the art-craft debates of the previous decades. These arguments were further complicated by the ascendancy of a postmodern emphasis on structuralist debates dominated by linguistics, semiotics and signification. Both philosophical positions argued for interpretation and the locating of all creative practice through the domains of language and representation alone. The aspects of the works which centred upon their textile materiality in both their conception, creation and reception were relegated to consideration mainly of their craft-based technicalities or alternatively confused by discussions of functionality.



figure 1: Elsje Van Keppel Regeneration 1995 Photographer unknown

Occasionally, the debates surrounding Second Wave Feminism further problematized Van Keppel's choice of textile as her medium by situating the patterns

and construction of particular works in relation to narrowly domestic references. I wish to contend however, that all these perspectives overlooked other more vital and equally legitimate concerns of artists such as Van Kepple, who intuitively made the most significant works of the period against the dominant ideologies recognising that, as Donna Haraway reminds us,

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.ⁱⁱ

Elsje Van Kepple's textile works were informed and generated by an innovative, rigorous and uncertain conceptual intent that emerged through an intimate and highly experimental engagement with particular aspects of textile's materiality. She sought outcomes as traces of actions both delicate and harsh upon cloth using materials found on country repeatedly often over many years manipulating the surfaces over extended periods of time at specific locations. The textile forms were subjected to the same energies that weather the landscape and the human body on country – extremes of heat, saturation, erosion, wind and sun. The cloth, later re-constructed through 'the essence of ancient textile traditions'ⁱⁱⁱ was stitched and re-stitched, over printed, re-dyed and mended. Van Kepple however was well 'aware that in the Australian context they would have different resonances.'^{iv}

Feminist theorist Karen Barad identifies a significant aspect of Van Kepple's creative practice concerns and the era in which she worked, when she argues,

Language had been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretive turn, the cultural turn: it seems at every turn lately every 'thing' – even materiality – is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. The ubiquitous puns on matter do not alas, mark a rethinking of the key concepts (materiality and signification) and the relationship between them.^v

These twin and problematic perspectives - language and representation, left the most innovative works of the 1990s such as Van Kepple's which challenged the histories and boundaries of medium, form and performativity, in a kind of suffocating critical domain of language and culture in the no-man's land between art and craft or if you will, art and design. Design, as an ascendant new category of crafts practice further muddied the waters of identity politics of makers and innovative creative practice from the 1980s well into the early years of the new millennium. These were the decades in which Van Kepple made her major works and evolved a distinctive methodology that continues to shape and guide a great deal of contemporary studio textile practice by way of major artists and teachers such as Judy Watson, Nalda Searles, Cedar Prest, Kay Lawrence, Ruth Hadlow, John Parkes, Valerie Kirk and Liz Williamson for example who were colleagues or students of Van Kepple and arguably through their teachers and mentors, the subsequent generation of textile artists such as Ilka White, Jemima Proos-Saunders and Julie Ryder amongst others^{vi}.



figure 2: Elsie Van Keppel Animal Vegetable 1994 Photographer unknown

The consequence of Van Kepple's focus on seeking a different understanding of textile beyond the debates of language and culture ensured that an appropriate critical analysis and acknowledgement of the innovative significance of her works beyond the applied arts and crafts was largely disregarded because the dominant debates of the era focussed upon different concerns. Her works remained unrecognized as a particular original, innovative and emergent new field of visual arts practice fundamentally driven and shaped by a different conception of materiality.^{vii} Craft versus art versus design remains a problematic suite of categorisations even today, almost two decades later as evidenced by numerous Museum collections and arts organisations at pains to demarcate the boundaries between craft and design by opting for the choice of both terms in their titles and badging. For example, Australia's own *object: Australian design centre* was once the *Crafts Council of NSW* and New York's *Museum of Art and Design* established originally in 1956 as the *Museum of Contemporary Crafts*, later became the *American Craft Museum* prior to its 2008 re-branding as MAD (*Museum of Art and Design*). Its stated aim is that it,

celebrates materials and processes that are embraced by practitioners in the fields of craft, art and design, as well as architecture, fashion, interior design, technology, performing arts, and art and design-driven industries.^{viii}

Of course in the case of textile works such as Van Kepple's, the additional influence of Feminist debates must also be recognised because the earlier Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s which shaped Second Wave Feminism, informed many of the textile works of the following two decades. Most frequently these works, through the choice of techniques and materials, emphatically demonstrated the traditions of domestic labour as a means of overtly challenging women's sequestered devalued place and roles. By adopting, exploiting and amplifying the tropes and forms of domestic textile constructions, many female makers aimed to test the boundaries of pattern languages and decoration in a form of quotation of early Modernist abstraction. Emphasising traditional textile processes of embroidery, weaving, felting, knitting, knotting and related techniques many artists subverted the

contexts and meanings of their otherwise mundane domestic materials and forms often by distortions or exaggerations of scale through the processes of making and construction. This also resulted in the subsequent adoption of many textile techniques, materials and forms by other artists, in following decades, who identified the power of materiality of cloth and textile structures as a fresh and challenging new medium when re-contextualised to readily subvert expectations and perceptions of meaning of their audiences. However, with no understanding of the history, complex skills or traditions of textile many of these artists produced works which, while attending to postmodernist methodologies and propositions of sign and signification, resulted in textile works which were fundamentally shallow and glib manipulations of materials. Uninformed by the depth and the place of textile across centuries as an intimate companion and mnemonic recorder of and counterpart to lived human experience anchored within the narratives of ritual, ceremony and daily life, these postmodern textile works lost a fundamental vitality and resonance in the hands of makers unaware of tradition and far deeper potential of textile as a medium. The difficulty then in respect of the materiality and processes of working with and through textile in contrast to each of these dominant debates and discourses – language, semiotics, representation, art, craft, design and feminism in the last two decades of the twentieth century was that works with other motivations which did not fit comfortably within the parameters of these critical domains were overlooked and largely misrepresented as being part of the post-war craft movement allegedly masquerading as art.



figure 3: Elsje Van Keppel Ethel River: Cathedral Floor 1992 Photographer unknown

I don't mean to suggest, however that Elsje Van Kepple's works were not shaped by her Feminist understanding of her life and experience. One of the few times I heard her react fiercely was to a thoughtless assumption about her role as a new parent when the question unequivocally implied she no longer had a practice and identity as an artist because she had become an invisible capital 'M' Mother - a role in which she it was assumed she would have no time for her textile practice. However motherhood was one of many experiences along with marriage and her role as a full-time Lecturer in Textile at Edith Cowan University, Perth which made her realise just how relentlessly determined she needed to be to realise her vision for textile through her work – her practice and her teaching. Feminism most certainly did significantly inform her identity and lived experience as a wife, artist and academic – but not in the usually expected and predictable ways as framed by Second Wave feminism. I wish only to say that her works were not readily recognised as being Feminist in nature or intent because they didn't adopt the expected style of Feminist works of the

era (and in many respects still don't.) As colleague Phillipa O'Brien noted in respect of Van Kepple's work, *Dust to Dust*,

[...] it is created from the time honoured log-cabin patchwork pattern – the imagery rebounding between old urban walls, the ancient domestic hand-crafts of patchwork and batik, hearth and home, the home without walls in the bush, the earth as home, dust returning to dust.^{ix}

As such, I believe Elsje Van Kepple's works are examples of what Grayson Perry, recently said of the importance of the innovative works that emerged in spite of the heated debates and emphatic categorisations of media and materials of this era, that the makers of this period, 'sailed out on the dangerous sea of fine art with crafted forms'.^x

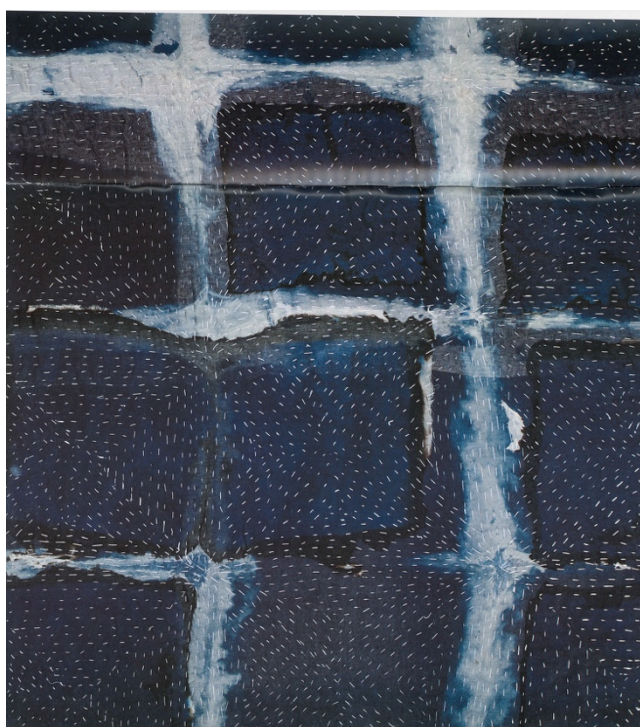


figure 4 : Elsje Van Keppel Dark Night 1996 Photographer unknown

One of many reasons that Van Kepple's intentions were largely not well understood and her works were misrepresented was that they were problematically unrecognisable to an audience who expected textile works to be craft as predictably familiar referring to everyday objects. The same audiences understood art to be

otherwise – cool and cleverly self-conscious as part of the legacy of Greenberg’s Modernist - Kantian notion of reified refined art operating via narrowly categorised, autonomous and fundamental mediums. Moreover, in this Neo-platonic tradition, only certain material substances of the world, such as paint, were approved and strictly prescribed as suitably almost intangible ‘matter’. Consequently this limited range of superior appropriate materials as potential tools toward abstractions of Platonic ideals relegated many other media such as textile to insignificance in the decorative arts as illegitimate materials for the making of art-works. The Greenbergian critical position assumed that the proper ambition for an artist was to aim for materially authentic works that lay far beyond any reference to the commonplace material world to achieve pure form and transcendence. Textile of course being fundamentally associated with the feminine and domestic realms was emphatically not a suitable vehicle for Greenbergian Modernist - Kantian ambitions. Van Kepple whose practice required a complicity with textile in particular – working and acting as an agent with her materials, adopted a different methodology. However, this was an approach which was not a wilfully nor consciously direct critique nor refusal of this form of logocentrism and the dominance of written language as the privileged tool for creating and communicating meaning. It was perhaps more of an intuitive move within the discourse of her undergraduate education of Modernist abstraction towards a language of textile because the medium offered her qualities of fragility and transience not apparent in other media she encountered in her studio-based Art School education of the 1970s. As Anthropologist Tim Ingold has pointed out, an actual primary concern with materials such as Van Kepple’s, has until recently, remained surprisingly rare universally even beyond the visual art Studio-focussed debates and technique focussed disciplines of the traditional Crafts. Ingold argues, even in the elaborate Academic discourses such as Anthropology and Archaeology which address the human-made material culture, attitudes to materialities were similarly overlooked in this era. He states,

The greater part of archaeology is dedicated precisely to the study of materials and the ways they have been used in processes of production. Even in anthropology there is some ethnographic work on the subject. My point is simply that this work

does not seem to impinge significantly on the literature on materiality and material culture.^{xi}

In contrast, the intentions and works of this era by Elsje Van Kepple, manifested a vital understanding of materiality that can now be better expressed via a *post-humanist performative* approach articulated in the writings of Feminist theorists such as Karen Barad. I believe that Van Kepple's works need to be located in terms of Barad's understanding of materiality and performativity to be adequately understood.

I recall the difficulty many critics and crafts' reviewers had with Van Kepple's works in the 1990s who struggled to describe her works via problematic terms such as 'deconstructed landscapes', 'numinous' or 'spiritual'— each of which mislead us into assuming that this was Van Kepple's actual objective. There were however some who recognised aspects of Van Kepple's work more clearly. Garth Morse, a fellow Western Australian noted in 1989 reviewing Van Kepple's work that,

[...] there is no attempt to merely decorate or to invoke traditions of making which may relate to pleasing or superficial subjects. Elsje King presents us with a world of fragments, glimpsed evocations of a tenuous reality, forms in a constant transition between being and nothing. It is this perception, this life energy, which endows her work with its particular mystery. Her capacities with materials are quite simply, superb.^{xii}

It is the rare observations such as Morse's which relate Van Kepple's work and her engagement with cloth to Karen Barad's notions of *intra-actions* where Barad argues in her 2007 paper *Meeting the Universe Half-way* that,

A performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things. Unlike representationalism which positions us above or outside the world we allegedly merely reflect on, a performative account insists on understanding thinking,

observing, and theorising as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being.^{xiii}

Or in Elsje Van Keppel's own words,

The processes I use are often metaphors for nature's processes, ones which naturally weather and create a surface. This object is not specifically about the landscape, or about a desert, or about Niagara. But it was stimulated by the experience of being in a particular place at a particular time. It is about an almost indescribable feeling of fragility and even vulnerability.^{xiv}



figure 5: Elsje Van Keppel In the Making 1994 Photographer unknown

At the risk of allowing language to dominate and misrepresent yet again, I wish to argue that Van Keppel's works are certainly about a particular form of land dialogue

but this is better expressed as an ontological ambition or intention to record through repeated, steeped bush dye colour and threading through cloth the investing of a human presence at a certain place and time. This process became over time a kind of onto-poetic mending or repair of cloth as intimate collaborator of skin and soul to be found on and in tandem with the diurnal rhythms of the bush-camps and the continuity of returning through varied seasons to country. Phillipa O'Brien states that, *'it was in the unifying experience of Australian nature that she could experience the sense of oneness, and the continuity and connectedness that she craved'*^{xv} and which was encountered through the bush camps and with indigenous cultures through her collaborations with Nalda Searles. Her ambition I believe was to test her own relationship to country phenomenologically towards a new and uncertain process of understanding of being in place through the honesty of her material language. This might have been because of her migrant heritage in the sense of someone who as a foreigner might bring a different and uncertain, open perspective to their reading of or making meanings about place. Academic Alison Ravenscroft proposes this as an event of,

[...] reading as an act that marks and makes. When we read, we produce a scene of our own imagining. We produce a scene, there is no scene waiting to be seen. There is no scene before us, as it were. This subjective and subject-making practice has its limits: all readings have their aporias [...] Another way of putting this is: how might a settler not read ? What are the critical and aesthetic implications of allowing the aporias to remain? How not to fill in the gaps or slide over them in our haste at interpretation?^{xvi}

If this reading of place and of country occurred without the conflicts of issues of sovereignty that non-indigenous Australian born readers of texts^{xvii} negotiate in relationship to country, I can only guess respectfully. Since Elsje Van Kepple is no longer here to answer our questions I suspect it was a major factor in her respect for and repeated return to country as place essential to inform, shape and saturate her practice. I do recall one of our last conversations when she recommended I read Val Plumwood's 1994 text – *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*^{xviii} – because for her it

resonated by articulating aspects of her deep emotional attachment to place and confirmed her understanding of responsibility to country. It entranced her thinking because it was a means to validate and better articulate her emotional and physical relationship to place and provided a vital language necessary to express her understanding of things she knew subliminally and intuitively. Crucially it was also a means to better negotiate (and work against) the academic discourses within which she was obliged to operate to justify her creative practice.

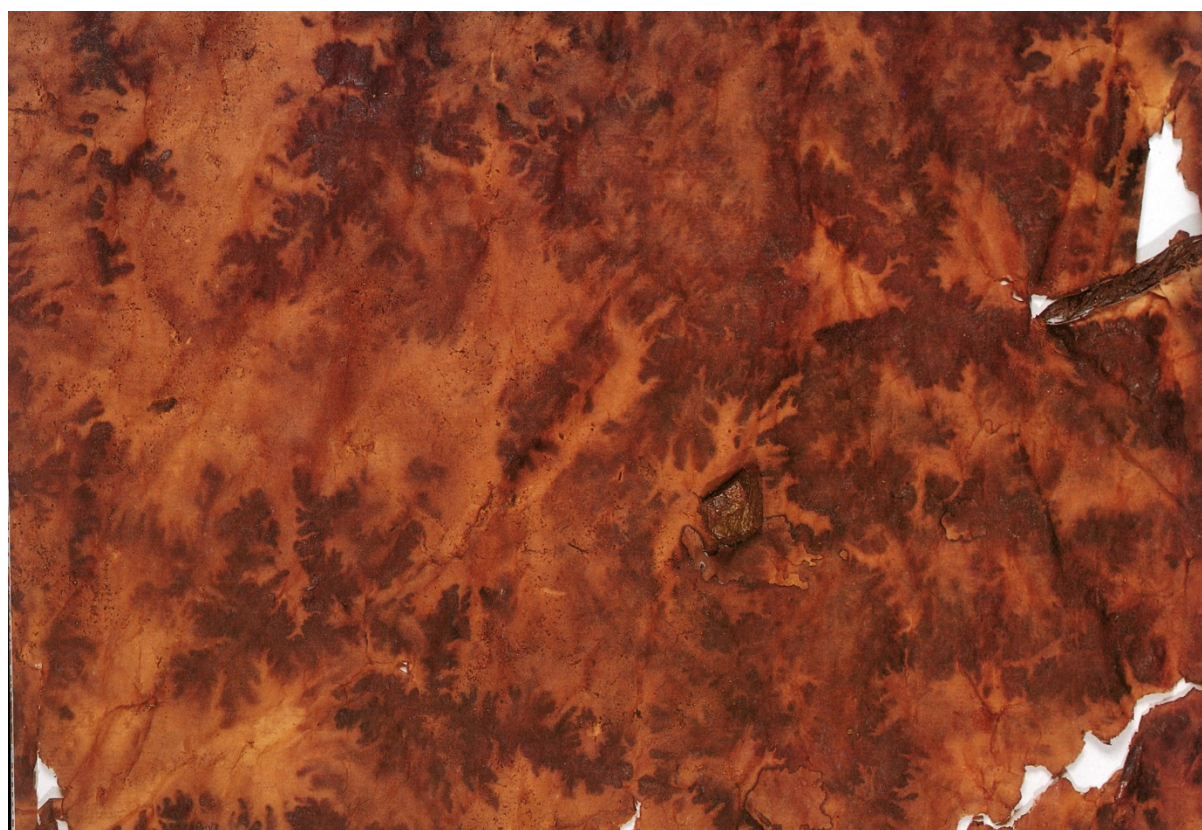


figure 6: Elsje Van Keppel Parched 1993 Photographer unknown

In Van Keppel's engagement with cloth and stitch I recognise Barad's 'primary semantic units', that are,

[...] not words but material-discursive practices through which (ontic and semantic) boundaries are constituted. This dynamism is agency. Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world. The universe', as Barad defines it and I believe Van Keppel engaged with it, was, 'agential intra-activity in its becoming, [...

]^{xix}

Elsje Van Kepple's works arose from and inherited a vital mix of abstraction that was indebted to her art-school education in Modernist abstractionist discourses and forms that eschewed decoration and instructed 'a truth to materials' through which meaning is inherent. Adolf Loos' dictum that ornament was moreover a crime was never overtly asserted but nonetheless ever present. Van Kepple's early works are either dark or light fields of subtle felted layered cloth of simple rectilinear formal order and precision played out against a neutral fragile delicate ground. Whether these early large scale works were a reflection of her early education in Bauhaus Modernism via woven and felted form through her typical 1970s Australian undergraduate creative arts education is debateable. This early training whatever its long-term influence, was later reinforced by two years post-graduate study in the winter dark seasons at Goldsmith's Textile Department in the University of London. This period was also the start of a tentative re-engagement with her European heritage. Each of these stages of the maturation of her practice are evidence the signature qualities of fragility and lace-like constructions and patterns of density/absence that was to become a fundamental part of her last works.

However it was through these early works and experiences that she recognised the value and significance of textile as a vital and resonant medium for expression of time and place. In 1978 as she began the process of envisaging a textile course at Edith Cowan University devising the course structure, the word that focussed her thoughts was *Location*. Phillippa O'Brien, a colleague of Van Kepple's and a contemporary Western Australian artist and writer has said that the concept and importance of location,

[...] seemed to be the central enlivening concept that would give veracity to a course that taught the skills of the great textile traditions but also sought to be a preparation for the life of an artist.^{xx}

Over more than two decades Van Kepple demonstrated a relentless determined commitment as both an educator and artist to the search for a resonant, *legitimate*

means to create an art of her own time and place which formed the substance of what she passed on to her students and peers. Late in her first decade at Edith Cowan, she returned from a disappointing second trip to Europe, specifically to her homeland of the Netherlands, where she had sought but not found a validation of both the great European textile traditions and a sense of place and identity. She did however unexpectedly discover what she was seeking in the spectacular Ethel River Gorge in the Ashburton Ranges – an intense transforming experience that she had sought in European culture. Though an encounter with the light, colour and space in a canyon in country at Ethel River in Western Australia she began understand that it was in the unifying experience of the Australian natural world that she could experience as sense of continuity and connectedness to place that she craved. In the Western Australian landscapes were experiences of materialities that were ancient, weathered, complex, and as resonant as the qualities she perceived in the timeless human traditions of making through weaving, felting, dyeing and stitching she had hoped to find in Europe.

