

Locating: Place and the Moving Body

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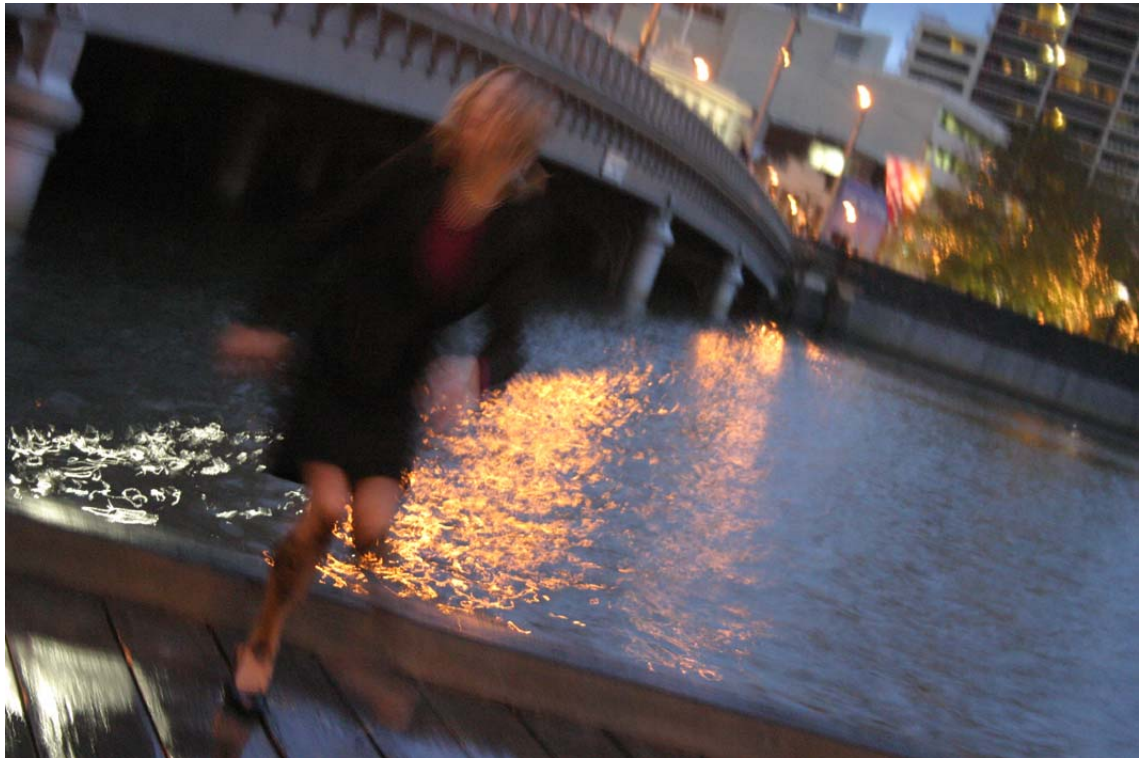


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Doctor of Philosophy Declaration

"I, Gretel Taylor, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Locating: Place and the Moving Body* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

Signature

Date

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Abstract

Locating: Place and the Moving Body

This research project physically and theoretically investigates a relationship between body and place, via site-specific performance-making processes in diverse Australian sites. It encompasses the creation of two live performances and a video installation, the development of which are documented and elucidated in a written exegesis.

The exegesis and associated performance processes explore the proposition that movement/dance—as a spatial practice—can be a mode of locating, or an attempt to locate. ‘Locating’ implies an endless process that is always heading towards location, place, total presence—but may never arrive. Using practice-based, embodied research as its methodology, environmental information from the specific site is gathered via sensory perception tasks, some derived from Body Weather (a movement philosophy developed by Japanese dancer Min Tanaka), generating an improvisational exchange of perception and response. This ‘locating dance’ *is* the relationship between body and the place: it is simultaneously the seeking of relationship and the expression, enactment or illustration of it.