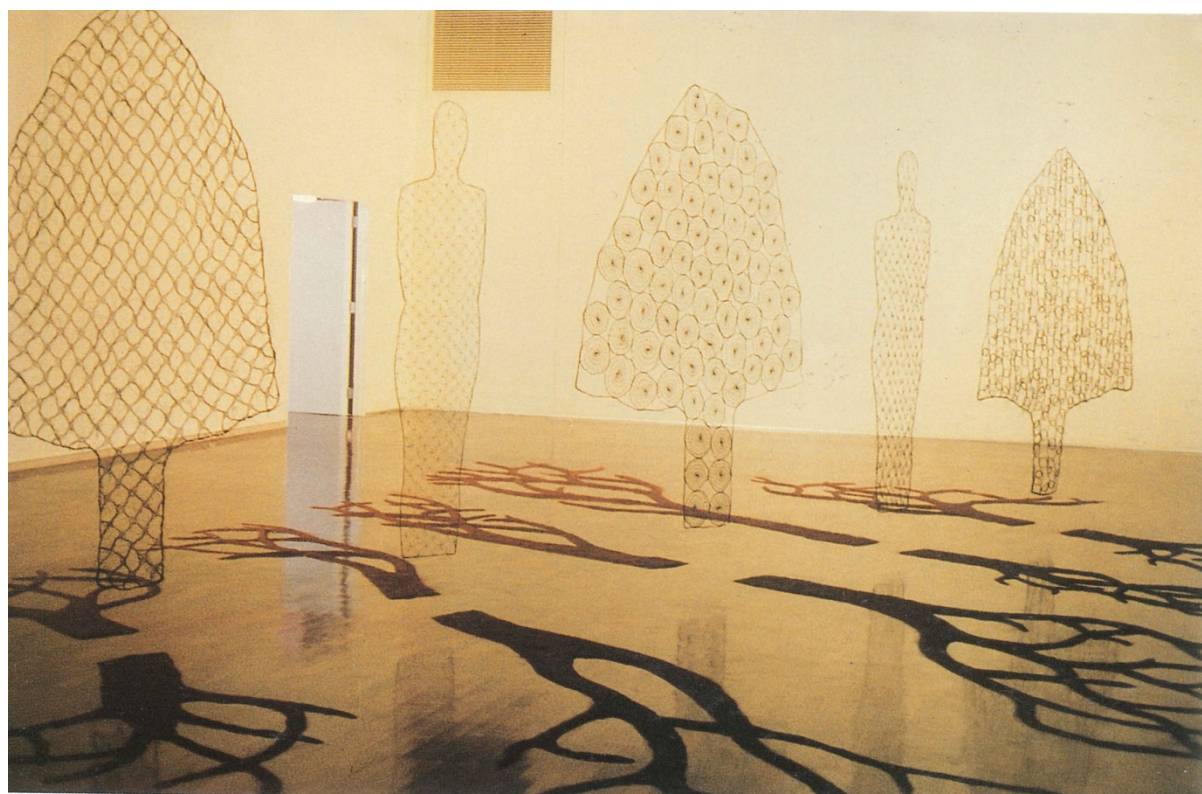


figure 7: Ruth Hadlow An Inner Garden: embroidering on Air 1993 Photographer unknown

She also recognised the unique skills and importance of joining forces with fellow artist Nalda Searles, who brought great knowledge and capacity as both teacher and artist to Van Kepple's vision for an innovative and relevant textile program for the Western Australian arts community. In the following decades Searles went on to build significant creative partnerships with indigenous communities across the Western Australian, the Northern Territory and South Australia. She was the perfect Academic and artist ally with whom Van Kepple could build a new philosophy and approach to teaching textile in what has become an internationally identifiable Australian studio-textile practice that emerged from the teaching program complemented by a bush camp site-specific experience for students and artists alike.

Together their complementary vision began to shape Van Kepple's ambition, establishing the bush camp experience initially for students who were required to commit up to two weeks immersed in isolated bush-camp based creative practice at various locations across the Western Australian goldfields first at Niagara and later Ethel River. Van Kepple and Searles blended a unique aesthetic of place that combined the best of Australian domestic *Between the Wars* make-do and mend practicality.

Working in the bush had many implications. It gave everything a natural authenticity that could be achieved no other way. It necessarily reduced process to the basics. Take the basics, do the basics. Sleep on the ground. Notice everything you do. Take time – be present. Experience the place fully. The tradition of the annual bush camps was that they were meditative activities.^{xxi}

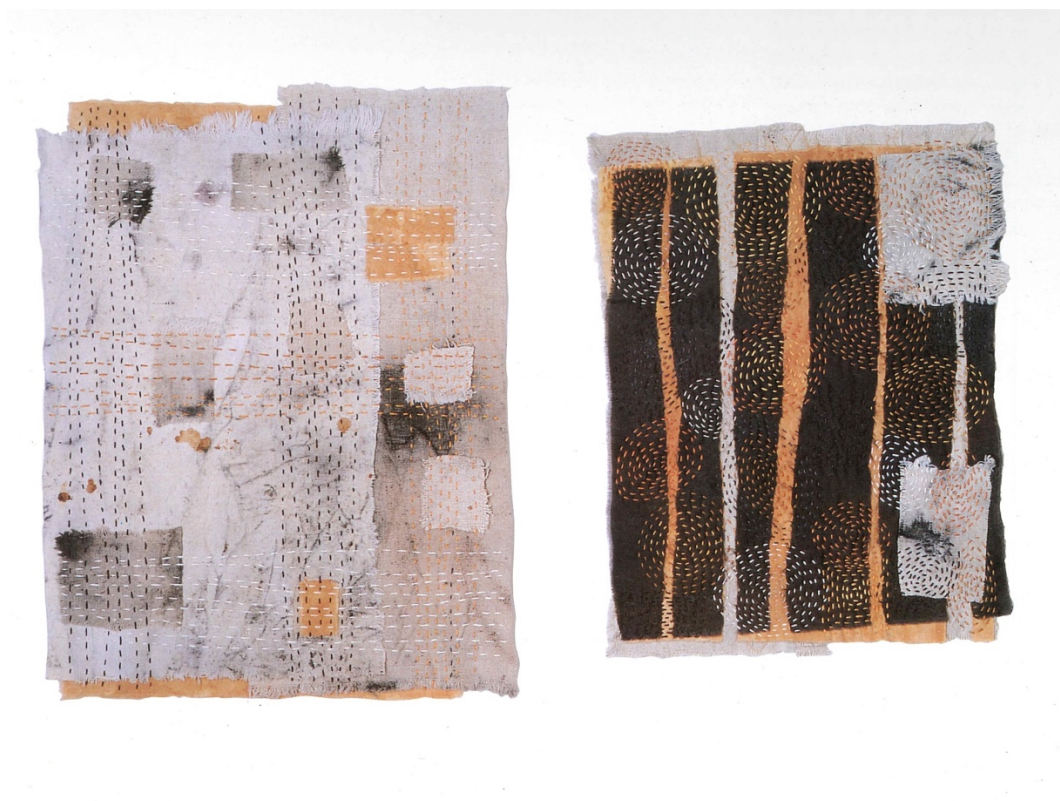


figure 8: Ruth Hadlow Cape Barren Island Samplers 1996 Photographer unknown

By working with re-cycled natural fibres, fabrics and natural dye techniques on location in bush camps the artists tested and built a repertoire of bush-dye knowledge during the first decades of the new course through Edith Cowan University. This knowledge was further complemented by Searles' knowledge of Nyungar and other indigenous basket-making traditions which were later further enhanced via Van Kepple's on-going additional dialogue with Indonesian Batik artists Agus Ismoyo and Nia Fliam through the Brahma Titra Sari's Studio in Jogjakarta, Indonesia. The close relationship Van Kepple established and treasured with the Indonesian artists and their studio was another result of her search for a sense of place which led again, by way of her Dutch heritage, to Indonesia as an ex-colony of the Netherlands. This engagement with contemporary Indonesian textile culture and encounters with the Japanese traditions of Shibori through relationships with other colleagues, were adapted, as Van Kepple said, into a particularly Australian version of the textile process that has acquired its own distinctive language of resist dye forms in tandem with bush-dye process.



figure 9: Judy Watson Photographer unknown

Artists who have joined the bush-camps over the decade or more have included Judy Watson, Rebecca Paterson, Ruth Hadlow, the Ernabella Community of artists, John Corbett, John Parkes, Kay Lawrence, Valerie Kirk, Liz Williamson, Sue Wood (whose works were one of seven satellite exhibitions as part of Land Dialogues) and many, many more, the author included. All of whom have extended and shared the philosophy of the bush-camp recognition of place and practice. Charles Sturt University through the School of Communication and Creative Industries^{xxii} was also part of this emergent Australian studio-textile practice through the teaching programs on-campus and with the Wiradjuri Elders' re-emergent practice of weaving.



figures 10: Judy Watson Salt Pan

Photographer unknown

In my own case Van Kepple's ideas and legacy were fundamental to the recent process of devising, testing and problem solving involved with the construction and creation for the CAD Factory and National Museum of Australia's *On Common Ground* event. Commissioned to create a seventy metre long, ten metre high textile installation entitled *Vanishing Point: Swan Hopper Legacy* I was indebted to both an understanding of the significance of site and location I learnt from Van Kepple but equally an appreciation of the importance of working with the cloth and the elements

– the currents of weather and water, fragility, light reflections, shadow and the shapes and tensions of textile and wind to engage the fundamental character of all the elements in concert. To allow each a place and role as intra-active participants in the emergence of the concept and the form. The work was situated on country over the Murrumbidgee River at Narrandera last October and here at Wagga Beach in a different configuration for *Land Dialogues*. It will later this year (2016) be re-created again as a series of cave-like spaces for the National Regional Arts Festival and conference *artlands* in Dubbo to again address through textile the fragility and tentative resilience of the survival of the creatures of our river systems across south-eastern Australia. The first and subsequent versions of the textile installation were,

[...] constructed from cloth discarded as part of the relentless cycle of fashion and chance, (which) came from the domestic realm. Its industrially designed patterns were a stylised homage to the beauty of the natural world yet their manufacture was central to the destruction of the same exquisite order in the fragile landscapes that sustain us. The cloth carried the colours and histories of the black swans and other birds that once filled similar spaces above the rivers across south-east Australia in their millions before the determined destruction by Swan Hoppers and the relentless demands of industrial scale development. This textile points to many things most especially to the unseen energies and sounds of this place. The fragments and geometry refer to the building blocks and logic of complex fluid ecologies. It is imprinted with the rhythms and traces of water, of creatures, shadows, sediments and energies of life. This textile is as tenuous and fragile as the river's own survival – the resilience of both is strained to breaking point.^{xxiii}



figure 11: Julie Montgarrett, Vic Mc Ewan -CAD Factory, Clytie Smith Vanishing Point : On Common Ground Photographer Julie Montgarrett

In the almost two decades since the death of Elsje Van Kepple, Nalda Searles has continued to share their philosophies of process with communities across Australia most notably as a key motivator for the Tjanpi Weavers from Central Australia who created the remarkable woven full-scale Toyota which won the Telstra Art Awards in 2005^{xxiv} and the Narrogin Doll makers project^{xxv} that has successfully addressed the need for healing in the face of on-going grief and trauma as a result of the cultural disruptions and conflicts in the small indigenous community in Western Australia. All of these artists have identified the immense value and significance of the immersive experience of working on country and in locating and intensifying their individually authentic intra-actions of materiality through site-specific practice. Understanding the importance of this sustained focus on making is vital as part of teaching programs within undergraduate, post-graduate contexts, in community-based practice and in master-class workshop challenges. The aesthetic, psychological, physiological and performative intra-active material practice that the

bush-camps have engendered have begun a new understanding of the languages that emanate from human dialogue with and from materials when subjected to the forces of energy transference; the elements of gravity and tension of threads under pressure through human agency over time. These interactions emerge from and also require an acknowledgement of the importance of place in anchoring and informing practice. These are the elements of a creative practice that is more than the phenomenology of experience mediated by human senses and temporal perceptions – it is a blend of the phenomenon of the intra-agency of materiality. As Petra Lange-Berndt, a leading researcher in the field of material studies in art history, argues in *How to be Complicit with Materials*, *Materials here become traces that are entangled in the web-of-life. Nature is more than the raw material of culture in the logic of capitalist colonialism.*^{xxvi}

The influence of Van Keppel and the bush camps' philosophy of materiality has shaped and now widely characterizes the non-indigenous fibre and textile art of Australia having steadily developed for more than three decades. The original materially based research process envisaged by Elsje Van Kepple has folded across time, and demonstrates a form of synchronicity with unrecognised undercurrents of life. The particular materiality it engages is neither a passive surface awaiting the mark of culture nor the end product of cultural performances as Barad would have it.



figure 12: Julie Montgarrett, Vic Mc Ewan -CAD Factory, Clytie Smith Vanishing Point : On Common Ground Photographer Julie Montgarrett

The legacy of Elsje Van Kepple's work I believe is evidenced as the reimagined links and connections to land and location, to country, created through the intersections of the potentials of fundamental traditional textile methodologies. As forms of visual and material phenomena intra-acting and re-inscribing into textile's discourses in webs of relationships to tangible networks of connection and hand-work on, through and across country. New approaches have been questioned and engaged by these makers to create contemporary meanings and to problematize post-humanist performative theoretical constructs which question dominant histories and assumptions about the significance of materiality in ways that art and critical theorists previously refused to acknowledge.



figure 13: Julie Montgarrett, Vic Mc Ewan -CAD Factory, Clytie Smith Vanishing Point : On Common Ground Photographer Julie Montgarrett

In conclusion, I think it fitting to let Barad have the last word –

In an agential-realist account, performativity is understood not as iterative citationality but as iterative-intra-activity. Intra-actions are agentic and changes in

the apparatuses of bodily production matter for ontological as well as epistemological and ethical reasons: different material-discursive practices produce different material configurings of the world. Different difference/diffraction patterns; they do not merely produce different descriptions. Objectivity and agency are bound up with issues of responsibility and accountability. Accountability must be thought of in terms of what matters and what is excluded from mattering.^{xxvii}



figure 14: Julie Montgarrett, Vic Mc Ewan -CAD Factory, Clytie Smith Vanishing Point : On Common Ground Photographer Julie Montgarrett

ⁱ Topologies in this instance is intended to suggest both the character and expansive scale of the landscape as country experienced at certain locations or from particular points of view as well as the use of the term to describe the networks and interrelationships as used in relation to computer systems designed as a mapping of interconnected electronic pathways and points on a field of intersecting and

interacting elements. It aims to point toward the notion of complex webs of meaning as materialities and intra-actions that trace and communicate what 'matters' in relation to lived experience as new forms, patterns and relationships

ⁱⁱ Donna Haraway, *SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far*, Pilgrim Award Acceptance Comments, 2011, <http://people.ucsc.edu/~haraway/Files/PilgrimAcceptanceHaraway.pdf> p.4 Accessed September 12, 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ Phillipa O'Brien, Notes toward a lecture on Elsie Van Kepple's works presented at the 1998 SHIFT Textile Conference, at the Canberra School of Art 1998 and given to the author in the same year.

^{iv} Kay Lawrence, *Elsje King's Fragile Objects*, object magazine; issue #27 1998, p. 17

^v Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and*

Meaning, Duke University Press. 2007. p. 214

^{vi} For example, publications such as British author, Matthew Koumis' *Textiles of the World* series twice focussed on Australian contemporary Studio textiles, and included Van Kepple in its first Volume identifying her as a significant leading Australian textile artist voice and in the second Volume which focussed on thirteen of the next generation of makers included 8 of Van Kepple's and Nalda Searles colleagues and artists connected as ex-students of others who have adopted aspects of Van Kepple's ethos in their teaching and textile practice. *Art Textiles of the World: Australia*, Matthew Koumis (Ed.), Telos Publishing, U.K. 1998 and *Art Textiles of the World: Australia vol. 2*, Matthew Koumis (Ed.), Telos Publishing, U.K. 2007

^{vii} Van Kepple was recognised with a major exhibition in the Powerhouse Museum Sydney in 1997 however this was specifically within the context of the leading NSW Museum for the Applied Arts and Sciences. The exhibition catalogue entitled, *Fragile Objects* included essays by Grace Cochrane, Senior Curator of Decorative Arts and Design, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney and author of *Crafts: A History of the Crafts Movement in Australia*, Craftsman House Pub. 1992.

^{viii} Museum of Art and Design, New York. Website - <http://madmuseum.org/about/museum-history>

^{ix} Phillipa O'Brien. ib id. 1998

^x Grayson Perry is also an artist of complex sculptural forms and installations, who describes himself as 'once a potter' and like Van Kepple an artists whose works are intimately informed by the great traditions of ceramics as vessels with ritual, symbolic, narrative functions. *Perry, 2013. Reith Lecturers – Tate Modern*

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03969vt>

^{xi} Tim Ingold <http://home.zcu.cz/~dsosna/SASCI-papers/Ingold%202007-materiality.pdf> Archaeological Dialogues 14 (1) 1–16 !C 2007 Cambridge University Press doi:10.1017/S1380203807002127 Accessed September 12, 2016

^{xii} Garth Morse, Hovea, Western Australia. 1989. Written for *Elsje King Textiles*, Meat Market Craft Centre exhibition flyer. November 1990. Taken from a Commentary on the work of Elsie King (nee Van Kepple) provided to the author by the Artist.

^{xiii} Karen Barad, op.cit. 2007. p. 216

^{xiv} Conversation between the author and Elsie Van Kepple, 1995, Canberra during the Junichi Arai Masterclass, Canberra School of Art.

^{xv} Conversation between the author and Elsie Van Kepple, 1995, Canberra during the Junichi Arai Masterclass, Canberra School of Art.

^{xvi} Conversation between the author and Elsie Van Kepple, 1995, Canberra during the Junichi Arai Masterclass, Canberra School of Art.

^{xv} Phillipa O'Brien, *ib id.* 1998

^{xvi} Alison Ravenscroft, *The Postcolonial eye/I: White Australian desire and the Visual Field of Race*, Ashgate. 2012. p.2

^{xvii} Reading in this context includes visual practices as the interpretations and perception of visual and material works of art as well as text-based work.

^{xviii} Elsje Van Kepple also referred me to a much earlier paper in the Australasian Journal of Philosophy - Val Plumwood, *Ecofeminism: An Overview and Discussion of Positions and Arguments*, in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 64, supplement 1, 1986, pp. 120–138. Both texts addressed aspects of ecofeminism that were of concern to both of us in respect of textile, feminism and our own arts practice and identities as artists within the field of feminist debates of the previous decade. This thoughtful sharing of ideas is typical of Elsje Van Kepple's generosity as noted by Grace Cochrane in the opening speech of *Fragile Objects* at the Powerhouse Museum in 1997.

^{xix} Karen Barad, *op.cit.* p.215

^{xx} Phillipa O'Brien, *op.cit.* 1998

^{xxi} Phillipa O'Brien, *ib id.* 1998. p. 3 of 8

^{xxii} The bush-camps were originally part of the BA Fine Art degree programs in the former School of Visual and Performing arts, Wagga Wagga from 1998 to 2002. Annual Summer Masterclasses were subsequently led by Ruth Hadlow from 2005 – 2010 and coordinated by the author for the textile community for Wagga with national and international participants.

^{xxiii} Julie Montgarrett, Artist Statement for Vanishing Point: Swan Hoppers Legacy in collaboration with Vic McEwan and Clytie Smith, On Common Ground, CAD Factory, Narrandera, NSW, 2015. <http://www.cadfactory.com.au/river-hanging>

^{xxiv} <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/oh-what-a-weaving-grass-toyota-wows-judges/2005/08/12/1123353507268.html>

^{xxv} http://202.14.152.43/documents/YarnsoftheHeart_.pdf

^{xxvi} Petra Lange-Berndt, '*How to be Complicit with Materials*', Introduction to Petra Lange-Berndt (ed.) *Materiality*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK and the MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. P. 18. 2015.

^{xxvii} Karen Barad, *op.cit.* 2007. p. 216



FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

**Land Dialogues: Contemporary Australian Photography (in
Dialogue with Land)**

James Farley

ABSTRACT

The work presented in the 2016 exhibition *Land Dialogues – Contemporary Australian Photography (in Dialogue with Land)*, can be read as a contemporary post-photographic project seeking to challenge the enduring traditions of landscape photography. In a wider context, Land Dialogues seeks to challenge the established values associated with our culture of consumption and anxiety, particularly the culturally constructed (and supported) separation between human beings, non-human beings and the earth systems in which we all live. Artists represented in Land Dialogues employ a variety of photographic methods to address themes including global warming, ecological estrangement, the perception of nature, biodiversity loss, alternative histories and the relationships between human and non-human beings. The new and varied approaches for communicating these themes are symbolic of a wider cultural shift that is taking place as the realities of global warming sink in. It is becoming clear that some fundamental assumptions about the relationship between modern capitalist societies and the Earth's life systems are flawed. There is a growing cultural movement seeking to question the traditions and values of consumption and excess associated with a capitalist consumer society, in a bid to move towards a culture of ecological awareness and respectful earthly stewardship.



Image One. Installation View of *Land Dialogues – Contemporary Australian Photography (In Dialogue with Land)*, as installed at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, 19th March – 5th June, 2016. Photographed by James Farley

Land Dialogues – Contemporary Australian Photography (in Dialogue with Land) joins the large international and interdisciplinary dialogue seeking to challenge and dismantle the accepted assumptions that human culture exists somewhere outside of, and in opposition with, the rest of the biophysical world. The exhibition is the coalescence of a number of contrasting voices finding common ground through the medium of images, each with the shared desire of offering new ways to value, understand and represent the world in which we live.