In seeking location in relation to Australian sites from the perspective of a body that is white, the research also interrogates white Australian identity in relationship to this country, with the knowledge of the genocide and dispossession that its history entails. The work of theorists of place and space, as well as local historical and ecological sources, provide the framework for this series of excavations. Via traveling in Europe and to Aboriginal Land in the Northern Territory, insights develop into the cultural and corporeal residue of colonisation. Thus, the specific geographical site of each of the performance works acts also as a microcosm for, or reference point to, the broader site of contemporary Australia and the non-Aboriginal postcolonial experience of place. Representation of the body in performance is constructed in various ways to acknowledge the implications of its whiteness. The locating dances and performance works that comprise *Locating: Place and the Moving Body* engage in a multi-sensory listening to the country that aspires towards (white Australian) location—that elusive and longed-for ‘belonging’ or true ‘settlement’—yet they do not purport to have found, or even anticipate finding, an endpoint to this dance.

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I have received a great deal of support from my family, friends and colleagues in the process of undertaking this project (and the life events that occurred alongside it). I would like to thank my partner Tom Berteis for his love, patience and generosity throughout. Tom composed the sound for and assisted technically with all of the performance works. My parents Chris and John Taylor and my sister Claire have been ever encouraging and supportive.

Another major contributor to whom I am indebted is James Geurts, artist, filmmaker and dear friend. James was my entire film crew for the *Still Landing* work: his tasks ranged from director of photography to costume and hair assistant, editor to personal counselor and artistic inspiration. Prior to James' vast contributions to the video, I was blessed to meet traditional owners of the Puturlu country (where we shot the film): Johnnie Miller, Jean Brown and the women elders who came out to show me the 'good spots' and sang in the film—Coral Napangardi Gallagher, Gracie Napangardi, Rosie Nangala Fleming, Nellie Nangala Wayne, Liddy Napanangka Walker and Mary Nangala Ross. I will always remember and be grateful for these experiences and for the Warlpiri people's permission to film on their land. None of these meetings would have been possible without the assistance of Natalie O'Connor, who was my link to and liaison assistance with Yuendumu community.

Many people have shared their time and knowledge in the gathering of sources and the implementation, documentation of and reflection upon the performance events. I will here reel off these names, but I am sincerely grateful to each and every one of these people and organisations—Elizabeth Keen, Christian Alexander, Kye Knight, Dominic Redfern, Ben Dudding, Georgia Curran, Harry Gilham, Diana Bassett-Smith, Russell Yeoman, Eltham and Kangaroo Ground Historical Societies, VU's Secomb travel fund, Frank van de Ven and the Itxassou 2005 workshop members, Miloš Šejn and Bohemiae Rosa 2005 workshop members, Dancehouse, Watch this Space Gallery (Alice Springs), City of Melbourne (Meat Market Gallery), Tom Howie, Amelda Read-Forsythe, Chris Babinskas, Jude Walton, Auntie Joy Murphy, Auntie Isabell, Georgia Snowball, Mandy Field, Leonie van Eick, Cat Harrison, Sophia Cowen, Meredith Elton, Tony Yap, Emma Strapps, Craig Peade, Daniel Mounsey, Jo Lloyd, Margaret Trail, Lindsay Dresden, Olaf Meyer, Martin and Marlene Hengeveld. Several friends/ colleagues were also generous enough to read a draft of this exegesis and give me valuable feedback, much of which is folded into this final version—Mark Minchinton, Jill Orr, Elizabeth Hartrick, Chris Taylor and Sandie Hernandez. There are undoubtedly still more individuals and organisations I should mention that assisted at some stage with this research that I have not here remembered. Thank you all.

I dedicate this exegesis to the memory of my grandfather, Charles Emery Taylor, 'Pa'. Pa was an inspiring intellectual and adventurer who was always interested in and encouraging of my PhD research and would be pleased to know that I finally finished it!

1. Locating

It starts slowly. I breathe deeply, cold air filling me, bringing the wind inside. I let this interior breeze move me; it sways me gently, whilst I am also aware of the variations of temperature and pressure of the exterior air that meets surfaces of my skin. Tree tops arch and bow above my head as the breeze strengthens and noisily rustles reeds at the water's edge. I remember that this is Birrarung, the Yarra River: territory of the Wurundjeri people, created, according to their story, by Bunjil, the wedge-tailed eagle ancestor. This consciousness makes my presence here feel superficial, at the very beginning of a process of acquainting, although I am already familiar with this place. I have my own memories of this particular spot. It was to this place I came to express rage at my personal loss a year ago. But today I am calm and receptive.