Land Dialogues is not representative of an overall direction or doctrine of photographic practice in Australia; nor is *Land Dialogues* a complete picture of the expansive field of photographic practice engaged with or embedded in land or place based issues. The *Land Dialogues* exhibition is a broad survey of new directions and possibilities for photography in a period of cultural change. The artists featured in *Land Dialogues* are Renata Buziak, James Farley, Amy Findlay, Christine

McFetridge, Christopher Orchard, Jacob Raupach, Kate Robertson, Felix Wilson and Carolyn Young. They represent a mix of regional and metropolitan artists from Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and Tasmania, and are from varying career levels and discipline backgrounds. Each artist represents a unique direction forward and approach to engaging with land through personal experience and practice. The curated voices may or may not be related to each other, they may harmonize or clash with one another and at different times, some may even contradict others. This is deliberate. *Land Dialogues* aims to highlight the existence of infinite possibilities in practice and knowledge, each forming and breaking connections with one another at different points. *Land Dialogues* is more concerned with establishing channels for continued communication and exploration than it is about dictating specific modes of practice. It seeks to suggest a culture maturing in its knowledge of the vast challenges ahead, and accepting that the changes needed to survive cannot be reactionary, shallow or quick fix. This exhibition moves towards accepting that we all live beneath the long shadow of anthropogenic impact upon the earth. Rather than denying this traumatic reality, or dreaming up an easy out, we collectively need to process the anxiety that comes with this knowledge in order to start living cautiously, treading lightly and working calmly towards solutions beneath the shade.

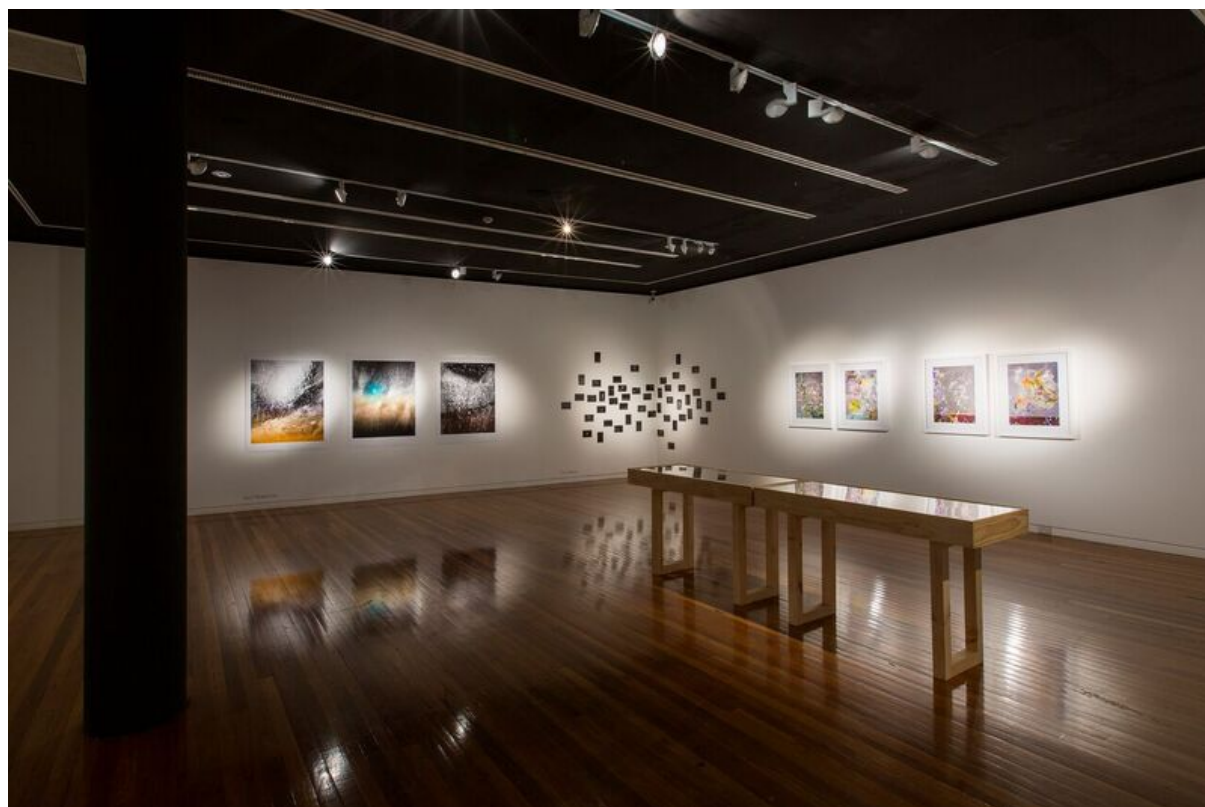


Image Two - Installation View of *Land Dialogues – Contemporary Australian Photography (In Dialogue with Land)*, as installed at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, 19th March – 5th June, 2016.

Photographed by James Farley

It is not my intention to speak towards each of the artists individually, nor will I delve into the various links I perceive between their work or expand on the implications these have for the wider cultural/critical discourse. I wish only to contextualize the framework around which I based the curation of this exhibition, in order to show how these examples of contemporary photographic practice are situated within both the contemporary field of Australian landscape photography, and the wider technological, philosophical and critical discourse affecting change in the global community at this time. I will focus on clarifying the terminology of the post-photographic moment, which is the unifying factor allowing these artists to employ seemingly disparate mode of investigation in the pursuit of similar topics. The notion of a post-photographic moment will be expanded into a theory of wider cultural change, based upon the argument that energy, technology and culture are inextricably linked, but forward by cultural theorist Barry Lord. I will also address the

communication strategies behind new the approach to positive messages around climate change, as outlined by climate psychologist, Per Espen Stoknes. Finally, these various threads will be bound together through the wider influence on my curatorial position in the eco-critical philosophy of Glen Albrecht, Timothy Morton, Val Plumwood and Deborah Bird Rose.



Image Three - Installation View of *Land Dialogues – Contemporary Australian Photography (In Dialogue with Land)*, as installed at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, 19th March – 5th June, 2016.

Photographed by James Farley

Australian Landscape Photography

The role of landscape photography in Australia's history has been erratic and fractured due to the many forms of practice it encompasses. In *Photography and Australia*, Helen Ennis suggests that the only unifying feature of landscape photography is that it "Has been the practice of settler Australians and the expression of a settler-colonial culture" (Ennis 2007, 51). Ennis suggests that photography in Australia was vital to the process of colonization, where the

Australian land was used as a tool to construct a sense of national identity. This is evident in the earliest images of Australia, where photography was employed to document new lands or property ripe for settlement, cultivation and development, and later as a tool for classifying and collecting the land, its flora and fauna so that it may find its way into the popular imagination (Ennis, 61). In *The Photograph and Australia*, Judy Annear extends the use of photography as a colonial tool for place-making into the expedition and travel photography of the latter half of the 1800's and into the wilderness photography that dominated Australian landscape practice well into the twentieth century (Annear, 2015). Historically, Australian wilderness photography is inextricably linked to the environmental conservation movement and the promotion of a duty of care. However, wilderness photography is also implicated in furthering the perceived human/nature divide, not to mention its role as a driving force behind the promotion of tourism, where economic and aesthetic interests are often prioritized above ecological concerns. In *Photography and Landscape*, (2012) Rod Giblett argues that the imported European aesthetic traditions of the sublime, the picturesque and the beautiful which have been adopted by touristic and wilderness photography are flawed. Giblett states "they create unrealistic expectations of aesthetically pleasing or aestheticized landscapes that bear little relation to the lives of people, indigenous or not, who live on or near them and who rely upon them for their livelihoods" (Giblett and Tolonen, 2012). Giblett is one of many voices (see Bright 1985, Palmer 2013, Orchard 2016) calling for new modes of photographing, representing and relating to the world that challenges the enduring traditions of Enlightenment thinking, upon which the colonial foundations of Australia were built. A great deal of this colonialist mentality continues to permeate through Australian culture and photographic practice today.

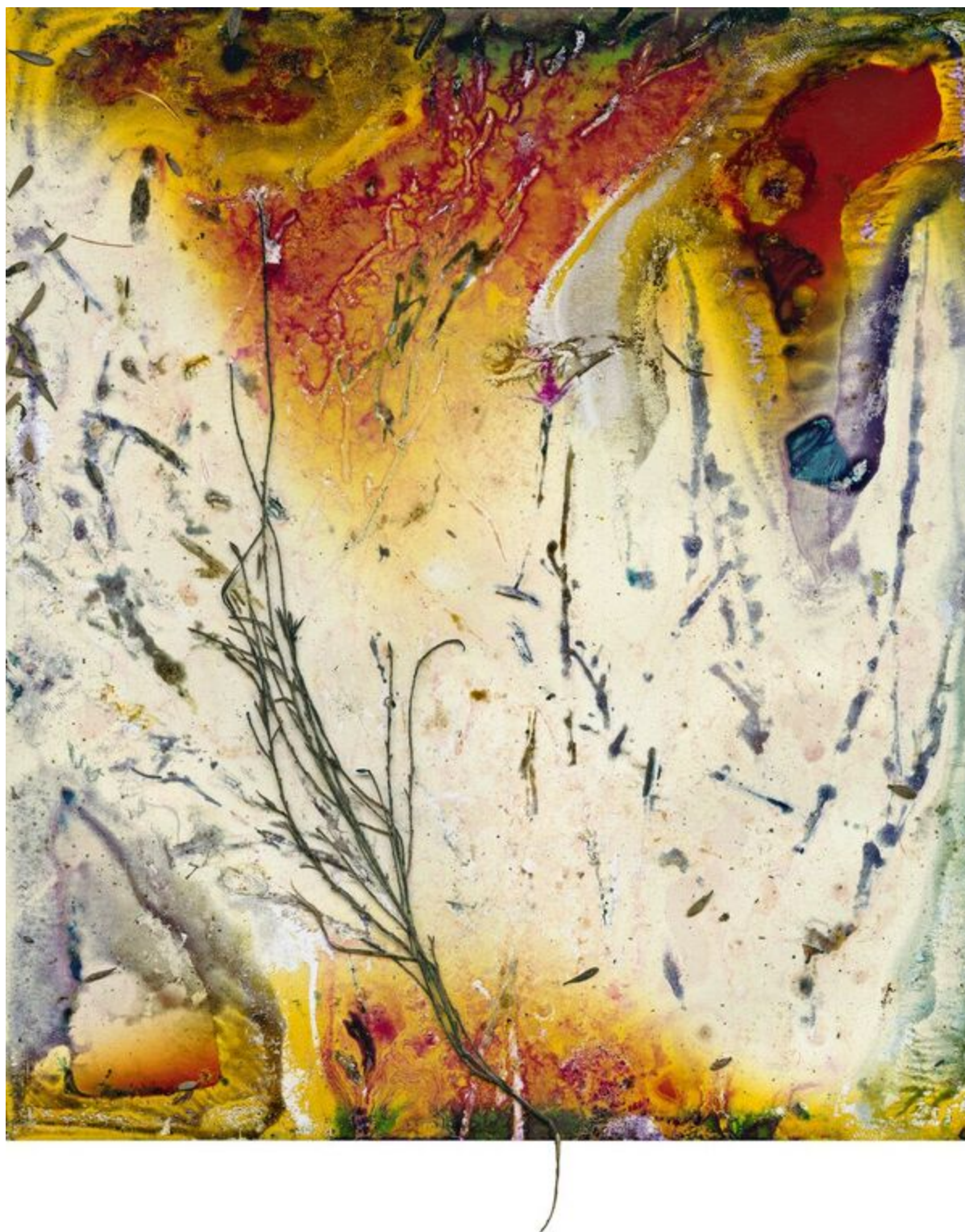


Image Four. Renata Buziak. *Leptospermum Juniperinum... insect repellent 2015*, Archival Print on Rag, 114 x 90 cm. Courtesy of the Artist.

In the contemporary context of twenty-first century Australia, ideas of national identity, community and self are constantly evolving due to globalized capitalism, technological innovation and globally interconnected information networks, not to mention anthropogenic climate change, mass extinction and the destabilization of multiple earth life systems. In this time of great transition, it is increasingly clear that no notion of nationhood, nor its relationship to the land can ever be fixed or static, rather, they must be protean and constantly emerging. The artists represented in the *Land Dialogues* exhibition are responding to these changes in a number of ways. The aforementioned factors of global change also have dramatic implications on the medium of images, which despite numerous shortcomings, is still being used to construct culturally specific relationships, narratives and systems of value between humans (individual and communal) and the land. The curatorial guidelines of the *Land Dialogues* exhibition carefully avoided imagery that overtly seeks to contribute to any furthering of Australian national identity drawn solely from the features of the land. Instead, *Land Dialogues* focuses on photographic practice that expands upon or challenges the tradition of representation by engaging in speculative and experimental dialogue with earth systems traditionally called *nature* and reduced to a flattened image called *landscape*. The motivation for this exhibition falls in line with the emergent eco-critical and new materialist agenda of radically reinvigorating discussions around the lived reality of life on this planet, and how these must change if life on earth is to continue (Gibson, 2015). In order to promote new modes of ecological understanding and value through photographic representation, the traditions of making and reading landscape photography must change to incorporate more than just photographic representations of land in the “what we saw” or “what this place looks like” tradition of documentary or aestheticized landscape photography. It must include and promote dialogue between all aspects of life on earth, including human and non-human beings. It must transcend ideas of place in terms of isolated realms like metropolitan or regional, considering instead a more interconnected, interdependent and ethical understanding. It must include life at all scales and across both space and time, from the planetary to the microscopic, from the immediate to the geological. Finally, it must accept that there may be limits to photographic representation, but must not stop pursuing these limits.



Image Five. James Farley. *In the garden (Wagga Wagga)*, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 70 x 50 cm.
Courtesy of the Artist.

What is Post Photography?

Post-photography is a moment in practice grounded in the globally connected and infinitely reproducible image/information culture of modern western society. Its roots can be found in two places; the first lies in the semiotic understanding that photographs, just like the written language, are coded and decoded through the interpretation of culturally constructed signs. (Sonesson, 2014) Although similar to the postmodernist/ poststructuralist critique of language, post-photography does not have to be postmodern art photography, nor photography at all if you accept the post-medium condition put forward by Rosaline Krauss (2000). The second is in the implications in a visual world after the advent of digital imaging. The foundations for this understanding of post-photography are laid out in the critical text, *The Reconfigured Eye – Visual Truth in the Photographic Era of Post-Photographic* by William J. Mitchell (1994). Mitchell focuses largely on the ontological implications of digital technological developments, with a keen interest on their implications to the already problematic notion of truth in photography. For Mitchell, the fundamental differences between traditional photographic images, created by the interaction of light and chemical process, and the digital equivalent, is their relationship to that which is photographed. Mitchell gives the following definition of the post-photographic moment as a new era in photography's ever evolving social and technological history.

We can identify certain historical moments at which the sudden crystallisation of a new technology (such as painting, printing, photography or computing) provides the nucleus for new forms of social and cultural practice and marks the beginning of a new era of artistic exploration. The end of the 1830s – the moment of Daguerre and Fox Talbot – was one of these. And the opening of the 1990s will be remembered as another – the time at which the computer processed digital image began to supersede the image fixed on silver based photographic emulsion. (Mitchell 1994, 20)



Image Six. Amy Findlay. *Resilience*, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 93.5 x 111.0 cm. Courtesy of the Artist.

Mitchell suggests that just as photography displaced painting in the early 19th century, digital photographic technologies have displaced our understanding of photography entirely because the digital imaging technologies allow for the intentional creation (and dissemination) of images that may not bear any causal relationship to that which they depict (Mitchell, 30-31). Or as Martha Rosler says when reflecting on the implications on an image's ability to bear truth, "Post-photographic practice at a minimum can be said to have abandoned any interest in indexicality and perhaps, just as importantly, in the privileged viewpoint of 'witness' – and therefore any embeddedness in a particular moment in time and space" (Rosler, 2004). The ever increasing malleability of the digital image has led us into the post-photographic moment, a new era in photography's ever evolving social, artistic and technological history.

In the recent publication *Post-Photography – The Artist with with a Camera*, Robert Shore (2014) shares the view that we have entered the post-photographic moment,

however is less concerned about the decentering of the photographer, the photograph and relationship with the real. Shore extends the inquiry to the post-photographic moment into a large survey of contemporary practitioners engaged in various practice around the world. This collection of artists is broken down into five categories based around a single idea or mode of creation and each artist is given space to outline their own practice rather than Shore suggesting any single aesthetic framework or curatorial vision to the collective (Shore, 2014). There can be no single authoritative voice on the post-photographic moment because it is necessarily flexible and multifaceted. As Rosler and Mitchell address, the post-photographic moment highlights and extends existing issues for any context where the truth or indexicality of an image is paramount; such as journalism, traditional documentary or scientific classification, however, photography has always faced such problems. In the ever evolving field of artistic practice and investigation, the post-photographic moment is ripe with opportunity and potential that must be explored. In what I have witnessed of post-photographic practice so far, I would put forward the following characteristics of this moment, but would advise taking them as lines in the dirt rather than a path etched on a map.

- The post-photographic moment does not elevate or celebrate any one style or idea from photography's past, but is informed by that past in its entirety. It embraces not just the canonical figures of a constructed history, but encourages the exploration of counter narratives that have been largely outside the frame of historical focus.
- Both post-photographic artists and audiences are increasingly fluent in the visual language as both participate in the creation and dissemination of images in an increasingly regular fashion. This leads to a reduced space between artist and audience, due largely to the endless flow of visual data via online networks.
- Post-photography is inclusive of all current photographic practice and theory and welcomes images or processes not traditionally considered 'photographic', including but not limited to image appropriation, pixel drawing, data mining and computational imaging.

- The post-photographic moment allows artists to be less inclined to develop a canonical style, instead utilizing the unlimited access to photographic technology, history and technique to experiment with any and all aspects of the medium of images. Often adopting or combining whichever options are deemed necessary to meet a specific personal, social, political or aesthetic intent.

These characteristics are present in the work of all artists featured in the *Land Dialogues* exhibition. *Land Dialogues* takes into account the technological/ cultural shifts that set the stage for the current post-photographic moment, in conjunction with a wider view towards the changing technological and cultural relationship with the biophysical world. This is addressed through the argument put forward by cultural theorist Barry Lord in *Art & Energy: How Culture Changes* (2014). I am interested in exploring a parallel narrative between the technological/ cultural implications of the post-photographic moment and the cycles of technological and cultural change as outlined by Lord. I believe that the contemporary shift in practice through the post-photographic moment and highlighted in *Land Dialogues*, is indicative of a changing culture. Perhaps the characteristics of experimentation, openness, self-reflection and inclusiveness will continue to expand outside the realm of artistic discourse to be embraced by the emergent cultures of stewardship as a whole.



Image Seven. Christine McFetridge. *The Winter Garden (untitled)*, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20 x 16 cm. Courtesy of the Artist.

Towards a Culture of Stewardship.

In *Art & Energy: How Culture Changes* (2014), Lord explores the correlation between developments in a culture's sources of energy and the effects on the corresponding cultural values. This project linking energy and culture is based upon four fundamental principles.

- A culture cannot arise or continue without the energy source that enables that culture to be practiced.
- Getting and retaining access to sufficient energy requires adopting certain values and acknowledging certain priorities, while abandoning, denying or suppressing others.
- The values and meanings entailed by that energy source become a basic component of the value system of that culture.
- If the energy source changes, then the values and meanings at the base of that culture will change. Energy transition is an engine of cultural change.

(Lord, 2014)

Photography first makes an appearance in the early 19th Century, during what Lord calls the Culture of Production. This is the period of the Industrial Revolution; which began as coal became the dominant source of energy. The next significant change in energy lead to the Culture of Electrification, still based largely on coal but in a transformative way, leading to advancements across all fields of cultural practice, eventually leading to such revelations as digitization. In a quick side note, it is important to note that in Lord's theory of cultures, multiple cultures often overlap and feed into one another, they can also exist simultaneously in different locations due to the constantly emerging and developing needs for energy around the globe, as well as the relatively slow speed of innovation and cultural change. After electrification and digitization, the next significant cultural shift is called the Culture of Consumption, earning its name thanks to the value shift away from production to consumption, associated with the adoption of oil and gas as primary sources of energy.

Lord argues that the culture of consumption dramatically affected not just what we buy and how much, it changed our cultural priorities and taste in people, things, events and ideas, for better and for worse. We still sit within the culture of consumption today, however a second culture has emerged... the culture of anxiety. This culture exists in response to nuclear energy (and the destructive power associated with it), terrorism (and its political links with control of oil, gas and social power) and the threat of global warming, (which is a consequence of all previous sources of energy to date.)



Image Eight. Christopher Orchard. *Significant Roadside Environment*, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 41 x 56 cm. Courtesy of the Artist.

We currently sit nervously in a culture of anxiety, faced with the big questions posed by anthropogenic climate change, in addition to an increasing demand for cheap energy and a global community that wants to continue to advance. In order to do so, Lord suggests that one possible direction for the future is the emergence of a culture of stewardship. Lord expresses his hopes that this emerging culture will incorporate

the best aspects of all the previous cultures, while introducing new values that are (or will be) associated with the widespread adoption of renewable energy. There are many barriers to the emergence of this culture; technological limits, political and corporate agendas and resistance from individuals whose ways of life could appear threatened by the current solutions. Now I am not naïve enough to think the arts can really impact any of these challenges head on, it will take a monumental interdisciplinary, multi-directional, multi-cultural movement to implement and manage any effective change on the scale that is needed. However, I do believe that the arts will play a significant role in inspiring people to work towards and support these changes. Artists can start dreaming, testing and challenging the possible futures for a culture of stewardship that is yet to fully emerge, as artists have done in all previous periods of cultural change.

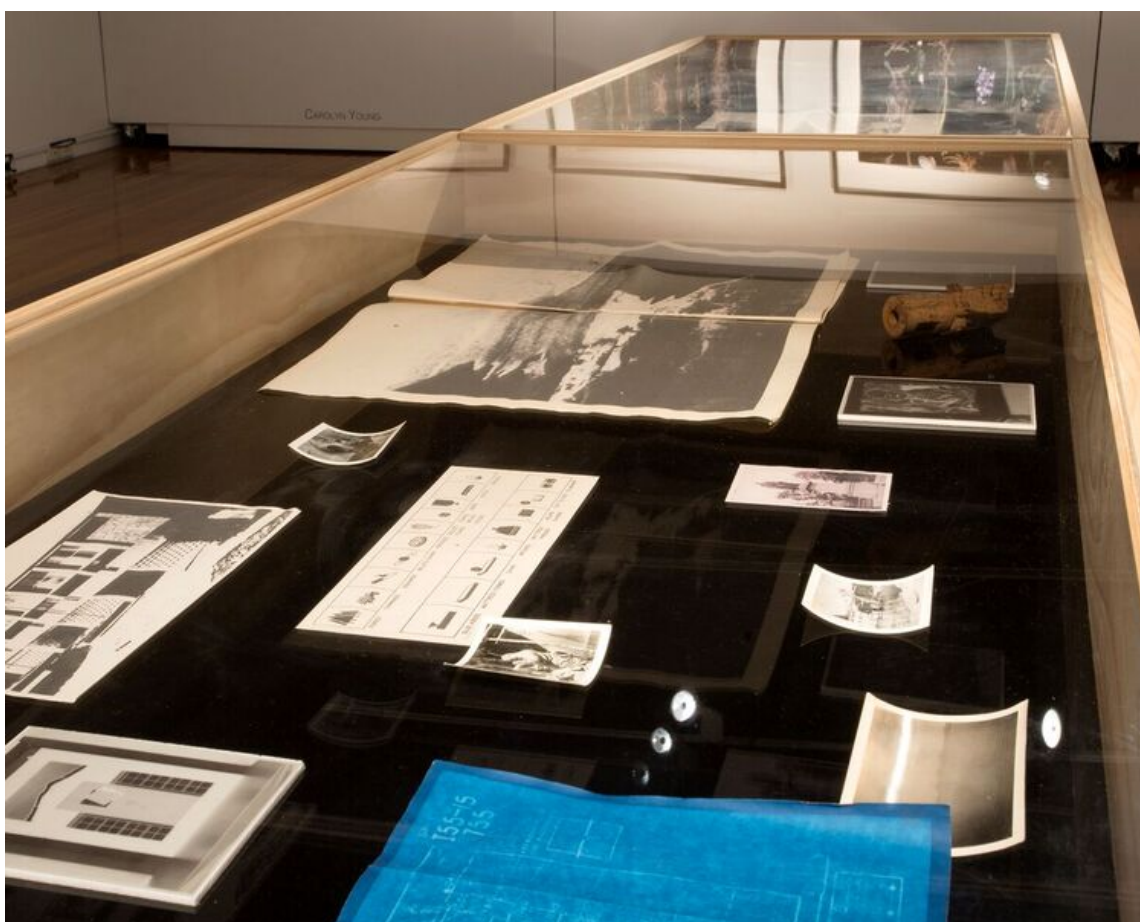


Image Nine. Jacob Raupach, Detail from *Strata (More Gaps Than Record)*, 2016, Photographic Objects / Installation. Courtesy of the Artist.

Reframing the Message of Change.

A key aspect of the *Land Dialogues* exhibition was to locate these new directions in photography on a personal or community scale. Conversations about global cultures, climate change and these times of crisis often tend to become entirely abstract and

overwhelming. The threats of our current position loom large and it is easy to slip into thoughts of helplessness, which quite often lead to inaction. Climate psychologist, Per Espen Stoknes outlines a number of strategies to avoid this slip into negativity in his aptly titled book, *What We Think About – When We Try Not to Think About Climate Change* (2015). Stoknes explores the psychological defense mechanisms utilised by many people in order to protect themselves from information that is too traumatic, challenging or threatening to bear. He breaks this defense system down into what he calls the Five D's (Distance, Doom, Dissonance, Denial, iDentity) and offers some strategies to work with these defenses, rather than against them in order to effectively communicate messages around global warming (Stoknes, 2015). He calls these strategies a New Psychology of Climate Action, and suggests that in order for communication to be successful, these guidelines should be followed.

- Make the issue feel near, human, personal, and urgent.
- Use supportive framings that do not backfire by creating negative feelings.
- Reduce cognitive dissonance by providing opportunities for consistent and visible action.
- Avoid triggering the emotional need for denial evoked through fear, guilt, self-protection.
- Reduce cultural and political polarization on the issue.

(Stoknes, 2015)

These strategies were important in developing the framework for *Land Dialogues*, as they allowed for a clear curatorial vision that avoided the types of imagery that so often invoke the defense mechanisms outlined in the Five D's. As a curator, I am less concerned with images showing the effects of anthropogenic climate change in a direct or illustrative way, nor am I interested in documenting the sites where damage has already occurred or those sites we stand to lose. Psychologists, theorists and a growing number of artists agree, that these strategies do nothing to instigate real change, instead often leading to aestheticizing sites only for their value as images. Rather, the work focused on in *Land Dialogues* is concerned with

presenting alternative ways artists can speak beyond this anxiety, living with a mind towards cultural transition and feeling at home in the world.

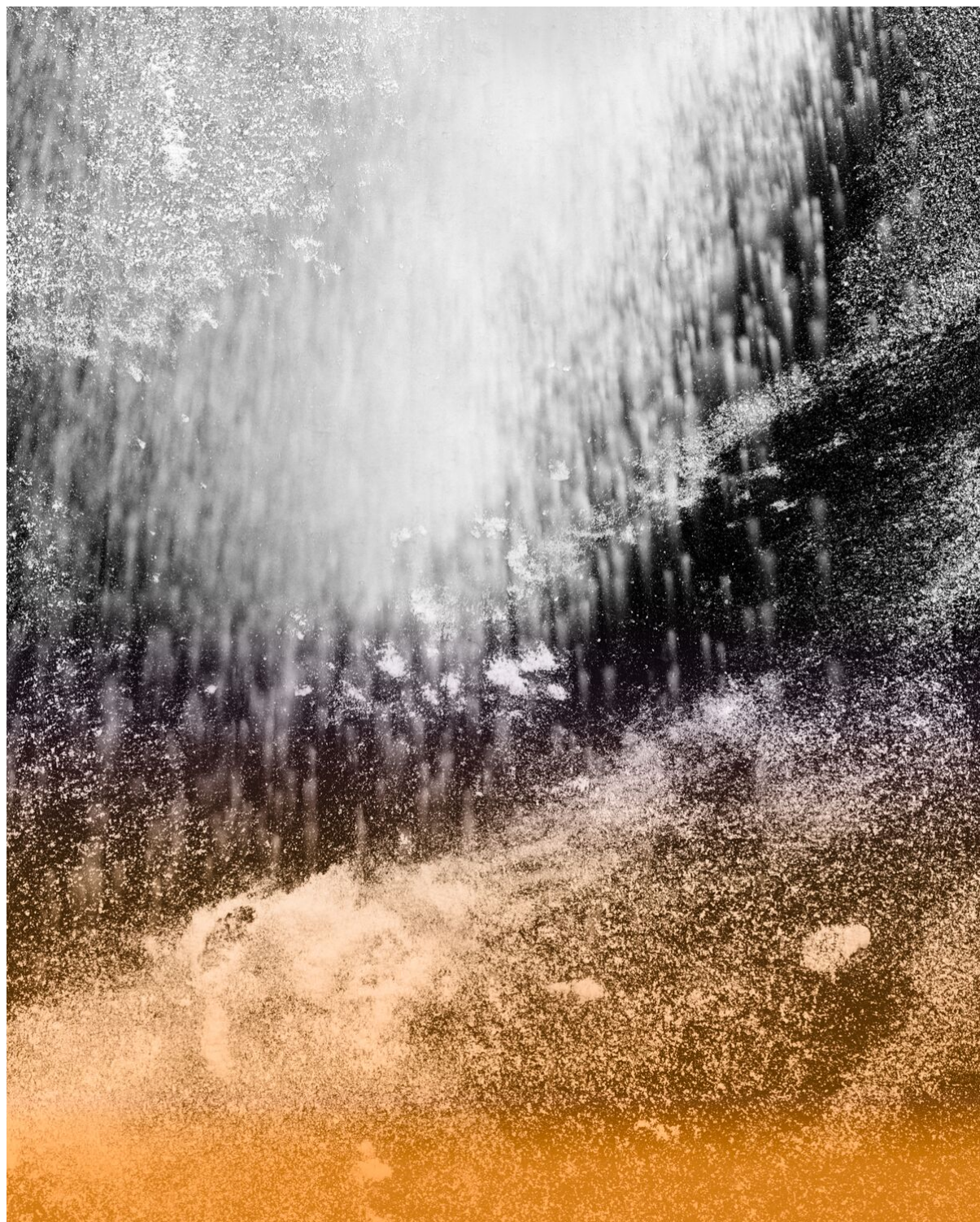


Image Ten. Kate Robertson, *Dust Landscape 7*, 2012, Archival Inkjet Print, 120 x 96cm. Courtesy of the Artist.

A number of eco-philosophers have put forward different theories and vocabularies to help artist move toward this goal. These new directions approach a similar subject from a number of different specializations or backgrounds, however each is contributing to the growing field calling for a complete overhaul of thought and action in regard to human beings and the rest of the biophysical community of life. The work of Australian professor of sustainability, Glenn Albrecht, is just one of the voices that has been particularly useful to the process of curating an exhibition towards such an end. Albrecht has gained international attention for presenting a new vocabulary of psychological conditions known as “psychoterratic conditions”. One of Albrecht’s new concepts, *solastalgia* has been particularly popular. *Solastalgia* is neologism created by combining the Latin word *solacium* (comfort) and the Greek root *-algia* (pain) (Albrecht, 2005). Albrecht describes *solastalgia* as:

The pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation). It is manifest in an attack on one’s sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation. It is an intense desire for the place where one is a resident to be maintained in a state that continues to give comfort or solace. Solastalgia is not about looking back to some golden past, nor is it about seeking another place as ‘home’. It is the ‘lived experience’ of the loss of the present as manifest in a feeling of dislocation; of being undermined by forces that destroy the potential for solace to be derived from the present. In short, solastalgia is a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at ‘home’. (Albrecht, 2005)

A growing number of artists have connected with this term and it has been widely used to accompany practices that seek to express lament for the destruction and forced change of the landscape. This is explored in the catalogue essay by Albrecht for the 2012 exhibition *Life in Your Hands; Art From Solastalgia* at the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery. Albrecht reflects on the relationship between his new

psychoterratic condition and the motivation of artists in the introductory essay to the catalogue:

Contemporary environmental art portrays the loss of species and ecosystems as something more than loss of biodiversity ... it also depicts the loss of something vital within us ... the negation of the very possibility of deriving happiness from our relationship to the environment. Artists not only sense the alienation that is occurring to human–place relationships, they attempt to depict such relationships in their art. When presented with the conceptual clarification of their inner feelings about Earth relations they are empowered by it. (Daw, R. Ed, 2012)



Image Eleven. Felix Wilson, *Encounter Sequence (Melbourne)*, 2016, Photographic Installation (detail). Courtesy of the Artist.

Land Dialogues seeks to focus on something beyond a sense of empowerment observed by Albrecht through the term *solastalgia*. Although a useful concept in defining the human psychological distress associated with living in a changing environment, *solastalgia* limits such a response to the human realm. This suggests

an overly anthropogenic position regarding climate change, by reducing the great loss of biodiversity and physical change of the land to the negative impact on how humans relate themselves to place and not addressing the realities for other life forms or ecological networks. The motivation of *Land Dialogues* is to move beyond anthropogenic dialogue grounded in alienation, narcissism and anxiety, heading towards dialogue that is more speculative, inclusive and open. A more fitting term in this goal, also coined by Albrecht, is *soliphilia*. Albrecht describes *soliphilia* to mean “The love of and responsibility for a place, bioregion, planet and the unity of interrelated interests within it.” (Albrecht, 2009) *Soliphilia* is positioned to be the antidote for *Solastalgia* and may be one of the most appropriate term to describe the overall direction of the *Land Dialogues* exhibition. Effective as it is, this term is not unique in its goal by any means. There are a number of other concepts that have been equally revealing and influential that share similar hopes and aspirations.

Australian ecofeminist philosopher, Val Plumwood, has been influential in critiquing the enduring divide that locates human beings as the outside nature, then elevating humans to a position of masters over nature and all its domains (Plumwood 2001, 2002). Deborah Bird Rose, friend and colleague of Plumwood, continues this task in a contemporary critique of anthropocentrism and expands Plumwood’s call for a new mode of humanity that includes both human and non-human beings (Rose, Gibson and Fincher, 2015). Eco-critic and philosopher, Timothy Morton, puts forward a number of influential ideas in *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), *The Ecological Thought* (2012) and the concept of *Dark Ecology* (2016).



Image Twelve. Carolyn Young, *Reflecting On Ngunawal Plant Use In November*, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 93.5 X 111.0 cm. Courtesy of the Artist.

Morton has proved particularly influential in the curatorial process towards this photographic exhibition due to his attempt to completely remove the concept of nature, which aligns with the goals of *Land Dialogues* in challenging the photographic traditions of representing nature and landscape. The fundamental objective of Morton is aptly summarized in the title of his book, *Ecology without Nature*. Morton aims to reveal the concept of Nature as overly holistic, constructed and damaging. The process through which this may be achieved is the *Ecological Thought*. For Morton, the Ecological Thought is part of a larger ecological project that moves beyond thinking ecology in terms of environment, climate change or human/non-human relationships, rather it involves conceptualizing the world as a series of dynamic, entangled and codependent beings (or objects) (Morton, 2012). For Morton, art is well suited in demonstrating the psychologically challenging aspects of thinking ecologically.

Art can help us, because it's a place in our culture that deals with intensity, shame, abjection, and loss. It also deals with reality and unreality, being and seeming. If ecology is about radical coexistence, then we must challenge our sense of what is real and what is unreal, what counts as existent and what counts as nonexistent. The idea of Nature as a holistic, healthy, real thing avoids this challenge. (2012)

Morton's argument has evolved from *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) into *Dark Ecology* (2016), which is a way of thinking *the* ecological thought comfortably in the shade of an already unfolding global catastrophe. *Dark Ecology* embraces that shade, and all things mysterious, unknown, curious and open. These qualities align with the parameters of the post-photographic moment and as such represent further steps towards the emergence of new cultures of stewardship.

Land Dialogues seeks to combine a number of contrasting voices in a common space, the work allows for the creation of pathways for dialogues that may have otherwise never existed. My taste as both an artist and a curator has been shaped by these varying strands of thought, which are in the process of being woven together in a form of ecological thinking via photographic praxis. *Land Dialogues* is an exercise of this praxis. It is my hope that this exhibition can contribute to the growing international dialogue by showing photography's capacity to move beyond anxiety, negativity and fear and towards a pathway that is mindful, personal and positive.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Arts practice and inter-generational equity: A consilience approach.

Christopher Orchard



Significant Roadside Environment Area #2 – C. Orchard 2016

In late 2013 to early 2014 over a period of three long and dry summer months spanning December through February, three very significant life events took place. I moved house from the city of Wagga Wagga to the small rural community of Marrar in regional New South Wales, a place where for all intents and purposes, I knew no one, and had very little immediate kinship with. At the time of this move my first child was born, a transformational event for which there is very little in the way of words to describe, other than a knowing through being. To compound these alterations, as part of my ongoing desire for research dialogues, came a need to investigate the theoretical and practical means by which we come to understand a personal relationship with land, place and space. I commenced a practice-as-research focussed PhD with the University of Tasmania. It was a shifting of mindset away from a previous mode of landscape photography embedded in a discourse of the sublime that dominated my Master of Arts (hons) projects, to a more exploratory and conversational relationship with the familiar, born through repetition and connection-over-time. I had the overwhelming feeling that I needed to know more about how we

come to understand and relate to place/s, and how to communicate those understandings to others, particularly a sense of environmental stewardship, a kind of working within nature (not with, but inside of its means), not just for me, but for my family, and my communities.



Significant Roadside Environment Area #2 – C. Orchard 2016

I made a decision, albeit only recently, that at the core of uncovering, or bringing forward new knowledge, I could not be transient or a visitor to places, but had to be critically engaged and actively embedded in the regions I occupied and worked within to make honest responses. This comes from a passing through landscape as tour guide with Dr. Troy Ruffels, but also ideas shared over a vindaloo and lager with Plymouth Professor of Photography and the Land Jem Southam October 2014 in Plymouth UK. All of the practice-as-research investigations would be in some ways autobiographical and auto-ethnographic in nature, responding meaningfully to the lived experience of working and practicing within a rural community in regional New South Wales. This includes the localised issues associated with the lived experience

of climactic change, allowing my experience and cultural product to become a microcosm for a distributed global experience, a personal response to anthropogenic climate and other broad environmental changes, impacting at the local level. My immediate footprint, in terms of physical agency is centrally positioned in the Riverina region, a broadly agricultural region of South Western, New South Wales, widely considered the most degraded landscape in NSW with approximately 2% remaining remnant vegetation. All undertakings are located geographically within an approximately 17,500 square kilometre area, with most sites bounded by Cootamundra & Mt Ulandra at the North East tracking South via Gundagai and the Hume Highway to Livingstone National Park at the South Eastern point. At the far South West sits Galore Hill and the caves of infamous Australian bushranger Daniel 'Mad Dog' Morgan, with Mt Bunganbil at the North Western point. All spaces considered, the area in which I frequent is about one fifth the size of Tasmania, and one fifth of the land area of the Wiradjuri People, the traditional custodians of the land in which I live and work. This area encompasses some major geographic shifts from the Mountains of the east, weaving westward through river & hill country, passing by long-extinct inland seas and through large transitional flats heading out west.

These selected places are sites with which I have had immediate affinity, or immediate unconscious response to, and it is these sites that more or less, that will become spaces of returned visits, at irregular intervals, when I feel it necessary to reconnect to them. As Jem Southam articulates about how he photographs place/s, these sites have found me, more than I have found them.



Significant Roadside Environment Area #2 – C. Orchard 2016

It is the experience as it is lived and interpreted through photographic and post-photographic practice that generates new and thoughtful review offering potential avenues for change, new knowledge, or new modes of thinking towards research-orientated action (as *agency*). This necessitates an active approach to critical analysis, ongoing self-reflection and creative-reconstruction as new visual-data is found, produced, manufactured and critiqued. What I present here is only a nominal amount of investigations that form part of a broad scope of place-based arts practice and research outcomes. All of my practice-as-research is, at its core, interdisciplinary, as it is embedded in an individual lived reality where points-of-agency are explored through broad scoped practice. Each project is centrally informed by the Charles Sturt University ethos and Wiradjuri phrase, Yindyamarra Winhanganha; 'the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in' where discrete but invariably linked investigations are taken at the edges of traditional photographic disciplines and presented as visual allegory to test and

critique possible consiliences, convergences, nexuses and latent unities of understanding where the limits of potential experience are the limits in modes-of-interpretation. Testing of broad, but lived interdisciplinary knowledge through practice is designed to result in a dialectical method, a procedural meshwork towards critical practice in action, simplified; a physical rendering of potentials for change production. This change production is the commitment to 'communicating understandings on an individual and community level' and in engaging community in meaningful environmental stewardship discourse towards an arts practice, located and responding to place for intergenerational equity.

There are a few projects inside this framework that have been undertaken, over the now 10 months full-time equivalent that I have been enrolled in the PhD. These projects briefly introduced, in chronological order are:

1. **Agrophilia**: a site-specific photographic investigation in to the familiar, specifically located at viewing/re-viewing colonial marks on the land between Wagga Wagga, Junee and Coolamon.
2. **Performing Geographies**: a second site-specific investigation undertaken in to the vernacular and familiar, specifically located at testing the politics of space from Temora to the base of a long extinct inland sea at Ingalba Nature Reserve.
3. **Making Place / Making Peace**: a post-photographic response to notions of place and the ANZAC centenary as part of the curated exhibition Loss, Reverence and Longing: ANZAC stories from the home front.
4. **Significant Roadside Environment Area #1**: A post-photographic response to environmental groups concepts of significance in competing environmental, economic, social and political concerns; specifically located between Marrar and Wagga Wagga. I drive this road twice a day, once to work, and once

5. coming home. One of the hardest parts of being an academic and doing a PhD is making time from the competing demands of work/home to actually respond to land (which requires above all time) to make new work.
6. **Playing and Reality:** a post-photographic response to ideas of climate change, water shortage, prolonged drought and intergenerational equity. A response to time spent in Broken Hill, Mungo National Park and being at home in Marrar.
7. **Extinction Clock:** a post-photographic response to increasing concerns for rapid biodiversity loss and an attempt at the translation of complex facts/figures in to new and meaningful forms. More an exploration of alternate forms than anything solid or resolved.

I want to explore these projects in a more depth as to how they inform the overall line of inquiry.

Agrophilia. - <http://corchard.com.au/index.php/agrophilia/>

Agrophilia took the form of an artist's e-book and photographic essay: operating with the by-line *Exposing an Australian Regional Vernacular, or, Architectural Agrarianism*. Published in the Academic Journal 'Fusion' in its 4th edition 'The Town and the City'. It worked towards a preliminary investigation, an exploration of one key question for me that arose from a reading of Deborah Bright's essay *Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men* where she says:

Whether noble, picturesque, sublime or mundane, the landscape image bears the imprint of its cultural pedigree. It is a selected and constructed text...

For me, the way the landscape as colonial & post-colonial text within my region had been constructed by others, and how I was, in the midst of reconstructing this text to make meaning in my own life, due to moving house and by means of cultural symbolization, it was an important moment for consideration. I was being asked, not

by anyone else, but rather by myself, what about (townships) place do I value? I was struck by the way John Brinkerhoff Jackson spoke of landscape and the familiar in both 'Discovering the Vernacular Landscape' and 'Landscapes: Selected Writings'. I was re-assured by them that it was okay to like same-ness. The project re-acts to certain ambivalence. I felt at once burdened by incredible debt, logging in to netbank for the first time to see the total debits was a kind of depressing mathematical sublime, but somehow also freed to enjoy a lifestyle of regionalism and vernacular character that was in many ways, slow and soothing; a troubling, unreconciled state I still carry with me, and probably will for the next 20 years paying off a mortgage.