At a slow-flowing section of the river, a fish flips momentarily out of, then back into the river, creating a ripple across the body of water that lasts minutes. I imagine the fish flipping inside my torso and imitate the waves it casts gradually rippling to my peripheries. My hands explore the texture of the rough bark and some dry sap on a tree and I let the sensations filter in to my interior like dye. Picking up a small stick I find several tiny bugs and varieties of moss co-habiting upon it and ponder the miniature ecology of a single stick. Next to it is the delicate skeletal remains of a eucalypt leaf, its flesh eaten out by some insect. I stretch out my sore hip to the sound of a passing plane. My head shakes gently side- to- side mimicking the movement of foliage of a shrub next to me affected by the wind, while ribcage follows the slow drag of the river on its gradual journey downstream. Fleeting chirps of birds chatter to knees and my arms describe occasional swift lines of flight that pass my view. Texture of dry leaves and sticks underfoot effects a kinesthetic response from the soles of my bare feet into my legs, which are moving in a dance that adds a crackling layer to the 'soundtrack' as my feet in turn impact the ground.

Occasionally I realise I am no longer perceiving and responding—it is more immediate than that. Almost without the intermediary of the senses, I am simply relating to my surroundings. This is my dance of locating.

Locating the Exegesis

Locating: Place and the Moving Body explores the relationship between body and place via an improvisational movement practice, which I call ‘locating’. This research project encompasses the creation of two site-based performances: *Immersion/ Excursion: Killeavy* at the site of an old homestead in Eltham; and *Blasted Away* at Queens Bridge, Melbourne, where there was once a waterfall across the Yarra River; and a video installation, *Still Landing*, shot in remote desert country near Yuendumu, Northern Territory.¹ The thesis explores the implications and potential of ‘locating’ in the contemporary Australian context.

The written component of the thesis, the exegesis, serves as an extension to and in some cases, the understorey (like the layer of vegetation beneath the main canopy of a forest) of the physical explorations and performance-making processes. It includes the thoughts and theories that inform the physical practice and performance events, some of which may be evident and some probably invisible in the performed outcomes. This project is situated within the body of knowledge that has flourished in the last decade in the fields of Performance Studies and Dance Studies, that is developing ‘a theory of performance production that positions the lived experience of the practitioner at its center’, as Mark Minchinton proposed in 1994.² The approach places value on subjective and embodied experience as valid forms of knowledge. The exegesis is autoethnographic in orientation. In an autoethnography the researcher becomes the primary participant/ subject of the research, creating a reflexive account of her own experiences situated in culture, connecting the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political.³ Dancer/ anthropologist Cynthia Novack describes the cyclical pattern of ethnographic research, whereby the ethnographer moves ‘back and forth or, rather, around in a spiral’ oscillating between ‘generalizations and specific observations, abstractions and immediacies, looking “from the outside” and trying to understand the vantage points “from the inside.”’⁴ In *Locating: Place and the Moving Body*, I set some theoretically informed intentions, then immersed myself in the ‘fieldwork’—the site-based movement practice, which led to periods of reflection upon and

¹ These were the main performance works of the research, but there were additionally two studio showings and a short site-derived work *Foreign/ Familiar*.

² Mark Minchinton, ‘Saboteur, Guerilla, Pedestrian’, in *Writings on Dance* 10, Melbourne, 1994, p19

³ Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, 2004, accessed on 23/06/08 at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autoethnography>

⁴ Cynthia J Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1990, p21

Novack derives this cycle or ‘hermeneutic circle’ from Clifford Geertz, 1977.

theorising of insights derived from the practice, which initiated further fieldwork action, etc. Insights and critique were generated from and then informed, each aspect of this reflexive loop.

Throughout the exegesis the personal pronoun “I” is often employed. My voice as the writer, in parallel to the autoethnographic research process, is located at different times in contrasting relations to the dance/ performance and to the place. My perspective shifts from deeply embedded within the dance (as I attempt to write from the midst of experience) to observing my dance or the experience of being in this place from a distance in context of a wider view and through the various ‘lenses’ of a range of theoretical and artistic standpoints. Italicised writings generally offer an experiential voice, attempting to express in language the experience of a dance or corporeal realisation. These writings are often in the present tense: as close to the lived moment as possible, as a continuation from dancing, perceiving. Other writing is occasionally presented in scrapbook-like fragments or journal entries reflecting upon the ‘fieldwork’, whilst discussions on the logistical and artistic creation of the performance work and theorising of my process in connection to others’ artistic or theoretical works might use a more formal academic tone and form.

By employing this diversity of writing styles, I hope to effect in the reader an experience of multiplicity similar to that of the lived experience of a locating dance. In a movement improvisation in a place, I am sometimes attentive to the interior forces and impulses of my body; at other moments I am present to my body’s surfaces as the interstice between myself and the world; and at times I am outside of my self-body, analytically observing my body from afar. Together these contrasting styles and voices aim to evoke and contextualise the complexity of the lived moment of body in relation to place.

The titles of all chapters of this exegesis have kinesthetic potentiality, encapsulating the embodied state of their content. This introductory chapter, ‘Locating’, aims to orientate the reader to the research project *Locating: Place and the Moving Body* by outlining its major philosophical and artistic influences, key terms, ideas and methodologies. It introduces the notion and dance practice of ‘locating’, which is the core of the research.

Spatial practices: dancing as locating

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, philosopher Michel de Certeau describes walking in the city as a ground-level spatial practice, whereby one is immersed in the city's streets, inhabiting and engaging in a practice in relation to the spaces one traverses, in contrast to 'arranging things into an image to be surveyed by distanced subjects'.⁵ Art historian Rosalyn Deutsche states that de Certeau, via his discussion of these contrasting views of the city, in fact 'socialises vision itself'. De Certeau demonstrates that the walker in the city potentially resists the system of power imposed by modern town planning, by which surveillance from a vantage point above the city aspires to a detached totalising coherence.⁶ According to Deutsche,

Everyday life is differentiating, situated and involved, while visualizing social discourses produce coherent knowledge by withdrawing from society and claiming an exterior position.⁷

Deutsche goes further to proclaim that the pure view of the exterior, elevated vantage point is a modernist mode of vision that establishes an opposition between subject and object. This mode of viewing renders the subject transcendent, the object inert and reinforces knowledge as mastery.⁸ In this research my dance process and performances have engaged with places in an immersed inter-relation, valuing insights that emerged from the involvement with, or participation in, the differentiating particularities of a site.

Michel de Certeau makes a distinction between place and space. Place 'implies an indication of stability' whereas a space is distinguished by consideration of 'vectors, velocities and time variables ... composed of intersections of mobile elements.'⁹ De Certeau likens space to the word when it is spoken, 'that is, when caught in the ambiguity of an actualization...'¹⁰ Walking is thus equated to enunciation: 'a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language).'¹¹ In demonstrating his theory that 'space is a practiced place',¹² de

⁵ Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1996, p210

⁶ Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the City', *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984, pp 91-110

⁷ *Ibid.*, p211

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ de Certeau, 1984, p117

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p98

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p117

Certeau asserts that ‘to walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper.’¹³

If place then implies stability and order, the experience of lacking a place, according to performance theorist Nick Kaye, suggests space or site to be characterised by mobility or movement.¹⁴ As Kaye notes in Site-Specific Art, de Certeau’s walker in the city ‘realizes the site in its transitive sense, always in the act or effort of locating, never in the settled order, the “proper place”, of the location itself.’¹⁵ Kaye identifies ‘a site-specificity linked to the incursion of performance into visual art and architecture.’¹⁶ He proposes that the interception of space and time into any work of art work leans it towards performance: that site-specific art *is* (becoming) performance. The language Kaye uses to develop this argument almost always refers to action, physical movement and/or embodiment, which affirms for me that dance is potentially an ideal means by which to express place and all of its memories, inscriptions and ever-shifting lives and meanings. The immediacy and ephemerality of dance can represent and actualise what Kaye terms the ‘event of location.’