I began to document the planned landscape of my region, labelling it as a kind of frontier territory (because I was experiencing it anew, or for the first time), where its often-ugly histories would be buried beneath a familiar and vernacular veneer, yet both things provide a true vision of small-town character. At the cross roads of major travel routes would be the same few things: the Court House (reminding people on the frontier of their civic duty and responsibilities, providing a reminder of the rule of law), the Post Office (providing a connection to the outside world), the Bank (reminding people of the economic systems of governance, and to provide a sense of solidity to their endeavours)... and on the fourth corner, of course, the pub (allowing people to forget the realities of actually being there on the frontier). It was the same four stories played out from Wagga Wagga, to Junee, to Coolamon to Lockhart. I could see how towns had been built around these colonial ideas and conflicting realities as colonisation pushed farther... transformed later, as it were by the railways and the automobiles, in towns large enough to support it, changing the way we access these spaces in to American style strips.

Jackson says:

I define a landscape not as scenery; which is the customary use of the word, but as an organization of man made spaces. Those are the things that have an immediate sympathetic appeal, at least to me.

I'm not interested in the natural scenery here, I'm interested in what other men have done, or tried to do on the face of the earth; and this design changes from season to season, and from year to year and from generation to generation and is eventually obliterated and replaced by another design. This is the history of the (vernacular) landscape.

I wrote about these at the time, and feel the same now that this sense of sameness makes one calm during a road-trip, that passing through such spaces to me was a general sense of cultural nostalgia, a sense of homeliness tinged with an essence of hard work and perseverance. The only unease provided by the love of the horizontal (what I came to call Agrophilia), and that, in every small town, the other story playing out was the death of the vertical and the closure of the second storeys and above of any building. Once the province of Doctors, Lawyers and all manner of moneyed gentry, the upper storeys of the regional shopping malls has lost their appeal. The doctors, lawyers and accountants have long since outgrown these premises and they no longer serviced the needs of such businesses. Many are now boarded up to prevent entry, converted to cheap student accommodation or sport a perpetual for lease sign.

All of these small towns I can remember as a kid visiting, stopping for fish & chips and a lemonade on our way somewhere, either out bushwalking, bird-spotting or out fossicking. It is this *nostalgia* I would investigate further later on.

Performing Geographies - <http://corchard.com.au/index.php/performing-geographies/>

Performing Geographies in many ways is the next iteration from Agrophilia: this time tracing the movement from a town (Temora) and its traditional centre outwards. Again, taking the form of an artist's e-book and photographic essay, currently pending publication in Fusion Journal #7, MASK; Performance, Performativity and Communication in the Professions and Creative Industries. The full title of the photo-essay was *Performing Geographies: Between photographs and footprints*, and, in

many ways serviced to ask whether there was any value in taking photographs, or whether we should leave footprints, and what these statements might really mean in an already degraded landscape. In the contextualising paper I wrote that the use of photography to punctuate walking as an act of recording a political will has a long and multifaceted history. I stated that I am less concerned with building layers of complexity on top of an existing and well-documented history than I am with going for a walk... and investigating or thinking through what going for a walk might mean in the anthropocene (to me), and in regional New south Wales. I want to read a little of that paper;

... I have been walking now for about 3 hours and 42 minutes to arrive at my final destination: the Ingalba Nature Reserve, 17.8 kilometres by my GPS counting west-south-west on foot from the New South Wales regional town of Temora. The nature reserves sits at the bottom of a long vanished inland sea, and with it remnants of a drastically changing land, not just in recent economic or political shifts of land usage, but a real sense of a deep and geologic time.

To provide context, I used to come to Temora a lot as a child. While others might have had hobbies, for my two brothers, both diagnosed Asperger's, the concept of idle time filled with diversions was unheard of, there was no mere distraction or entertainment, but rather concepts that required frequent and intense investigation to uncover every known detail. One of these pastimes we got into was lapidary, but no mere (normal child's) rock-collection was enough, but rather the hunt for specific types of stones, found only in specific locations, then, the cutting, faceting and making of cabochons and other forms (and only a knowing of the underlying geology, chemical makeup, scientific names and every possible minutiae of information would suffice). I wasn't able to keep up with this, but I certainly could enjoy being in the countryside digging in the clay, sand and dirt, uncovering a few interesting stones. This pastime would take us out almost every weekend somewhere new around the region for the better part of 3 years, and whether it was greenstone, amethyst, quartz crystals, soapstone, and agate or, as happened on

one occasion, opalite, it was lovely to spend weekends as a family walking through country together learning.

A few of my later project ideas were born while undertaking this specific walk. I took a small notepad, in it I wrote: *The smell of rain on dry soil; if there isn't a word for this already there needs to be one; if there isn't a cologne that smells like it, there needs to be one.* The word is *Petrichor*, a quick google shows me that it exists (the wonders of modern technology, demystifying ideas before they even get a chance to coalesce); I thought I was on to something... ..it was apparently co-coined in 1964 by Isabel Joy Bear, an Australian. Of course it existed, and of course it included an Australian, it is such a familiar and delightful smell. Better thoughts followed yet, the smell of rain on soil is different everywhere, so this smell must be, it is, uniquely of this place. Mugga iron bark, black cypress on some gravelly and rocky sections of roadside; grey box and white cypress on slightly better soils; occasional dwarf she-oak (*casuarina*). I think to myself there might still be something in this... ..I have an exhibition coming up at Eastern Riverina Arts office in Wagga Wagga, maybe I can recreate a sense of place, the smell of certain bushlands, a job for later in distilling essential oils. What if my photographs not only were of something visually, but were of something via scent... I'll do this later. The truth is, I would return to my cold white office, place some eucalyptus leaves in front of the air conditioning outlet, and allow the smell to fill my room as I write these notes up... I write better in the 'open air'. *Aspects of Making Place / Making Peace* and *Significant Roadside Environment Area* were initially thought of through this process.

Making Place / Making Peace - <http://corchard.com.au/index.php/making-place-making-peace/>

From Greek origins *nostos* (to return home) and *algos* (pain) and the German *heimweh* (homesickness) came the 18th Century English term: *nostalgia* (acute homesickness). In modern dictionary definitions *nostalgia* is explained as 'a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past'. This contemporary interpretation does not embody the fullness or traditions of the word, and does little

to represent the experience of being removed from ones *home*. Reading nostalgia in a contemporary way places the term outside its known and felt psychological implications, it says home is something to see as being only romanticised about, a thing understood as mere sentimentality. In the installation work '*Making Place – Making Peace*' for '*Loss, Reverence and Longing: ANZAC Stories from the Home Front*' we (My Partner Shona Pratt & I) are asking to re-take the word back to its origins. We want to assert that *home & homesickness* is central not just to the lives of those touched by World War One, but, instead still to our present lived realities. We want to contend that *home* should carry with it a true weight of a person or peoples geographic, spiritual and cultural connectivity to place.

In the First World War acute homesickness was a lived experience, a reality that saw Australian soldiers returned home diagnosed with (then, but not now) a clinically diagnosable psychological illness: *nostalgia*. Through exploring the term *nostalgia* by tracing both life on the frontlines and life on the home front a rich history of shared symbolism emerges. Of the greatest interest to us is the use of natural elements (soil/water/seeds) to embody cultural experience. Our installation work is engineered to serve a dual purpose, to provide an avenue to explore the rich symbolism of War (poppy/rosemary/land), and to juxtapose these as symbols of domesticity (gardening/cooking/home): each tied to a real desire for connection to, or understanding of (a) place.

In exploring stories from the home front, we wanted to explore concepts of '*home & land*', not '*homeland*'. The deliberate separation of these two words uncouples nationalistic attachment and sentiment and returns us to a specific place, an identifiable geographical area of interacting life systems, our home habitat. Here *nostalgia* and a new *psychoterratic* (earth related mental health) term *solastalgia* (a home sickness you feel while still at home) show principal similarities in alternate spaces (the battle front and the home front) when a great cultural and spiritual trauma, one that disturbs our sense of residence takes place upon our collected lives. Soldiers want for home (nostalgia), but if returned, home it doesn't feel like home anymore (solastalgia). Families at home feel a pronounced psychic numbing

as if from the very start, what once was home will never be again. In every choice of the work we have created, these places of loss, reverence and specific types of longing play out. None of the loss, reverence or longing is ever reconciled, and this, is deliberate.

Significant Roadside Environment Area -

<http://corchard.com.au/index.php/significant-roadside-1/>

In this practice-led-research project the contemporary politics of space (and mobility) are explored using the New South Wales (Australian) road/roadside as microcosm for industrial intervention at the nexus of political, economic, environmental and cultural agendas in thinking, walking or driving through the anthropocene using the road as literal 'line separating nature from technology'. Central to the Australian economy the road is explored as a physical and non-physical space for the interconnection of philosophies where an uneasy or tense marriage between commercial and financial interests and environmental vestiges of genetic variation are forced in to uneasy balances, and in many cases, managed out of an equilibrium (if there ever was one). This stability and instability is explored as philosophical misalignment of potential values, to see the road not only through anthropocentric eyes, but also as the last fragmented corridors for genetic diversity, amongst flora and fauna and as home to some last ranges of remnant native vegetation (including a large proportion of threatened/endangered species) as hosting its own capacity to value outside its value to humankind.

The perspective placed on the roadside as landscape transformed by technology makes comparative analysis of New South Wales roadside areas including traveling stock routes and reserves as comprising almost 5% of the states total land mass, being an equivalent area to the states designated National Parks. To put this in a local perspective, the amount of *roadside environment* as last vestige for genetic diversity, and corridors for flora and fauna in the area I work, is equivalent to twice the size of the Tarkine. Tracing the not insubstantial history; including pre-colonial histories of the road/pathways of the Riverina Region specifically; a mapping of the

politics of land use is undertaken through autoethnographic methods to produce new land narratives and unique insights in to relationships between competing anthropocentric values, particularly the value of place-making in historical accounts, contemporary cultures and the value of recording or documenting change as it happens, and to reflect on change as means toward design futures.

Here 'significance' is manufactured by prescribing cultural value rather than natural value. A roadside area's is created or fabricated as if to be able to articulate significance purely by saying the word. Rendering natures voice visible is a constant challenge for the artist working within nature. I take the roadside out of the country and place it in the office of a local business as an installation. Meet all the criteria for 'significance', and make have people walk past it (not drive) and question their own impact.

Playing and Reality - <http://corchard.com.au/index.php/quarter-acre-1/>

The exhibitions name comes from the D.W. Winnicott book of the same name as an exploration of how children begin to experience the world, ultimately in to a testing of that world, separation anxieties and building concepts and ideas around death. I first began thinking about this when undertaking the walk for performing geographies; I wrote:

I have thought multiple times before on what water restrictions mean for our mental health, what dirt instead of grass might mean for our wellbeing. I am reminded of something my partner said to me only two weeks prior about our one-year-old son, and our new home we share together in Regional Australia. She said: *'All I want is for a patch of grass for Thomas to play on, he really likes being outside'*... and every time I think of my young child experiencing the world behind the tempered glass doors of our living room, breathing conditioned air, playing with plastic toys, it makes me little melancholic... we do need a piece of green grass... but maybe we need to share that green grass with everyone (like a park) rather than own our own.

In this exhibition I put the piece of green grass up on a pedestal, under glass, behind a distant line so as to not allow close interaction. Images of brown dirt surrounded as framed prints, and shot glasses with measurements of rainfall over the three months prior sat, never to meet the grass, as over the month of install it slowly browned off and died.

My work for the recent exhibition here at Scotch Oakburn College is a continuation of that idea. Where the process of terraforming our backyard (gardening really) has started to take place.

Extinction Clock - <http://corchard.com.au/index.php/extinction-clock/>

The measuring of change over time: from the vast expanse from the birth of our known universe, the fortuitous yet random appearance of our species home in planet earth, to the first signs of life and then on to the moment you read this sentence and it appears, ever onwards to progress... Somewhere between four and a half million and six million years ago our lineage diverged from other primates, three and a half million years ago our common ancestor began to walk upright & two and half million years ago, we began to use basic stone tools and to form larger community groups. Then somewhere between one hundred thousand years, and two hundred and fifty thousand years ago, what we designate as Homo sapiens appeared.

Bipedal, self reflective, imaginative... ..how awesome to be alive, and to know it. What was not to like? ... In short, death was not to like.

Some things in our experience seem immovable, unwavering & unchanged with time, others seem to change and fluctuate wildly. Yet, more things come and go largely unnoticed. This clock is a measure of change over time, a measure of biodiversity loss: of the silent disappearance of plants, animals & insects from planet earth... ..99.9% of all plants and animal species that have ever lived are no longer on the face of planet earth. This Extinction Clock counts in measures so that we

cannot just see the enormity over time, but also to see the count rise as we sit, providing for reflection on a very human scale.

Where to next? Conclusions?

The easiest answer is that I do not know, and that there is no conclusion, only that time continues to move on, and that I am okay with that. Perhaps it is somewhere within the broad field of agri(culture). Where the cultivation of land, and the cultivation of self become entwined.

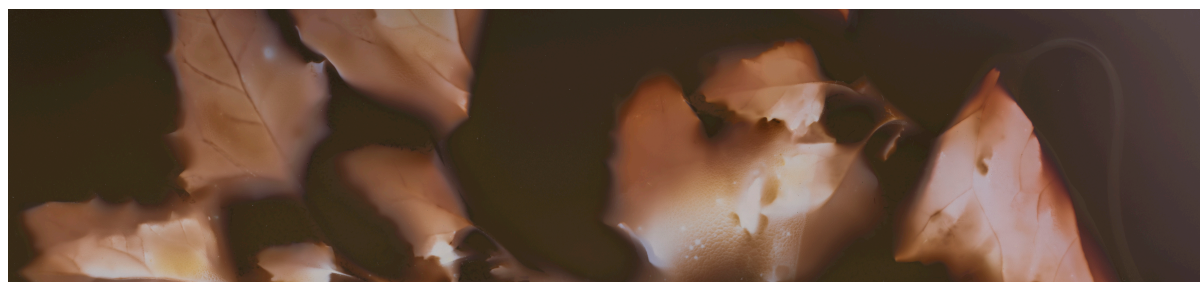


FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

A Single Day Walking on Terraformed Land: strangeness and familiarity in rehabilitated open cut mine land at Rix's Creek.

Penny Dunstan



Abstract

Terraforming the Upper Hunter Valley occurs when piles of open cut mining waste are transmuted into hills and plains, covered with topsoils and planted with a mix of trees and pasture plants. Animal and bird systems self-establish over the top of the human designed landscape. Due to economic and engineering constraints, terraformed land differs from its original form, and the plant and animal systems that establish within and across it diverge from that prevailing in undisturbed sites.

At Rix's Creek mine in the Hunter Valley, NSW, Australia, I explore strangeness and familiarity in a landscape terraformed twelve years ago, which has transformed through the prevailing years into a woodlot, pastures and wild places. Plants are familiar but they are in strange configurations. Soils are recognizable but they are divested of their origins. Water finds form in upland swamps yet hillsides remain dry. The landscape is recognizably Hunter Valley and yet alien in quality.

This paper explores my experiences on one sunny winter day in Lot 100, New England Highway. I traverse the land on foot, using my agronomic eye to see and my art practice to interpret the landscape. Whilst it is tempting to keep a list of the missing and the alien, I use the idea of *respectful wayfinding* (Instone 133) as a methodology to understand the new configuration of life evolving in the terraformed environment. Direct photographic printing, drawing and digital photography, also seek to honour the life force that will not be denied in this terraformed land.

Introduction

Geoengineering is re-landscaping the Upper Hunter. What once was agricultural land is becoming something else. Our demand for coal for both power and foreign exchange, has left large tracts of the Upper Hunter Valley in New South Wales, Australia, undergoing an experimental procedure called rehabilitation as part of a post-mining tidy up. Rehabilitation starts with a remodeled landscape made from rock that once sat above and in between the coal seams. Mounded and shaped into steep sided hills, the new forms are coated with a layer of topsoil and planted with trees and grass as per agreed mine closure documentation. Mining is, after all, only a 21 year land use according to these documents (cite here). And thus all becomes right with the world. Or does it?

Rehabilitation experts may dispute that the process is experimental, however the evidence is not in regarding the long term stability and sustainability of rehabilitated land. Experiments have only been conducted over short time frames of four to 40 years. But the time frame of the Earth stretches beyond human temporalities and our changes to landform will exist until the next ice age, when ice sheets will remodel the earth surface once again. Furthermore, what are the consequences of upscaling such experiments from 40 hectares blocks to 64,000 hectares as is predicted legacy of coal mining in the Hunter? There are so many unknowns that shadow humanity's choice to geoengineer an entire valley. Whilst this land is predicted to be used once again for grazing and for wood lots, who can say what will happen between the interactions with climate change and new subsoils that are highly alkaline? Or species colonization and agricultural use?

As an artist and agronomist, I explore one block of land terraformed 10 years ago, near the Hunter Valley town of Singleton. This research forms part of my PhD studies into the strangeness and familiarity of human constructed mine rehabilitation landforms, and manufactured ecosystems. Although transformed into a woodlot, pastures and wild places, there remains an alien quality to the environment. Plants are familiar but they are in strange configurations. Soils are recognizable but they are divested of their origins. Water finds form in upland swamps yet hillsides remain

dry. There are colonizing weeds alongside species from Western Australia. At first glance, it looks like a 'natural' Hunter Valley vista, but after spending a day exploring lot 100, I find it an unsettling place.

This paper does not argue for or against land rehabilitation. Instead, this research explores the rehabilitated environment using an ethic of respect for land as an entity in its own right. In this instance, land is understood through observing, looking, drawing, photographing, walking upon and breathing within. Writing is derived from a lived experience of being-in rehabilitated land and participating in the webs of existence that are slowly redeveloping. The embodied nature of the land is honoured, whether it be a past agrarian landscape or a totally constructed new earth.

Thinking about the new field of ecological humanities and the place of humans in land, Deborah Bird Rose writes, "Respect (for land) is a matter of knowledge – of knowing the connections so that one knows the many contexts in which respect is due...." (Rose 5)

By weaving together my personal knowledge of agronomy, soils science, plant nutrition, water management, in conjunction with other knowledges acquired by looking and seeing through an artist eye, respect can be afforded to new land even if they may only be twelve years old. Tiny webs of life sprout through transported topsoils. Rocks start the decaying journey to soil pedogenesis. Birds and kangaroos inspect and taste new shoots. Water seeps. Air rises from hot lands. Eagles catch the updrafts. A lone human walks.

The logic of connection holds that the web of life is a web of mutual inter-dependencies. Human beings are enmeshed in webs of life as much as are koalas, eucalypts, flying foxes, coral, vultures and bacteria. The web of life really is Earth, because this is what Earth is - a place where life came into being and continues to come into being. Respect is an ethics of engagement with this place, our home; it is

an ethics that brings gratitude for the gifts of life into dialogue with our responsibilities within the wider webs of life. (Rose 5)

And so as a human walking in upon new Earth, I am a member of this web which Rose evokes. I walk with the Earth pushing back at me, breathing air containing dust and spores and bacteria generated from transported soils and rocks, and sitting under the shade of small trees. This paper is an account of that single day of walking in Lot 100 New England Highway, at Rix's Creek mine rehabilitation area, where the trees are ten years old and the Earth is still in recovery mode.

Lot 100 presents as a reset point in geologic history. Below my feet is a thin layer of topsoil rescued before the mining process and then homogenized, geologic history, 130 million years of it, down to a depth of around 800m. That is, 500m of void back filled and piled up to make a hill 300m higher than the original land. Around me are the planted grasses and trees, mostly native or settlers, each struggling to find a living in such a disturbed environment. And above me are the birds who come and go as they please, since they are not restricted by fences or root systems.

These created lands must eventually pass through mine closure, back to general ownership, transforming the relationship between people and rehabilitated land from onlookers to owners. How will people think about these newly created landscapes with their flat topped hills, steep slopes, straight line trees and odd combinations of plant and animal colonisation? Will these lands be accepted back or will they suffer the prejudice of relationships severed by legislation, or the prosecutions of those looking without express permission and combative mining relations? How can we think about strange, newly created landforms that most have yet to meet?

DAY OF THE CHOUGHS

I am being watched. My movements are shadowed. As I set up camp for the day and start a long exposure photograph, I am scrutinized. It's not that I'm on mine land without permission. Quite the opposite. The mine staff go out of their way to suggest

places to visit and deliver me to the each site in their mud covered four wheel drives. They are proud of the work they do to design landform and reconfigure natural systems and they are willing to share their success with me. No. It is the birds who are worried, in particular the Choughs. They have placed a guard with me; I am labelled *intruder*.

It is an odd feeling, being an intruder in a totally manufactured land. I am the human and they are the animal. Mining rehabilitation is a human creation, so shouldn't it be the other way around? But no. As I walk deeper into the tree lot, the ear piecing alarm goes up. *Intruder alert* the flock of 20 screams. The wail is harsh and vindictive. My heart races. Will I be attacked?

I am shocked to find I am given the same label as a snake or a bird of prey. Perhaps the birds know more than we think.

Terraforming

Lot 100 has changed since it was first surveyed. Now it is part of Rix's Creek mine, just west of Singleton in New South Wales, Australia. Wild bush and open farm land has transfigured into a steep sided hill, 300m above the original land surface level. It is covered with young trees in rows, sturdy soil banks running across the hill side and scatterings of grasses, broad-leafed herbs and wattles. It has the vista and air flow of a hill but it is totally man made. To the west of the tree lot is the mine void, with the two faces of civilization showing; the bare rock face interleaved with seams of coal and the mounds of crushed rock waiting to be reconfigured as another part of the hill of Lot 100.