In another arena of spatial intervention, European artistic and political agitators of the 1950s and ’60s, the Situationists, reacting against the unadventurous and oppressive obedience to architectural structures and town planning that seemed to result from the new urbanism, proposed a more active approach to spatial experience. The Situationist concept of Psychogeography has influenced architecture and the visual arts and is conducive to movement explorations/interventions of (particularly urban) space/ place.¹⁷ Founding French Situationist Guy Debord explained: ‘Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.’¹⁸ A Situationist practice that was a sort of spatial activism and a methodology for the ‘study’ of Psychogeography, was the *dérive*. Debord defined the *dérive* as:

¹³ Ibid., p103

¹⁴ Nick Kaye, Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation, Routledge, London, 2000, p9

¹⁵ Ibid., p6

¹⁶ Kaye, 2000, p3

¹⁷ The contemporary practice of parkour or yamakasi is a movement form that resists the grid pattern of urban space, possibly deriving inspiration from Situationist ideas. In contrast to my movement experiments, parkour practitioners emphasise acrobatic, guerilla-like street stunts. See film by Luc Bessons, ‘Yamakasi-Les Samourais des Temps Modernes’, 2001.

¹⁸ Guy Debord, ‘An Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’, 1955, <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/2> viewed on 26/06/08

...[literally: “drifting”], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. Dérives involve playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there...¹⁹

Although the Situationists’ activities were mainly based in cities, I have explored *dérive*-like sensibilities in my physical processes of acquainting with various environments—from forests to cities, to deserts. The main focus of this research is the dance and not the walk, but a large part of my practice has involved walking—walking in search of or on the way to sites, or treating the area I am walking in and through to be a site unto itself. Walking is a primary activity in establishing a relationship between my body and a place. A key theorist informing this exegesis, Australian cultural studies academic Stephen Muecke notes in his article ‘Footwalk’, ‘[walking] is an activity which fundamentally relates the machinery of the body to a country with distances to be crossed.’²⁰ Sometimes my walk would be the beginning of the locating dance; other times it remained in a state of a walk becoming-a-dance. Like a *dérive*, I would have a playful-creative attitude to the walk, often not intending to ‘arrive’ anywhere but following whims—going off-track and adding extra tasks or constraints. Some tasks I explored included walking extremely slowly or backwards and allowing my body to acquire qualities of the surroundings I was walking through, for example, letting my arms and head be taken in the direction the wind was blowing, or attempting to walk with a sense of water in my legs and torso emulating the movement of the river I was walking beside. The activity of walking thus shifted away from the pedestrian act and towards an investigation of my body’s relation to the terrain.

Extrapolating from de Certeau’s and the Situationists’ ideas of walking as a spatial practice which can resist dominant forms of visual and spatial power, this exegesis explores the hypothesis that movement/ dance—as a spatial practice, an extension of walking—can be a *mode of locating*, or an attempt to locate my self-body in relation to a place. Like the practices de Certeau supports,

¹⁹ Debord, (trans. Ken Knabb), ‘Theory of the *Dérive*’ in *Internationale Situationniste* #2, 1958, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html> viewed on 26/06/08

²⁰ Stephen Muecke, ‘Footwalk’, in *Writings on Dance* 13, 1995, p8

my locating practice is immersed, involved and close-range. As I dance in a site, I am responding to, participating in and *trying to know* the site. The term ‘locating’ seems to most accurately describe this dance of place: the slippery, endlessly-seeking jostle to find *my* place with(in) the place, acquaint myself with it, find relation to it. My use of the present participle, ‘locat-*ing*’, implies a perpetual process that is always heading *towards* location, place, total presence—but never arrives. The locating dance *is* the relationship between my body and the place: it is simultaneously the seeking of relationship and the expression, enactment or illustration of it. These locating dances and the site-based performances I develop from them are my research methodology. Locating is the start point and cornerstone of the performance-making processes I have undertaken at these sites, as well as the basis for theoretical discussion pertaining to the experience of body and place/ site in Australia.

In Terms of Place

Before I further elucidate the artistic and theoretical influences upon my practice of locating, it may be useful to consider some meanings of terms of place and space. A comparison of selected definitions of place-related terms from the Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary provides some insight into the complexity of place in contemporary Australia.

country

- 1 a) the territory of a nation with its own government; a sovereign state.
- b) a territory possessing its own language, people, culture, etc.
- 2 (*often attrib.*) rural districts as opposed to towns or the capital.
- 3 the land of a person’s birth or citizenship; a fatherland.
- 6 *Aust.* The traditional territory of an Aboriginal people.
- 7 *Aust.* (in combinations) land exhibiting a designated physical characteristic (*sand country*; *box country*).