It's all done according to the agreed mining documents which specify, among many things, lists of plants that should be growing once land is rehabilitated. Mining is established as a short term land use by virtue of the strength of rehabilitation. Once the mines leave, the land returns to the agreed agricultural land use (NSW Mining 2016).

In the Hunter, the actions of mining are hidden behind earth berms and stunted tree lots. From the perspective of the mine company, hiding the workings of mining are part of the remediation of the high levels of noise and a dust control measure. They are required by law to implement structures that reduce both physical and visual pollution. For those looking from the outside, it seems as if there is something to hide. And perhaps there is. The earth berms and strategically placed tree lines hide a mechanistic world view where land is understood as a commodity that can be utilized, unmade and then made again.

However, there are alternatives to this post-Newtonian, Enlightenment based thinking, which positions humans as observers and manipulators of earth processes, as if we weren't actually part of the Earth ourselves. As feminist ecologist Val Plumwood highlights; "We struggle to adjust because we're still largely trapped inside the enlightenment tale of progress as human control over a passive and "dead" nature that justifies both colonial conquests and commodity economies". (Plumwood 2)

Scientific method in western culture encourages us to see ourselves as outside the process we are observing. From our pinnacle on the hierarchy of creation, we observe and manipulate the Earth. Yet science also posits that humans are animals; that we are made of the same molecules as non-human others. And that those elements come from a diet that derives from earth. Science also describes the kinesthetic interaction between humans and land: when we walk upon the Earth, the Earth pushes back. This force known as gravity, is causing interaction between the materiality of rock and soils, and the materiality of breathing bodies. Through the action of gravity, I can experience the sensation of soils and sticks and rocks pushing back towards my feet. I can intrinsically know the surface of the Earth. And by activating my kinesthetic awareness as I traverse the rehabilitated lands, I can have a deeper appreciation of trees, earth, grass, air and wind. Or the shrill alarm call of birds, or the pain in my chest from breathing mine dust or the punch sound of explosions from the void.

On a larger scale of perception, mine land rehabilitation is the act of transforming part of a planet. So I have borrowed a word, terraforming, from science fiction to describe what is happening now in the open cut coal mining areas of Australia. In sci-fi books it is a word that embodies the idea that it is possible for humans to create a better environment out of a raw planet by making it more habitable, and more beautiful than the original. It involves redesigning landscapes and atmospheres to form something more 'livable' for humans. It is also possible for the process to go awry. I would suggest that this is particularly relevant to the Upper Hunter, where 65,000 hectares will be redesigned after open cut coal has gone. That's most of Singleton and Muswellbrook Shires left with hills like Lot 100 and vast voids filled with water of varying salinity.

Anna Storm (174) writes in her essay *Landscapes of Waste* on the void at the open pit mine at Malmberget, Sweden. She considers such massive pits as anti-structure, "something that has disappeared physically, a place of absence." Furthermore she asserts that, "Risks ... are visible and tangible – a huge hole, a pit, to fall into – but at the same time hidden behind vegetation and several generations of fences." (Storm 174)

Here in Australia, consideration of the long term management of final voids has only just entered discussion. (Upper Hunter Mining Dialogue - web) When mine leases end and land is returned to general use, who will supply the fencing and who will reconfigure voids as they age? Will these landscape become as Nye suggests "anti-landscape, a space that does not sustain life?" (Nye 11) And how will such places integrate back into common ownership? Importantly, "when a landscape has been degraded for generations, the damage becomes obvious to the unaided senses. People may respond to such places with dread, foreboding and aversion." (Nye 15). Nye (16) contends that the fear factor is especially strong if ... "some anti-landscapes are intended outcomes." Cottle (208) echoes this by characterizing the Hunter Valley as a *sacrifice zone* that supports modern requirements for capital and energy.

Post mining landscapes with their loaf shaped hills and vast water-filled voids will become landscapes of loss, marking the absence of what came before; jobs, machinery, blasting and, further back in time, farming and grazing and further back still, indigenous occupation. It could also be argued that rehabilitated land also qualifies as an *anti-structure*, given that although land form has reappeared, so much that passed before has physically disappeared. And it is yet to be proven that land re-formed from ancient rocks and transplanted topsoil, is capable of supporting sustainable long term industry. Issues of extreme alkalinity in developing subsoils (my research results) nutrient deficiencies and settling landscapes make for an unknown future.

Transmutation – New Materialism

Wylie in his book, *Landscape (2)*, explains the possibility of an artist becoming so close to the Earth that they can represent the thoughts of the land.

Once, in a letter to a friend, Cezanne wrote that ‘the landscape thinks itself in me...and I am its consciousness’. ... Cezanne is not a detached spectator – his gaze enters the landscape, is entered by the landscape. In lived, embodied experience eye and hand rest in each other’s depths, and when we in turn gaze upon this painting we see both at once: the painter’s vision and the visible landscape, imprinted on each other. (Wylie 2)

In this passage Wylie points towards a vision where the artist becomes intrinsically entangled with landscape rather than observing landscape from outside the system. Cezanne’s paintings become the embodiment of his intimate experience of places he paints. Likewise, in my interactions with Lot 100, I try to understand that there is no disembodied gaze, there is no view from ‘no-where’. It takes a conscious effort to shake the disembodied view of knowing, that both my science training and my art training have given me. Science encourages me to think that I am outside the research area looking in, with a duality of the observer and the observed. Similarly, conventional landscape art requires the artist to use external observation techniques, where ‘seeing’ takes place from outside the landscape in order to

execute a likeness of a scene. Generally landscape rendering is observed with a frame to surround it, to be observed at our leisure and convenience. However, choosing to research the practice and outcomes of mine rehabilitation through fine art, I am given permission to take the bigger picture, to move away from the disembodied view. Fundamentally, it also begins to dissolve the boundaries between land and myself, between myself and grass and rocks and alkaline soils and spiders and kangaroos and eucalypts and angophoras that constitute rehabilitated terrain. The idea that the artist is not separate from what she might observe, and that there is no duality of observer and observed, of researcher and subject, is a fundamental tenant of New Materialism (Coole 10). Materiality is a way of thinking about matter just as 'dead' and knowable only from a distance. Rather, New Materialism takes thinking about things and matter beyond the disembodied world view, viewing matter as active and participatory in the making of its own future. From the point of view of the researcher, the object of research isn't passive, in fact many elements are active in making the results of research. In the case of Lot 100, rocks, trees, dust, and kangaroos are all actors in the landscape and are always producing new knowledges. Even mine documents, views from outside the mine, letters to the editor of the local paper and economics should be included as participants in the emerging terraformed landscape. All elements are active and participate in the making of new land, thus the rehabilitated landscape of Lot 100 has multiple emergent properties. Trees establish on soils that are changing with each passing moment as organic matter builds and mycorrhizal fungi establish. Water works its way through the stones and oxidative processes enable rock to change quickly into soils. Alkalinity manifests in the survival and life spans of vegetation. Grasses establish and re-establish elsewhere. A new land comes into being through the engineers, mine documents, environmental officers and my research, walking and art making.

Walking as a Performative act

Instone (134) proposes in her paper *Walking as Respectful Wayfinding in an Uncertain Age* that it is possible to explore the emergent properties of a place by walking. She argues that intra-action can be understood through the interrelation

between body, knowing, place and feeling and suggests that walking through a land is a way of seeing and knowing. She quotes Solnit saying,

In many ways the random and impromptu qualities of walking engender a kind of openness to surprises and chance encounters that provoke affective ways of knowing (Solnit 11). The intermeshing of movement, mind, body and land/scape, ground and atmosphere transport us into a realm of inexpressible, ineffable and fleeting relations, where we know “the world through the body and the body through the world” (Solnit 29).

By choosing random paths through unknown tree lots and disturbed grasslands, Instone suggests I will find *affective ways of knowing* as part of my art practice. My aim of engaging trees, soils, understory and inhabitants forms part of a two way conversation enacted as I move through the land, understanding the earth through my feet, wind through my hair, grasses through my hands. By following the paths of kangaroos and smaller mammals, I am beginning to understand the odd world of terraformed land through my body and my body through interaction with the land. Instone extolls the virtues of walking as a research tool for understanding an area. Walking slows you down, time passes differently and mind and body are merged in the effort to cover ground and take in surroundings. That is, every step embodies time as well as space, each step meshing things past and those to come in an ongoing process, each step participating in the making of worlds and in the process, knitting together responsibility for past, present and future. (Instone 134-135)

I walked, mindful of my way and the placement of my feet, looking, smelling, listening and wondering. This performative walking method involves my legs, my head, my heart and my breath. In walking, I meshed my knowledge of past histories of unmined land with the current histories of terraformed earth, and meshed past histories of my own agronomic practice with my current artist practice. And perhaps I began to make a change to cultural interactions of mine companies with artists. It may be that I was meshing past histories of mine management and its introspective gaze, with alternate practices of looking outwards for community partnership. By

walking, I began to open possibilities and new histories for a land only twelve years old.

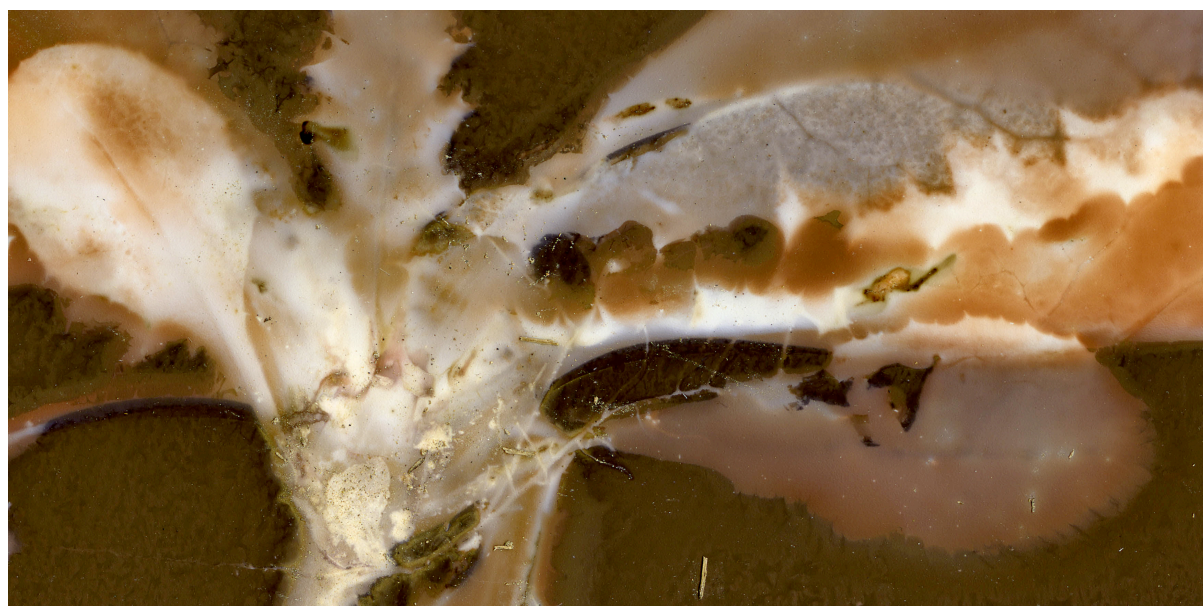
The very fact that I was walking in the land was an act of rehabilitation, making attachments grow, and creating special places. In walking, photographing, drawing and painting in the land I was and continue to be, calling rehabilitated land into a world of relating. As Instone (135) says, "This performative understanding of space and knowledge highlights the complex processes through which worlds are always relational achievements and perpetually "in-the-making," never fixed or pre-given." Walking as wayfinding builds "different knowledges" (Instone 135) of rehabilitated land, moving from an understanding of nature as commodity to a knowledge of new land as intrinsic, material and relational.

Back in the landscape as I walked, according to my training I kept lists in my head; lists of differences. Lists of species of weeds, of trees, of ground covers, of birds, of rocks. My head was full of categories of vegetation and life forms. I compared them to the undisturbed bush lists that I have from a lifetime of observing and ecological training. The rehabilitated land lists are short compared to the vastness of 'undisturbed' bush.

I wonder who primarily shapes the vegetation here? Kangaroos control some grasses by grazing, but the original soils, spread so thinly across the overburden, still exert control over what will grow and what will survive. I see that the rock that has taken the place of subsoils prevents deep rooting of trees, so that in some places twelve year old trees are blown over, their shallow root systems now exposed to the air. I see trees fighting with each other for limited resources and especially *Acaia saligna* where a little ring of phytotoxicity exists under the canopy. There is no couch or lucerne there and certainly no Eucalypts.

Changing my step as I venture over the hillside to the original land level, I see creeping pear, a nasty prickly pear plant; there are plants about every three steps as I descend down the long steep hill face. Flat teacup-sized leaves hug firmly to the

ground sporting very long spikes. This country could yet become impassible reminding me of the tension between the possibilities and risks that occupy a terraformed future. Impassability is a future that might already be chosen. Walking and wayfinding through the constructed-ness of the land allows me to become connected with this odd world struggling to find its way. Using my head, legs, heart and mind, I begin to see the strengths of Lot 100. Though terraforming has taken a terrible toll, this land has its own agenda, its own way of recovery. Evolutionally processes are afoot and as humans we have little understanding of the outcomes in the long term. Lot 100 will be a land of soils, rocks, trees, dust and kangaroos, all actors in the emergence of a new web of life (Rose). Soils are building through leaf litter, roots and plant growth. Even what would be now classified as weeds are there as colonizers, making passage for a future unknown. Lot 100 is a rich mesh of tracks – from the tremors of tiny ants to the pounding of kangaroo paws. They crisscross the hill in what seems like random patterns to a visitor. Following large tracks I am taken to places of importance for the kangaroos; grazing grounds, the water hole, resting places. I interrupt sleeping roos along the way and all the while the choughs are still scrutinizing me, the intruder. As I walk this landscape I am constantly reminded of the strangeness of it all, yet impressed by how it has been divided into kingdoms: kangaroo families, choughs and magpies.



Seeing through Art

Penny Dunstan, Digital copy of Lumen print of Thistle from Rix's Creek series, plant, dirt, sap, chlorophyll staining

Concurrent to my wanderings through Lot 100, I have been working on analogue photos called lumen prints, made by direct printing without a lens. This is where I sandwich a carefully selected plant or cutting between a glass sheet and a piece of black and white photography paper placing all face up in the sun. Long exposure times, and the sweating of the plant mess with the paper chemistry and the prints become coloured. The process produces an image that reminds me of the hours of work I put in preparing herbarium specimens to pass my undergraduate Agriculture studies, however in that case I had time to prepare and control the finished product. Working on site, under a picnic blanket to protect the photographic paper from the sun, gave me all of about 2 seconds to prepare a print. Pollen, insects, mine dust, plant sap and chlorophyll all become part of the print. I think of it as agency for the images passing from me to the land on which the image is made. This 'cooperative' art making technique forms part of my practice to present the relational world I am working with.



Penny Dunstan, Digital copy of Lumen print of Eucalypt from Rix's Creek series, plant, dirt, sap, chlorophyll staining

The Lumen technique also focuses my attention on the lack of species to choose. With sadness I notice that the community of plants is largely constructed on a few planted species alongside those species that would be found in the local version of the weed identification book.

I make rubbings of the trees that have died of borer attack, marking their transition from green life to resurrection as useful organic carbon. Borer paths form beautiful tracteries but they have taken the lives of many young trees. As I look for more dead trees, I notice that almost every tree in the tree lot that covers the hillside is infected with borer. If I were to return in three years there will be many more dead trees to frottage. This is a land remaking itself away from the image prescribed in mining documents – at the moment the tree density is too crowded to be sustainable. Drawing my track behind me are three satellites that peer down me from the sky. They draw the red wobbly lines of my journey down kangaroo paths, across grasslands and under fences, and these lines appear on my phone in a navigation app giving me a record of my path. The satellite tracks record my mark, (in the drawing sense) made by footfall across the landscape, their shape and form record the performative act of walking for use later in studio works.

Back in the studio, I examine my digital photographs. They help me recall the strange, engineered hill slope that is the same steepness all the way down and the giant soil conservation banks that hold the water across the slope. And the practice of covering up land with trees, even ones that prevent others from growing, and the use of engineered grass lands at the top. It's a strange landscape, designed to look familiar and ordinary, and yet the angles of the slopes are wrong, the trees are growing in the wrong places, there are not enough of the right species and some species are missing altogether. This landscape is totally man made right to the bottom of the void side it fills. That's around 800m of rock that hasn't seen sun and air for 130 million years plus an imported topsoil from the other side of the pit. Really, considered through an engineering lens, the land reconstruction is not a bad job.

But the feeling of strangeness still pervades Lot 100. The colonial pastoral landscape is a familiar concept, the transformed ecological relations are a grey zone, but many animals and birds have recolonized the site. A lot of human effort has gone into making the rehabilitated land look ordinary and unremarkable and hidden from notice. On first examination, Lot 100 looks like a return to the nature of the Hunter Valley but it is something more complex and interesting, something quite other. But perhaps it is just the lens I look through – I can remember the original landscape. I am comparing it to my experiences in wild and agricultural places of the Hunter Valley. When there are 65,000 hectares of land similarly constructed, it will be normal. Completely normal.

Looking at the consequences of human meddling in the natural world is one theme of the work of Australian artist Patricia Piccinini (Catalogue), who imagines a future of engineered lifeforms that are human-animal amalgams. She envisages that the very young will have no trouble accepting changed lifeforms as normal, after all, in their lifetime such life forms have always been there. Young adults are shown accepting engineered beings into their houses and lives. In Piccinini's work, fear of the unknown belongs to the older generations and although the audience viewing her art have mixed feeling about her envisioned blended life forms, it doesn't seem to bother the humans who populate Piccinini's work.

Taking the observations made by both Piccinini in her exhibition "Please Love Us"(web) and Donna Haraway (95) reviewing Piccinini's work, parallels can be drawn between thinking about human-created beings whether they be engineered human/animal life or engineered landform/ecosystems. Piccinini asks us to examine this question: that if life forms are created through no fault of their own, should we effectively excommunicate them because of their difference to what we know as 'normal'? Should they be counted them as strange because of their unfamiliarity, because we don't 'know' them?

Some of Piccinini's ideas have relevance to the future of terraformed lands in the Upper Hunter with all their missing parts and strangeness. These engineered lands are here, now, not part of an imagined future. There are 10,824 hectares now (NSW

Mining, 2014 figures) and it is envisaged that there will be 65,000 hectares when mining has finished. Piccinini (web) asks about her human /animal amalgams, we need to ask, “..can we love them’? My work in Lot 100, with all the tangled emotions of joy and loss, is an attempt to answer that question, by engaging with terraformed terrains along with their contradictions, unruliness, strangeness and perhaps lovability.

Roo Challenge

Walking Lot 100 has filled my head with the new and the strange. Returning to my day camp, I spread out my picnic blanket on the dry tufty grass, find my lunch and drink bottle, and flop down. The earth is hard and pebbly and my legs are tired. I stand up to get a better signal on my phone for my emails and I am caught in a gaze. A very large, very unhappy male kangaroo extends himself to full height only 8m from me. I can see his muscles rippling under his fur and his posture is aggressive. I feel myself in free fall from observer to observed, from the arrogance of thinking myself outside the system to being very much at the bottom of importance. Except none of these thoughts are relevant. This is about my survival. I am out the back of a mine and a long way from help.

My first thought is ‘I’m going to die’. I imagine myself gutted on the ground. And my second thought? ‘I didn’t put this in my risk assessment’. Then, as I wonder about the possibility of being found before I bleed to death after disembowelment, sense takes over and I freeze. The next move is his and he’s not impressed with me. He puffs out his chest even further and takes a hop forward. He’s only 5 m away. I consider the trees. Can I climb them? No. They are only twelve years old and planted tightly together so they don’t grow side branches. Should I run away? No. He can move a lot faster than me. What about hiding behind a tree? The spotted gums are only a hand width wide but I try anyway. Bits of me stick out both sides. I keep watching and my ears take on a supernatural sharpness, listening for his advance.

There's a pain in my chest and it's not just because I'm holding my breath. Mine dust is interacting with the remains of my cold. I try to suppress a cough. I try to keep as quiet as possible. But out it comes, a wheezy cough. And again. And again.

And he drops his shoulders and waggles his ears. He looks at me. I look at him from behind the tree. Again the wheezy cough breaks the silence. He stands down.

Watching me, ever watching me, he slowly makes his way back down the hill, the way he came. I continue to hide behind the tree even after he is gone. I measure my heart rate. It is 88 beats per minute and he's nowhere in sight.

Some months later, when I recount this story to a colleague, she tells me that when challenged by a kangaroo, you should make yourself smaller and cough as sign of submission. It's the first time I am grateful for having a cold.

My encounter with the old man kangaroo plays on my mind for some time. Even with my academic appreciation of new materiality, and a genuine desire to apply the concepts, it has taken an encounter with a large, territorial male kangaroo to put me firmly in my place. I had broken the rules of being in Lot 100 and was corrected for my presumptions that I was the only one who had "cognitive abilities, intentionality, and freedom to make autonomous decisions." (Coole 10). I was firmly placed as only one agent in the social structure of Lot 100. No privileges were afforded me by my species. Nature is not benign, and humans are not granted special dispensation. Rehabilitated land belongs to many, and judged through the eyes of a bull kangaroo this terraformed land is worth fighting for. Perhaps it is this that is the ultimate act of rehabilitation that I witnessed on my single day walking. I am left wondering what mining closure documents would look like if they were written to account for the opinions of non-human other.