land

- 1 the solid part of the earth’s surface (opp. SEA, WATER, AIR).
- 2 a) an expanse of country; ground; soil
- b) such land in relation to its use, quality, etc., or (often prec. by *the*) as a basis for agriculture (*building land*; *this is good land*; *works on the land*).
- d) any proprietary interest in land.
- 4 a) real property. b) (*in pl.*) estates.
- v.1 a) set or go ashore.

landscape

- 1 natural or imaginary scenery, as seen in a broad view.
- 2 (*often attrib.*) a picture representing this; the genre of landscape painting.

locate

- 1 *tr.* discover the exact place or position of.
- 2 *tr.* establish in a place or in its proper place.
- 3 *tr.* state the locality of.

- 4 *tr.* be situated.
 5 *tr. Aust. hist.* a) allocate (land) to a settler.
 b) establish (a person) as a settler.

location

- 1 a particular place; the place or position in which a person or thing is.
 2 the act of locating or process of being located.
 4 *Aust. Hist.* a) an allocation or grant of land.
 b) the act of establishing a settler in a place.

nature

- 1 a thing's or person's innate or essential qualities or character.
 2 (often Nature) a) the physical power causing all the phenomena of the material world.
 b) these phenomena, including plants, animals, landscape, etc.
 6a) uncultivated or wild area, condition, community, etc.

place

- 1 a) a particular portion of space.
 b) a portion of space occupied by a person or thing (*it has changed its place*).
 c) a proper or natural position (*he is out of place; take your places*).

site

- 1 the ground chosen or used for a town or building.
 2 a place where some activity is or has been conducted (*camping site; Aboriginal sacred site*).

space

- 1 a) a continuous unlimited area or expanse which may or may not contain objects etc.
 b) an interval between one, two or three-dimensional points or objects (*a space of 10 metres*).
 c) an empty area; room (*clear a space in the corner; occupies too much space*).
 2 a large unoccupied region (*wide open spaces*).²¹

Taken together, these definitions produce some interesting synergies and contrasts. Some of these words are used interchangeably in everyday life, but in this exegesis each is utilised (or avoided) for its particular distinct meaning(s). Some of these words are employed in ways that perhaps are only in usage in particular intellectual and artistic fields, or among a certain cultural group.

place

In Australian academic discourse 'place' has come to pertain to a whole gamut of complex identity relations to do with belonging, ownership, history, politics and experience and has become a major field of inter-disciplinary inquiry. As an example of the cross-disciplinary approach that the subject of place is generating, Stephen Muecke's writing draws from sociolinguistics, culture studies, Indigenous studies, history, philosophy, politics, fictocritical writing and travel writing.

²¹ The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, 4th Ed.

On an international scale, geographer Linda McDowell notes that the extensive movement of peoples from their places of birth and ancestry, through imperialism, immigration, refuge and simply through travel, has created a globalised sense of place, changing the notion of place as 'authentic' and 'rooted in tradition.' According to McDowell, place is now defined by the intersection of particular socio-spatial relations that create a place's distinguishing qualities.²² She writes:

[following the enormous changes of the twentieth century]...the commonsense geographical notion of a place as a set of coordinates on a map that fix a defined and bounded piece of territory has been challenged...[and now] places are contested, fluid and uncertain. It is socio-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries...²³

The new authenticity of place McDowell describes is 'made up from flows and movements, from intersecting social relations rather than stability and rootedness.'²⁴ That place is characterised by greater fluidity and instability now than in the past represents a major shift in the organisation of people's lives and as such is the impetus for the sizeable body of work being produced across a broad range of fields of knowledge on the subject of place.

Also recognising the changing conditions of place in the contemporary world, art historian Miwon Kwon in One Place after Another perceives the current contradiction between 'the nostalgic desire for a retrieval of rooted, place-bound identities on the one hand and the anti-nostalgic embrace of a nomadic fluidity of subjectivity, identity and spatiality on the other.'²⁵ Kwon comments upon recent shifts in site-based art practices, which reflect the global destabilising of place, to encompass a new notion of site as an 'intertextually coordinated, multiply located, discursive field of operation'.²⁶ Kwon suggests finding a terrain between this trend of deterritorialised mobilisation and the more traditional, grounded site-specificity and imagines a new model of 'belonging-in-transience'.²⁷ A clue to this new model, Kwon indicates, might be in considering the range of seeming contradictions *together*, to inhabit them at once and find a sense of belonging *with* the instabilities: 'to understand seeming oppositions as *sustaining*