Estelle Barrett (9) drawing upon Donna Haraway in her book *Material Inventions: Applying Creative Arts Research*, writes about the collection of knowledge through being-in or immersion in an environment.

This mode of knowledge production acknowledges the particular, the subjective and the personal as important aspects of enquiry; it articulates the notion of ethical or

embodied forms of observation – ways of looking and being accountable for knowledge claims that do not deny the agency of the objects of research – in particular human participants; it is a mode that replaces traditional notions of objectivity with the idea of situated knowledge and partial objectivity; finally it asserts the potential of situated and partial knowledge for forging webs of connections – identifying for whom, how and where else knowledge can be put to use.

A single day walking in on terraformed land has produced new knowledges from a mix of scientific and artistic observations, drawing newly rehabilitated land into a web of relating through walking as respectful wayfinding and art making. Or perhaps it is the other way around. Lot 100 has drawn me into understandings and territories of non-human others. It has made its own patterns upon my photographic paper and opened my eyes to the order of a place governed by kangaroos and birds. Both Lot 100 and myself are changed by this encounter and the record of our encounter is preserved as works of art to be shown at seminars, conferences and galleries, a legacy of a day of walking.

Conclusion

Lot 100, at Rix's Creek mine in Singleton, New South Wales, is a terraformed, post mining site in the Upper Hunter Valley. Piles of open cut mining waste have been reconfigured into a flat topped hill, covered with topsoil and planted with a mix of trees and pasture plants according to the requirements of mining documents. Animal and bird systems self-establish in over the top of the human designed landscape. My initial encounters revealed a resemblance to the general vegetation of the Hunter Valley but on closer examination an odd mix of familiar and strange become evident in the landscape. Points of familiarity dissolve in to discord. Shallow soils divested of their origins create difficult environments inhabited by colonizers we might call weeds. There are hilltop swamps. Trees fall over due to soil depth constraints. The landscape is recognizably Hunter Valley and yet alien in quality. Such strangeness and familiarity in a landscape is both reassuring and disturbing at the same time.

Using a new materialism framework, in this paper has expanded the vision of what constitutes landscape beyond the constraints of engineering and mine closure documents. In the case of Lot 100, rocks, trees, dust, kangaroos, mine documents, views from outside the mine site, letters to the editor of the local paper, economics predictions and artworks are all actors -participants in the emerging terraformed landscape. An interaction with one territorial male kangaroo provides a lesson in seeing the world as seamlessly integrated, where all elements are active and participate in the making of Lot 100, even if it is a newly terraformed land. Art works produced in-situ explore a collaborative creative technique, reducing the controlling input of the artist and increasing the agency of land to effect a change in the constituted art work. Here the work of art is to weave ties between the arts and mining companies, and between those who view the art and the newly terraformed land. The exploration of Lot 100 through respectful wayfinding, thinking, feeling, seeing, doing, and just being in the space, ties humans to a newly constructed strange and unfamiliar landscape.

There are many participants to be honoured and much to be pleased with in the rehabilitated world of Lot100, despite the losses and sadness of vanished lands and the oddities and unfamiliarity of a reconstructed world. Yet, there are signs that the future may not conform to the vision of mine closure documents. Lot 100 appears as a new world balanced on a knife edge, capable of tipping towards recovery or disaster. Both seem as likely as each other. Have we underestimated the regenerative powers of nature or overestimated them? The long term future of such large scale land terraforming is unknown.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Fault lines or Songlines? The influence of remote Aboriginal communities in shaping social research priorities in child protection.

Susan Moore

Abstract

The first in a portfolio of publications the author identifies her social work experience within remote Australia as the catalyst for the development of the research topic, *Keeping kids safe in remote Aboriginal communities: exploring community driven approaches for the protection of children from sexual abuse*. Review and reform of Australia's child protection systems rarely critique the theoretical foundations of the now overloaded, overwhelmed and fracturing system. The study explores in depth the issue of child sexual abuse through the eyes of Aboriginal people from remote communities of the Northern Territory (NT), those same communities impacted by the 2007 Australian Government Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). It was not the first, nor has it been the last time that governments would conflate remote Aboriginal communities with child sexual abuse to justify a broader political agenda. The research aims to forge space within the existing western dominated knowledge base that underpins child sexual abuse to position and amplify remote Aboriginal voices. It is only through the lived experiences of this ancient culture that a strong foundation can be considered for the protection of children within remote areas from sexual abuse.

Fault lines or Songlines? The influence of remote Aboriginal communities in shaping social research priorities in child protection

The fusion of culture and country influences my personal and professional life through the unlocking of pathways between head, heart and soul. My approach to social work practice, theory and the shaping of research is greatly influenced by my association over the past three decades with Aboriginal friends, colleagues and community members. Pivotal to my personal and professional growth is the specific collaboration with Aboriginal peoples of the Pilbara region of Western Australia (WA) and of the Northern Territory (NT). By no means can I claim expertise of Aboriginal culture. I can however speak from the experience of working alongside Aboriginal people in the delivery of statutory and voluntary services such as child protection, the Family Court and sexual assault counselling. Social research presents opportunity for the extension of practice experience to the deeper exploration of social issues

and their theoretical underpinnings. The paper outlines the commencement of PhD candidature and the influence of culture and remoteness that informs the research process.

Influence of Country

Aboriginal people are connected physically, spiritually and socially to country with specific roles and responsibilities as defined by their kinship system. Country holds significant meaning for the continuity of Aboriginal custom, law and culture. Ancient landscapes that geographically locate my social work practice include the geological formations of the Pilbara, Kimberley and Central Australia, the woodlands, wetlands and waterfalls of tropical Northern Australia and the diverse flora and fauna that serve as contemporary reminders of the fusion of past and present. The humbling climatic extremes of the desert regions or the dry then humid cyclonic weather patterns, lightning storms and monsoonal rains that define tropical coastal regions each profoundly impact the rhythm of life, work and being in remote Australia. Country and culture continue to have a powerful and humbling effect on my own way of being, knowing and doing. My responsiveness to the expertise of Aboriginal people recognizes the influence of culture, customary law and kinship obligations as shared between the generations through Songlines that shape and inform Aboriginal culture. Such connection to country is absent in the theories and assumptions that shape western policies and service systems.

Can the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse be contemplated without taking into account cultural beliefs about the meaning and causes of such abuse if such causes are informed by cultural and spiritual events across time and place? Should a child be removed from their family and country as a result of statutory intervention? What are the longer term consequences for the development of a child who loses their connection with country? How have western psychological theories come to dominate in the decision making for children considered to be at risk from harm?

Locating self in practice and research

While acknowledging the cultural expertise of Aboriginal people, my area of expertise is located within an experience of dominant western culture and the systems that intersect with vulnerable populations. Informed by post-modern practice, social work practice requires critical reflection and reflexivity responding to the complexity of social issues that present. From social work practice there is both obligation and opportunity for the development of theory ([Fook](#)).

Locating myself within research involving Aboriginal people requires the exploration and transparency of my own heritage and position of white privilege (Young, Mckenzie, Omre, Schjelderup and Walker) built upon the bleak history of colonialization. My very white Anglo heritage can be traced to 1300s England. My history incorporates the relocation through transportation of my convict and free-settler ancestors to what would have seemed a remote, isolated and distant land with the associated hardships and challenges. One such ancestor, Eleanor Frazer was sentenced to transportation arriving with the First Fleet in 1788. Significantly, she was the first woman in the colony to be granted freehold title, the gifting of (Aboriginal) land, in Concord, Sydney. A son born to her is believed to be the first born white child within the colony. My heritage speaks directly, and somewhat uncomfortably, to the tensions surrounding the historic and continuing fusion of cultures, power, resistance and survival between Aboriginal people and colonial settlers. And so the seeds of white privilege are sown.

Family stories and a private collection of photos reflect further the influence of culture and country upon my ancestors. Images depict the relationships between my ancestors and Aboriginal people of Northern Australia during WWII. Through his photographs, my mother's Uncle, Jack Taylor, introduced me as a child to the existence of a rich traditional Aboriginal culture. Juxtaposed with the images in his collection of military parades, British submarines and weaponry are the images that depict healthy children dancing in the shallows, traditional ceremony, warriors with ceremonial scarring, healthy, traditionally dressed men and women, skinning of a

buffalo, totem poles, crocodile hunting and children eating mangrove worms. These were not children in need of protection.

Other photographs depict Aboriginal prisoners with a notation on the back 'all murderers' working at the barracks alongside the troops. I cannot attest to the nature of the relationships between my uncle and Aboriginal people during his time in Darwin. Stories told to me by his sister, my grandmother, Hazel Colliver, suggest he was made a *blood brother* to a tribe from Northern Australia. At one time he was joined in Sydney by an Aboriginal woman from Northern Australia, perhaps at the time of the evacuation due to the bombing of Darwin. Uncle Jack's photographs serve as a reminder of the fusion of my ancestors through history with Aboriginal people and the possibilities that such relationships can create meaning and solutions for complex social issues. It is this legacy of relationship and collaboration that underpins my approach to social work practice and research.

Collaboration influences my pursuit of a deeper understanding about the agency of Aboriginal people in the nurture and protection of their children, the impact of western society upon the safety and well-being of Aboriginal children and the adequacy of current systems in supporting Aboriginal families and communities in protecting children from sexual abuse. Can alternate theories be identified through the privileging of Aboriginal world view? Can such alternate theory inform culturally relevant approaches to child protection that complement or replace existing approaches? Is it possible to achieve the aspirational goal of building safer communities for children within remote communities? What lessons from Aboriginal culture could be applied more widely?

Working remote

Social work within the remote Australian context demands of the practitioner willingness and an ability to contextualize, adapt and innovate their approach to practice. In part this is due to the lack of resources and infrastructure within remote communities. Many communities are small (with populations of several hundred or

even less in relation to homelands or outstations) and may only provide access to primary health care, sometimes police, primary but rarely secondary education. My early career transition from metropolitan Sydney to the mining and Aboriginal communities of the West Pilbara was confronting. It challenged my values and culturally bound assumptions yet created space for incorporating new knowledge and innovative practice approaches. Apparent from the outset was the limitation of western knowledge and service delivery paradigms, particularly in the field of child protection.

Working within remote Australia with Aboriginal people saw the realization of my personal and professional goals. Climatic extremes such as heat, cyclones, 4 wheel driving on red, dirt, corrugated roads significantly contributed to the challenges of remote living... Remoteness necessitates the development of alternate or nuanced application of mainstream service models that more adequately address the needs of Aboriginal people and communities. Statutory child protection is one such area whereby communities by necessity must and can be engaged in a community level response to the protection of children. The protection of children sits among the many other competing economic and social priorities of the community.



Kakadu rock face - Photograph: Sue Moore

Lessons from remote social work practice

Child protection and criminal justice frameworks that scaffold the mainstream response to sexual abuse are premised upon definitions of criminal offences. Such definitions lead to the narrow and for some inaccessible protections that may be afforded by the criminal justice system. Underpinning the approach is Australia's support of the rights of the child to be protected from harm. While not detracting from the seriousness of the sexual abuse of children, existing legislation cannot be the only available response. Being encouraged that is best left to the experts can

immobilize available family and community approaches to protection of the child and consequence for the alleged offender. For example, upon disclosure by a child of abuse or the commencement of an investigation parents are instructed not to continue conversation with the child for fear of jeopardizing the criminal investigation or alerting the alleged offender too soon. Such instructions can serve to interfere with family or community responses to what has occurred.

Where sexual abuse is intra-familial, child protection agencies may take action to remove a child from the family should protection not be guaranteed by the non-offending members of the family. When sexual abuse presents within a remote Aboriginal community, the impact is felt across the community. It is my experience that on some occasions there is retribution or broader engagement in decision-making by the community in accordance with customary law. Such community based approaches may not be revealed to authorities should such approaches constitute a breach of the law. Although for the purpose of the research participants are not required to reveal customary practices, the existence or otherwise of culturally informed retribution is of interest when exploring the range of broader community approaches to the protection of children. At the very least it indicates mobilization and action towards the protection of children.

Through grounded theory methodology, the study explores alternate conceptual frameworks of child protection as identified by Aboriginal people from remote communities of the NT. It is critical that Aboriginal voices are amplified within formal research and literature to ensure culturally relevant paradigms more strongly influence practice, structures, policy and further research.

Deconstructing child protection systems

In her promotion of a national research agenda, Professor Scott (2005) refers to the child protection system as an “experiment of the 1970s in response to the need to *do something* to address child abuse and neglect - but it was an experiment that had largely failed.”

Deconstruction of the theoretical and practice assumptions of contemporary mainstream child protection systems reveals its reliance upon legislative approaches underpinned by human rights theory, specifically the United Nation Convention of the Rights of the Child. Theories drawn upon in relation to child sexual abuse fall predominantly within psychological theories that explain the victim impact, treatment approaches and the behaviours of offenders and subsequent treatment approaches if convicted. Theories from neuroscience explain the impact of trauma and adverse childhood incidents on long term health and wellbeing. Forensic science informs the gathering of evidence of child sexual abuse to support the investigation and criminal prosecution of a complaint. Should the threshold of evidence for a criminal proceeding not be reached, the criminal justice system is unavailable as a response to protecting the child who has been sexually abused. Whether or not a matter proceeds through court, the responsibility for the protection of children remains vested at the family and community level. No theoretical frameworks however exist, or are recognized within the literature to support and inform a community owned approach to the protection of children. It is through experience of working in remote Aboriginal communities that the challenges and opportunities for strengthening protective community based strategies are realized.

Exploring community capacity for child protection

Within remote communities should sexual abuse occur, the offender may be known or unknown to the child and family, an outsider or someone from within family and kinship network or otherwise living within the community. As reflected throughout society, the position of power held by the offender and the place of the child in the community may determine the capacity for a community level response. Unlike the case of remote Aboriginal communities, expectations of community as agents of protection are not assumed within metropolitan areas where geographic proximity may be the only factor binding a community. Interventions are only considered at the level of family rather than community. Remote communities are characterized by deeper connections and mutual obligation within and between communities that promote opportunity addressing child protection at a community level.

The opportunities for a community based approach more readily presents itself within remote Aboriginal communities who mobilise in relation to dilemmas or issues impacting the community. Communities, for example within remote Western Australia formally met with government agencies at bush meetings to hold government to account for the actions or inactions in areas such as children, families, housing and youth justice. The influence of remoteness and key Aboriginal influencers throughout my career afford me opportunities to critically reflect upon the strengths and limitations of existing legislative, policy and political foundations of mainstream child protection services through multiple lenses.

In conceptualizing the early stages of my research, I consider a metaphor for community capacity to be a termite mound. Visible to others from the outside is only that small portion of the colony above ground. Less visible is the level of activity below the ground to ensure the survival of the colony. Explored through the research will be the nature of activity within remote communities that serve to support the safety and protection of children from the many and varied presentations of child sexual abuse. Until such approaches are recognized, mainstream legislative approaches to child sexual abuse will remain inadequate and communities exposed again to outside intervention that does little to protect children from sexual abuse.



Image 2 Termite Mound - Photograph: Sue Moore

The impact of injustice and harm to children continues to stir my mind, heart and soul. My capacity to address the complexity of historic constructs of injustice as a frontline social worker or leader within executive levels of government is frustratingly limited. Change from within is necessarily hamstrung by the constraints presented

through dominant western discourse and the subsequent structural roadblocks to change. The exploration of community development and children's rights for child protection practice ([Young et al.](#)) reflects a paradigm that goes some way to acknowledge community capacity although remains premised upon the assumption of a child protection practitioner being pivotal to the intervention. My approach to the research may well inform child protection practice, however what may be suggested is an alternate paradigm for remote Aboriginal community controlled approaches to a range of significant social issues impacting communities. Research provides one avenue through which to consider alternate paradigms for child protection not possible through the constraints of employment within child protection or other mainstream agencies.

Politics, child sexual abuse, remote Aboriginal communities

As a social worker within Centrelink during the NTER – more commonly referred to as *The Intervention* – I was involved with the roll out of the associated juggernaut of legislation and policy that heralded re-entry by the Australian Government into the affairs of remote NT Aboriginal communities. The utilization of powers over the NT mirrors the child protection investigation process whereby by the state intervenes into the lives of families who are unable or willing to protect their children. The Little Children Are Sacred Report ([Wild and Anderson](#)) chronicles the problem of sexual abuse within remote communities upon which the Australian Government took action. The Australian Government response, however, was significantly wider in scope. Although the catalyst for the NTER was the sexual abuse of children in remote communities, the reforms to follow evidenced curiously little interest in a research informed approach for addressing the protection of children from sexual abuse. An approach that left communities confused and further vulnerable to the wide-ranging interventions that targeted remote communities of the NT. Australian government welfare reforms, suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act, removal of land permits, prohibitions on alcohol and pornography, health checks and other welfare conditionality measures were supported by the machinery of the Australian Government. Unprecedented resourcing for service delivery to remote

areas had little bearing on the problem of child sexual abuse. A concept drawn from my clinical practice, I consider the NTER to have been a *paradoxical intervention*. Despite the flawed theoretical and political underpinnings of the approach, some space was claimed by Aboriginal people within remote communities for the discussion of sexual abuse and many other social and economic issues. Such voices included mobilizing against the stereotyping of all Aboriginal men as being sex offenders, some voices gave accounts of their experience as both victim and offender of intergenerational sexual abuse, some spoke of the challenges of protecting children from exposure to adult sexual behaviour within overcrowded housing.

From its inception the politics of the NTER at the national and community level would be seen as a distraction from meaningful conversations that could have supported a greater level of protection to children from sexual abuse. Lessons from my practice serve as reminders of power, voice, agency and capacity of remote Aboriginal communities to address complex issues. Simultaneously, the complexity of child sexual abuse presents particular challenges for any community, and indeed broader society, seeking to ensure the safety of its children.

From practice to research

Research informed practice at the micro, mezzo or macro levels is drawn from such disciplines of psychology, sociology, history and science. Interventions may be realized in practice at the level of the individual, family or community. Change may also be influenced in the areas of policy, program development or legislation. Social work research is commonly seeded through a dilemma experienced at the coalface of social work practice. From critical reflection and reflexivity emerge new approaches to practice. Also, from within practice experience research topics are identified and further developed. Research provides opportunity for deeper formal inquiry into the problem or social issue, the theoretical constructs of the problem and possible of the development of cultural appropriate approaches to the resolving the dilemma.

The opportunity to undertake a substantial research project provides scope for the research findings to influence broader systemic change. Change through such research can have wider impact than the incremental changes emerging from smaller scale reviews, evaluations or practice approaches and even more formal reviews of child protection systems. Country and the influence of Aboriginal people upon social work practitioners in remote settings form the cornerstone of locating the research problem and the research methodology to best reflect the goals of the study. The Aboriginal people who continue to impact my practice have been pivotal to the conceptualization of the research topic and methodology to ensure the ongoing privileging of Aboriginal voices in relation to the important aspiration of protecting all children from sexual abuse.

Lessons from my practice continue to influence and develop a collaborative approach to the research. Many conversations and the first participant interview endorse my need to adopt a position of ongoing critical reflection and reflexivity evidenced by continuing to adapt my language and approach through feedback of the aboriginal mentors and research participants.

Ongoing reflection upon my own assumptions and stereotypes is a critical component of the research. Already, for example, I am reminded that geographic isolation is not necessarily indicative of social isolation for Aboriginal people. Family continues to maintain connections and dialogue when they are not in the community through technology, social media and the grapevine. From the position of an outsider, dominant discourse can negatively conflate concepts of remoteness with disadvantage, which is not necessarily the experience of Aboriginal people. Themes of language and value may continue to emerge through participant interviews.

Research

The study's focus on the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse in remote communities has two distinct purposes; to strengthen the protective capacity of remote communities; and, to support such communities to strengthen their

approaches to protection as required. The challenge for Australian society is whether room will be made for involvement by Aboriginal people in re-visioning the problem and contributing to the solutions required to address the problem.

The research topic has been shaped and developed in relation to child sexual abuse,

“a complex issue that cannot be understood in isolation from the ongoing impacts of colonial invasion, genocide, assimilation, institutionalised racism and severe socio-economic deprivation” ([Funston](#)). My professional background includes experience within child protection and therapeutic services with children and adults impacted by childhood sexual abuse. Working with Aboriginal people from remote communities has assisted me to appreciate the limitations of applying mainstream frameworks within such communities but also the possibilities that present for creative and adaptive social work practice. It was this confluence of factors that led to the exploration of community development approaches to child protection that supplemented the available statutory approaches.

Early career involvement with grass roots community approaches to child protection have led to the exploration of alternate theories that underpin child safety in remote communities that may in turn influence into the future alternative and culturally relevant service approaches to child protection.

Through the amplification of the voices of a culture deeply grounded and connected to country, the forging of space within the dominant theoretical and structural discourse of wicked problems will result in a greater recognition of community agency in their development of solutions. Alternate theories are hoped to better inform the systems and responses to the problem, and importantly acknowledge or better engage remote communities in the building of safer communities for children. Grounded theory suggests the development of a literature review based upon the emerging themes contained within the data. The initial exploration of literature reveals the diverse knowledge bases that underpin child sexual abuse and

protection from multiple perspectives however lacking from the literature is a grander metatheory that speaks to the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse.

Limits of whiteness

Research limitations include cultural and racial bias that could be reflected in the nuances of participant interviews. This could include the questions asked, directions of conversations, missed opportunity or interpretation of data and the packaging and communication of the findings. Research findings will also reflect the inherent cultural and power biases of the researcher and speak to the need for the shaping and conduct of research into the future by Aboriginal peoples from an Aboriginal standpoint.