²² Linda McDowell, Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, p4, in reference to Doreen Massey and George Marcus's work

²³ McDowell, 1999, pp 3-4

²⁴ Ibid., p5

²⁵ Miwon Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002, p8

²⁶ Ibid., p159

²⁷ Ibid., p166

relations.²⁸ Kwon advocates ‘relational sensibilities’, emphasising relationships between things, people and places.²⁹ My locating practice, with its emphasis upon an ongoing process of relating, could be seen to share this sense of inhabiting transience.

country and land

In Australia the word ‘country’ is commonly used among Aboriginal populations and other people who mix with Aboriginal people—*gone out on country; looking out at country*. It refers to the area of land or nation of a certain tribal/ language group—*my mother’s country, Yorta Yorta country, Gunditjmara country*, etc.—hence there are hundreds of ‘countries’ within Australia.³⁰ Country is used instead of ‘the land’ and extends to the animals, people, vegetation and spirits, the earth beneath the surface and the air above it and the complex interactivity of all of these. Country is a living breathing entity. As late Warlpiri elder Darby Jampijimpa Ross put it: ‘Country—it’s the heart, the world.’³¹ Stephen Muecke describes Aboriginal Australians’ beliefs about country in terms of a vitalistic philosophy that ascribes life to inanimate things and places. Muecke suggests there is a certain vitality, movement, transformability into and out of country that is accessed via ceremony or ritual (which is also a kind of performance): ‘The country is not apart from life ... because life emerges from it and goes back into it.’³² According to this principle of connectivity, bodies and place are in a sort of mutual flow, whereby the country is seen as a living body, ‘full, perhaps with blood’ comprised of interconnected parts, linked by (kinship) relationships between people, country and ancestors: ‘the blood of this country’.³³ Ngarinyin elder David Mowaljarlai explains it as ‘Everything standing up alive’.³⁴

Aboriginal philosophy also ascribes more significance to country/ place than to cumulative time. Muecke suggests that the displacement entailed in imperial expansion may have instigated an intensification of Indigenous peoples’ historical consciousness.³⁵ Traditionally, Aboriginal people

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The exact count of Aboriginal nations now is difficult to ascertain, with land ownership distinctions sometimes blurred. Prior to European invasion there were between 600 and 700 nations, speaking between 200 and 250 languages (source: Anita Heiss, in Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait Islands, Lonely Planet Publications, Footscray, 2001, p46).

³¹ Liam Campbell, Darby: One Hundred Years of Life in a Changing Culture, ABC Books & Warlpiri Media, 2006, p212

³² Stephen Muecke, Ancient and Modern: time, culture and Indigenous philosophy, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2004, p171

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., pp108 and 171

³⁵ Ibid., pp14-15

had a sense that all times were co-present in country. The omnipresence of the many histories of a specific site is a theme I have adopted in my site-based performance works.

I have developed a partiality for the word *country* having spent time with some desert people and I have found that it actually has a different feel to it, a more total sense of place, as well as carrying the nuance of acknowledgement of (the land's) Aboriginality. *Land* on the other hand, is very much a whitefella term, with its colonial associations in its transitive form: 'set or go ashore' and its related pursuits—agriculture and ownership ('proprietary interest'). Reference to *land* is usually about what people will do or have done *to* it; rarely is *land* mentioned without association to human intervention. This research is informed by an anti-anthropocentric artistic perspective, that posits humanity as part of the world, but does not regard it as the centre of all existence. Thus I prefer the terms *country* or *place* to *land*.

locate/ location

In the process of this research I have developed my own particular meanings and uses of *locating* as outlined in this chapter, but draw to our attention the dictionary definition 5b) of *locate* in the transitive sense to mean 'establish (a person) as a settler' and 4b) of *location*: 'the act of establishing a settler in a place'. I was unaware of this meaning when I began describing my dances as 'locating' improvisations, but these definitions are surprisingly accurate of some of the broader connotations of my dance. As I will elaborate in the following chapters, my identity as a descendent of the colonisers became a more pronounced embodied awareness for me via the process of my locating dances. That the dance is attempting to bring my body and sensibility into closer relation with the place could be likened to an attempt to 'settle' more deeply, fully or honestly—this time without the intent of domination or erasure.