Support to identify researcher racial bias will be provided by the Aboriginal Research Advisory Group members who provide various points of reference and guidance to throughout the research. I reflect the position of other in relation to Aboriginal culture, but an insider of the white dominant mainstream services that impact upon Aboriginal children, families and communities.

My approach to working with Aboriginal peoples acknowledges my white privilege and my part within the dominant welfare systems that have endeavored to protect children from harm. It is with expertise of such systems that I recognize the limitations and the need to explore the ways that Indigenous ontology can offer an alternate approach that is underpinned by constructed alternative theory. The personal is political and my responsibility is to recognize the racial contexts of the agency of social work practice in relation to Aboriginal peoples and community ([Walter, Taylor and Habibis](#)). The outcomes for the research must necessarily be handed back to the Aboriginal peoples who have so generously and patiently guided my own personal and professional development. Such guidance has also been demonstrated by those parents, families and communities who have fought loudly and defiantly to protect their children, families, culture and communities from a system that has historically cultural safety.

Grounded theory processes and outcomes

Grounded theory is both a research methodology and outcome of research that requires of the researcher a capacity to be open to the many and varied knowledge bases that are discovered through careful analysis of the voices and experiences of the research participants central to the topic.

Constructivist grounded theory ([Charmaz](#)) provides a vehicle through which to honour the many and varied Aboriginal voices. Through blending creativity and responsiveness within the research process, Aboriginal people continue to shape and inform the research outcomes. Ethics of care and responsibility are central to such research ([Bainbridge, Whiteside and McCalman](#)) and support outcomes of inclusion, self-determination and social justice. Consistent with a strengths-based approach ([McCashen](#)) the research assumes capacity and agency of Aboriginal people over their own circumstances.

Opportunity exists within the research design for deep exploration of the theoretical foundations and assumptions that underpin mainstream systems and the gaps in knowledge that may inform an alternate theoretical foundation for the protection of children in remote Aboriginal communities. Grounded theory data analysis requires multiple levels of coding and synthesis of concepts to ensure the voices of participants are thoroughly explored and heard within the research process. The process of checking out, consulting and checking back ensures continued influence by Aboriginal voices in the analysis of data and the findings. The approach ensures the fusion of inclusion and collaboration congruent with my social work practice.

Early research reflections

Songlines reflect an Aboriginal world view, incorporating the stories that explain and guide. It is likely that stories relating to the protection of children will reflect the historic intersection between the Aboriginal and western society. Stories accommodate the complexity of historic, structural and spiritual dimensions of complex social issues perhaps more than those offered through western theories. Themes emerging already include family and community agency, multiple roles and responsibilities held by community members. What confronts small remote

communities is responsibility for managing not just the child or children who are at risk, but also the behaviours of those who are offending. Emerging in the early stages of research conversations is the diversity in definitions of what may constitute child sexual abuse and subsequently the differential and complex responses that may be invoked. Also apparent are the conversations and problem solving that involves relevant family and community members whether they are living on community or elsewhere and the decision making in relation to action can take time and may incorporate reporting and statutory agencies. Decisions may involve the child or offender leaving the community and may be complementary to existing legal processes such as police investigations.

Conclusion

Informed by the Songlines of Aboriginal communities, the exploration of alternate paradigms for community based approaches to child protection may assist in developing signposts to guide and strengthen community responses to a complex phenomenon. The research must be informed by the stories that locate social problems within broader cultural and historic frameworks, rather simply apportioning fault and blame to the Aboriginal people of remote communities where such complex social issues exist. The fusion of culture and country that informs my social work practice continues to influence my approach research and ensures the ongoing collaboration with Aboriginal people in guiding the research process. Aboriginal voices through this vehicle will be further supported in their determination of community based and informed approaches to the protection of children from sexual abuse. Such theories may assist in the stabilization of mainstream systems that are perched precariously on a fault line restricted in their capacity to make significant inroads to the protection of children from sexual abuse.

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FUSION JOURNAL ISSUE 10

LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

**Entangled Dialogues: approaches to walking and drawing our
contested tracks**

Antonia Aitken

This paper explores some of the philosophical, political and visual questions being considered in my current creative practice-led research. I will unpack how my artwork is grappling with a complex entanglement of ideas and images through notions of journeying, multiplicity, enfolding and knotting. Like all entanglements the ideas and images are fluid – sometimes reflecting, sometimes repeating and sometimes conflicting themselves. The threads, shreds, strings and lines of thought and material, are intimately entwined in a web or nest of possibility, and much uncertainty. I often grapple with the order in which to tell the story. Like the way we set out for a particular kind of walk; the paths we choose are sometimes motivated by the bigger questions that drive us, and sometimes the intimate and tactile that embrace us.

Walking as a methodology for relating

‘Walking itself is the intentional act closest to the unwilled rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart’ (Solnit 2001, p. 5).

Walking invites the body to move in a rhythmic synchronicity of thought, breath and step. It provides a mode of being in and of moving through an environment with a slowed-down and heightened sensory engagement. Walking can activate a body state that is attentive and aware of where we are and with whom we walk. This, in turn, can invite a rhythmic entanglement of time and place, generating dialogue with the land.

My current interdisciplinary creative research, is investigating how drawing and walking as *embodied* forms of land dialogue, can better nurture relationships of acknowledgement in grounds that bear witness to the complex and troubled imprint of colonisation.

Do forms of embodied land dialogue lead to stronger conversations and exchanges between those of us who share this land and with the land itself, and how might these conversations play out through our images?

These have been key questions in my art practice for many years, as I search for intimate and tactile connections with the land I inhabit, whilst sensitively navigating my cultural and physical terrain.

The site I walk

My practice has always involved the act of walking my local environment - my common, suburban footpath, fringing reserves or bushland. Most recently this practice has involved a site known now as Knocklofty Reserve on the urban fringe of Hobart. This ridgeline extends from where I live and is a corridor to Kunanyi or Mt Wellington. This is Mouheneener country. It's current name means 'lofty hill' originating from the Gaelic word *cnoc* meaning hill and *lofty* meaning high. The name is an example of early European colonial describing and naming practices, which overwrote many existing Aboriginal place names.

This place is thought to have once been a carefully managed grazing hillside for native animals - an important hunting ground for the Mouheneener people. With colonisation came extensive timber harvesting, sandstone quarrying and grazing of cattle to support the growing colony of Hobart. It is now a reserve under the protected areas classification, and the bush is vigorously growing back under the care of the Knocklofty Bush Care group made up largely of enthusiastic locals.

For me this is a place to explore entanglements of image and thought, weaving and knotting threads together by the action of moving through its networks of pathways. Knocklofty is not the subject of my work, but rather a site to explore broader questions of what a walking and drawing based methodology might be, and how it might address some of my philosophical and political questions through an aesthetic enquiry. This is an important point to make, as I see the sites I walk not as places to be *described* or *represented* through my work, but part of a network of places and place relationships that thread my broader concepts and images together.

Like the walking process, I am interested in how the physical actions of drawing and printmaking, with their repetitive, iterative and rhythmic qualities, allow for ones thoughts and ideas to continually move and shift. I liken the making process to the way a walk can invite the mind to simultaneously wander in an entanglement of plans, observations and memories. By collecting, recording, drawing, printing, cutting and collaging, I shift materials and ideas around until they are developed and ready to be organised into a form of resolution or pause. Never fixed and always fluid, my work and process constantly feels like a departure or mid-journey.

Acknowledging what underlies and what we don't know

Writer Nan Shepherd describes her slow and growing relationship with the Cairngorms in the United Kingdom, the country she habitually walked during her long life, in her evocative text *The Living Mountain*. 'Slowly I have found my way in. If I had other senses, there are other things I should know' (Shepherd 2008, p. 107).

I liken this description to the way I often feel as if I am teetering on the edge of knowing, and wishing I had knowledge or 'other senses' to gauge the complexity or depth of the places I walk and make.

I have, like many non-indigenous Australians, experienced a deep sense of sadness in acknowledging the trauma that lies deep in our land. Social theorist Brian Massumi writes:

The horrors and injustices of a place are part of what creates the conditions for that encounter. They are not in anyway neglected. They are refracted. In a sense, the *ground rises with the background*. (Massumi 2013, p. 192)

By actively acknowledging what's beneath our feet and the relationships and narratives that have formed the tracks we walk, I believe we can enter into a richer conversation with country; a conversation that asks us to be accountable to our

histories, but also, importantly, to learn from and generate new relationships from a place of knowing.

In this way I am exploring a dialogue with country through a making process that stems from the principals of acknowledgement, participation and importantly imagination.

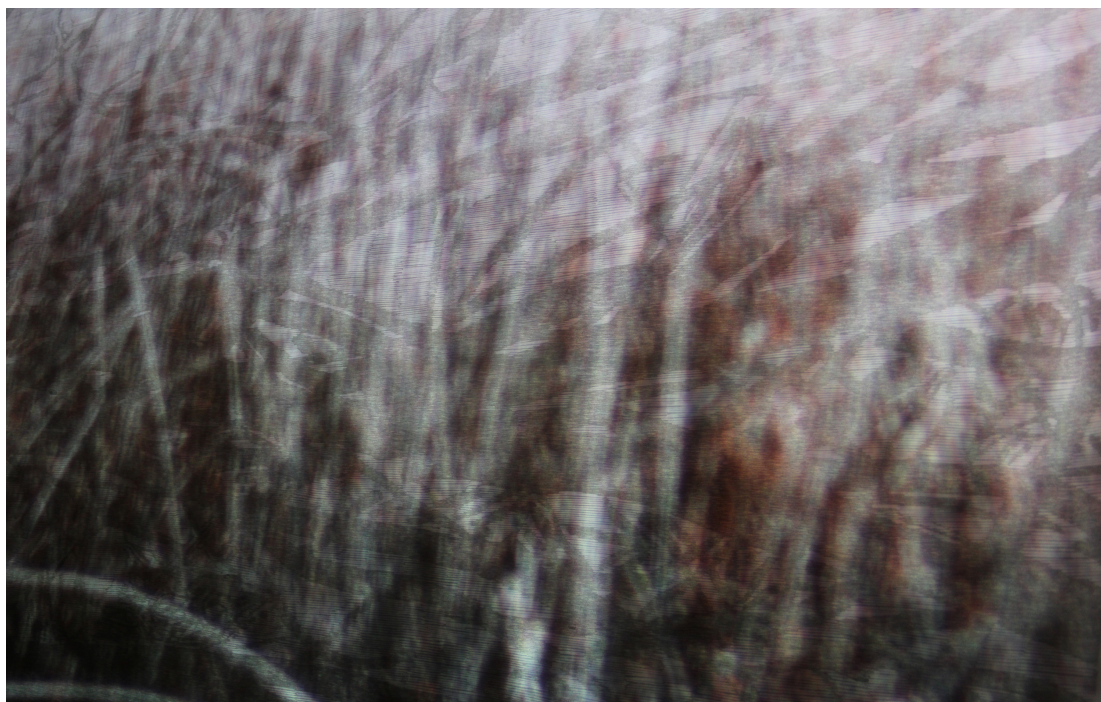


Figure 1. Antonia Aitken, from *rising ground series*, 2015. Still from digital video projection on woodcut prints.

Slowness invites dialogue

I am exploring these ideas within the rich and ever growing terrain of research into walking as a philosophical, aesthetic and poetic practice, and aid to thinking, making and conversing.

Central to these areas of thought is a consideration of *slowness*. To slow down is to be more aware - aware of the whole body moving *in relation* with the ground.

Philosopher and feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti, suggests that 'the body is a surface of intensities and an affective field in interaction with others' (Tuin 2012, p. 34). In

this way I understand walking to be an inherently dialogical practice, one that invites a complex and entangled conversation between body and place. 'Place' like 'country' encompasses the multiple relations between the humans and non-humans that exist within it. 'Walking', writes Social Anthropologist Tim Ingold is 'to make ones way through a world-in-formation, in a movement that is rhythmically resonant with the movement of others around us – whose journeys we share or whose paths we cross' (Ingold & Vergunst 2008, p. 2).

We walked and sat and walked some more, in a simple negotiation and movement around one another. Sometimes ahead, sometimes behind, sometimes beside; sometimes in conversation and sometimes in silence - the exchange also in the rhythm of our footsteps, shifting of weight and rubbing of clothes as we continued to walk up the valley.

(Antonia Aitken, journal entry from 27.4.2015 – walking in Gudgenby Valley, ACT with Kirstie Rea)

Human and non-human tracks crisscross the land, our footprints and pathways an intimate sign of a shared habitation. Impressions formed by our contact with the ground, 'their timings, rhythms and inflections' (Ingold & Vergunst 2008, p. 8) are determined by the topography, the presence of others and our reason or purpose for moving.

Physicist David Bohm describes the image of dialogue as 'a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us... out of which will emerge some new understanding' (Bohm 2012, p. 1) and shared meaning.

By acknowledging these crisscrossed journeys when we walk, we are keeping alive the narrative in and of that land/place and creating shared meaning. We are actively remembering – through inviting the past into the present. In this way we are imagining 'all accessible time as rich with possibility' (Rose 2004, p. 25), breaking up linear notions of time (past, present, future) and inviting more responsive entanglements and engagements with place.

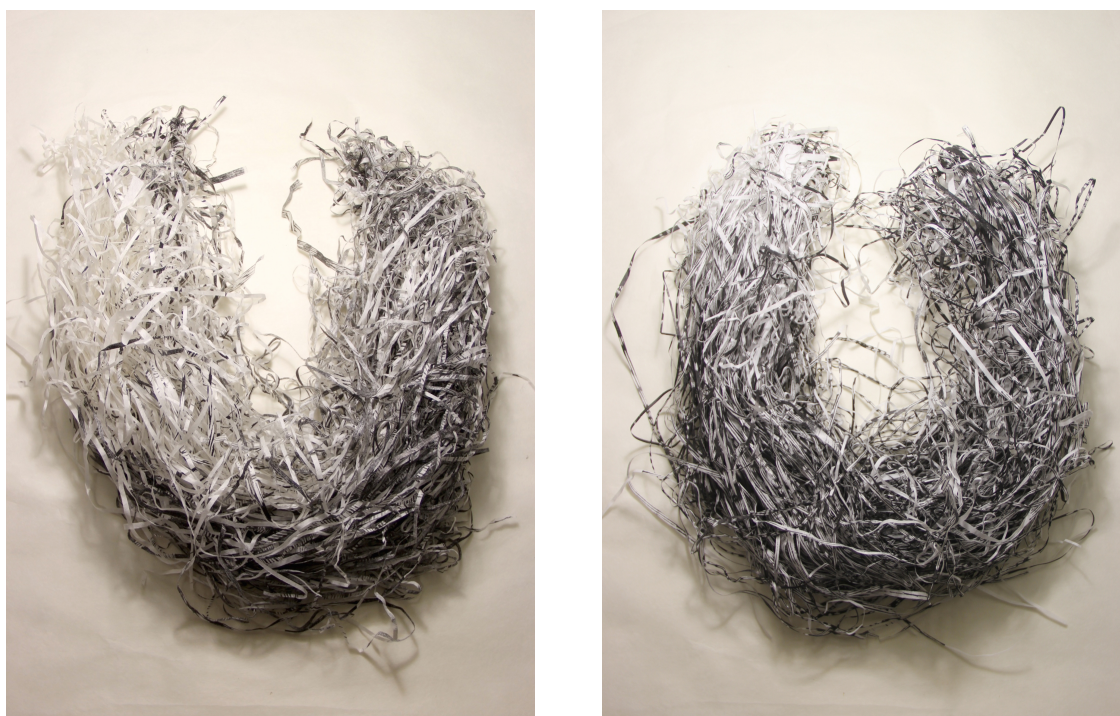


Figure 2. Antonia Aitken, *Entanglements I & II*, from *nests, knots and entanglements series*, 2015. Hand shredded woodcuts.

Shifting linear time concepts

Shifting linear time concepts is one of the key actions towards building recuperative and ethical dialogue with country, as reiterated by key environmental theorists, social anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose and ecological philosopher Val Plumwood.

This concept has become key to the broader questioning in my research as I seek to question western time and narrative concepts and pictorial devices that hinder cross-cultural dialogue. I am making within a growing field of Australian artists, writers and thinkers who are attempting to generate fluid and responsive discourse around the complexity of our contested spaces and interwoven tracks. These writers and makers are attempting to create work that interrogates these dominant cultural frameworks and proposes alternative views and narrative structures, helping to build restorative relationships with country. These models for rethinking cross-cultural

relations are key to building dialogue between those of us who share this land and with the land itself.



Figure 3. Antonia Aitken, *Peeling*, from *nests, knots and entanglements series*, 2015. Charcoal & ink wall drawing, router-cut plywood form, approx. 250cm (h) x 200cm (l) x 150cm (w).

Journeying and multiplicity

Through the process of moving from Canberra to Tasmania to undertake this project I found myself dragging out the prints that recorded the places I had been, left and longed to return. This process mimicked the packing of my bag, as I pondered and deliberated over what to take and what to leave; what were the necessary items, mementos, mnemonic devices that would transport that 'home' with me into the new?

By exploring the notion of walking or journeying as a dialogical and social practice as described above, it not only provides a way of connecting us with the many narratives that inhabit a place, but also helps us to conceptualise the various locations and attachments we carry with us at anyone time. We are imprinted by all the places we have walked.

My feet felt oddly dented in their soles, as if the terrain over which I passed had imprinted its own profile into my foot, like a mark knuckled into soft clay (Macfarlane 2012, p. 53).

If we think of multiplicity in our notions of place, it helps us to conceptualise 'place' not as fixed or bounded, but as fluid and every changing. This importantly opens us up to broader conceptions of what 'home-place' attachments might be. This is especially relevant for those of us who have culturally bound desires or longings for a fixed 'home' based notion of belonging. In his essay *Motility* about the work of Artist Simryn Gill, Ross Gibson suggests that the Australian experience 'might have less to do with being in a place than it has to being in temporal patterns of movement' and 'in a continual process of reorientation' (Gibson 2013, p. 260).

With this awareness I am choosing to recognise the multiple places I carry with me and the complex entanglement of relations, connections and disconnections that make up a sense of where I am and who I am. It is not one single locus or experience that defines this sense.

Currently I am testing how these images that I have carried with me from Canberra play out in response to Knocklofty and my current place of dwelling.



Figure 4. Antonia Aitken, *Carrying places I & II*, 2015. Hard ground etchings, collaged prints & drawings, 60 x 45cm (each).

Knotting

I am using the notion of *knotting* to describe this interweaving of multiple-place relationships. I am doing this by recycling my drawings, prints and print matrices, knotting them together in the creation of new works.

By collaging and layering the elements together, I am likening them to what historian Dipesh Chakrabaty call's 'time knots' – 'entanglements of real life in time', where past is not overcome or consigned to the past. Time knots, he suggests 'draw us into complex and co-mingled times' (Rose 2004, p. 25). The prints and plates that I am using in my images are all imbedded with the history of my previous relationships with sites and I am inviting them to have meaning and relevance in the present.

Whilst recycling and shifting their meanings through a process of reconfiguration and transformation, their underlying intent is held firmly in their marks. By building

associations between this rich vocabulary of marks, places and tracks (past and present) I am building new forms, relations and images. 'Every step faces both ways' writes Tim Ingold, 'it is both the ending, or tip, of a trail that leads back through our past life, and a new beginning that moves us forward towards future destinations unknown' (Ingold & Vergunst 2008, p. 1).

Enfolding

The notion of subtending and enfolding place is another key concept and image appearing in the work. Place philosopher Edward Casey writes 'If imagination projects us out beyond ourselves, while memory takes us behind ourselves, place subtends us and enfolds us, lying perpetually under and around us' (Casey 1993, p. xvii).

Whilst walking in Knocklofty over the last year and a half, I have come across a number of makeshift shelters; temporary dwellings constructed from the land and formed in reference to the body. Entanglements of time and place that enfold the body, these shelters have become a significant form in my thinking and recent visual experiments. They are ways of both visualising and conceptualising an enmeshment of body with site, figure with ground.



Figure 5. Antonia Aitken, *Enfolding I*, from *nests, knots and entanglements series*, 2015. Charcoal & ink on paper, laser-cut plywood, 60 x 40 x 30cm.

I am exploring this relationship through the notion of the matrix. The matrix is that which underlies or underpins us. It is that in which we are embedded. The land, the plate and paper are all matrices; surfaces, grounds, structures to interact with, shift, mould and disrupt.

An example of this is evident in the way I am attempting to translate a sense of movement, light and shadow present in the land. I am doing this by cutting right through the woodblock. The perforated matrix can channel and project light and shadow into the space and onto paper; from there the shadows can be drawn and cut, building up layers of shifting marks.

By cutting up and reconfiguring of the matrix, the work is beginning to link very much to the way I see walking as a tool to develop more complex and layered ways of experiencing, seeing and responding.



Figure 6. Antonia Aitken, *Enfolding II*, from *nests, knots and entanglements series*, 2015. Charcoal & ink on paper, mono & woodcut print, laser-cut plywood, 60 x 40 x 30cm.

Conclusions

The exploration of an *enfolding* and *knotting* of materials and ideas is helping me find a visual language that enfolds and knots the ground with body. The notion of *entanglement* recognises the complexities in navigating the multiple layers of narrative, relations and personal longings that lie within our land.

If we enter country through *embodied* approaches that slow us down and stimulate heightened sensory encounters, perhaps we can more easily build intimate connections that make us attentive to the ground we are in. I wonder if these affective body states can help us to build stronger and more robust dialogue with country, leading us down paths of acknowledgement, participation and new imaginings.

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LAND DIALOGUES: Interdisciplinary research in dialogue with land

Memory Trace, After Delay (2016)

Tonya Meyrick



Meyrick, T (2016)
Memory Trace, After Delay
(Digital Photograph)