landscape

Throughout the exegesis I attempt to avoid using *landscape* to stand for the surrounding environment or place, precisely because of its definition that limits experience of place to the visual sense: '...scenery, as seen in a broad view'. The work I undertake in relating to place engages all of the senses, including the visual sense in not only a 'broad view' but also the close-range, in a relation of surroundedness, immersion, inter-relation. This multi-sensory immersion in place posits the body within the place, whilst *landscape* connotes (and I would suggest, promotes) the observation of an exterior, placed at a distance from the body.

I will further elucidate Muecke's discussion about Indigenous sense of time in Chapter 3: Blasted Away.

My processes are aligned with the discourse emerging in the past century as a reaction against the western world's privileging of sight over the other senses.³⁶ Several of the aesthetic/ ideological movements informing this research—Body Weather/ Butoh, the Situationists and New Dance—would seem initially to have little in common, but they do share this wariness of ‘the spectacle’ and an interest in investigating socially denigrated senses, such as touch and kinaesthesia. Re-dressing the primacy of the visual has also been a significant area of inquiry in contemporary feminism, with several French feminist theorists³⁷ recognising links between ocularcentrism and masculine forms of identity. As Luce Irigaray writes:

More than any other sense, the eye objectifies and it masters. It sets at a distance. In our culture the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch and hearing has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations...³⁸

My sensory exploration of site(s) could be read as part of an artistic/ theoretical movement seeking to correct or re-dress these impoverishments. Rebellion against ‘spectacle’ or visual dominance has been fundamental in the development of the phenomenon of site-specific art and performance that involves a more immersive experience for its audience and a more deeply-embodied or lived experience for the performer.

The term ‘landscape’ is akin to the distanced approach to viewing/ knowing/ mastering a place critiqued by de Certeau in The Practice of Everyday Life and is also reminiscent of colonial forms of vision. Stephen Muecke in Textual Spaces notices about Aboriginal narratives ‘the complete absence of a *specular* version of the landscape.’³⁹ The metaphor of walking the city streets as an epistemology of embodied immersion in or amongst the world (in contrast to the disembodied aerial view) could be compared to the experience of Aboriginal Australians’ knowing of the country via walking and singing its ancestral tracks. In a later work, Muecke observes that the tradition of landscape painting in Australia reinforced the colonial gaze that ‘captures’ and claims ownership. He asserts that ‘framing Land as pictures of landscape [makes] possible the recontextualisation of the environment at a distance from ourselves and, by implication, under our

³⁶ Elizabeth Dempster, ‘Revisioning the Body: Feminism, Ideokinesis and the New Dance’ in Writings on Dance 9, 1993, p12

³⁷ Irigaray, Kristeva, Cixous, Montreley, Clement, Duras

³⁸ Irigaray cited in Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought, California University Press, Berkeley, 1993, p 493

³⁹ Stephen Muecke, Textual Spaces, Southwood Press, Marrickville, 1992, p167 (original italics)

control.’⁴⁰ When I engage in a locating dance, I attempt to participate in place, dance with country, or perhaps relate to land, but I do not posit myself in relation to the *landscape*.⁴¹

nature

The term ‘nature’ has become contentious because of its construed opposition to ‘culture’, which in effect reinforces dualistic thinking and separates humans from the rest of the world. I tend to avoid use of the word ‘nature’ for its connotation of this duality. A collection of essays by geographers, environmental philosophers, cultural theorists and anthropologists entitled Nature Performed was compiled as a result of Between Nature, an interdisciplinary conference exploring the interface between ecology and performance. The introduction to this collection breaks down the nature/ culture binary by recognising a movement towards comprehending ‘nature and nature-human activity in terms not of static structures and rules but *activity*.’⁴² As discussed in Nature Performed, this ‘performative turn’ in the study of environment indicates a growing understanding of the dynamism of both nature and society.⁴³ Drawing upon Judith Butler’s application of the term ‘performativity’,⁴⁴ editors Szerszynski, Heim and Waterton claim that the contributors to their volume reveal how nature itself is performative, by extending performance beyond the human (belonging to ‘culture’), to pertain ‘to a life which encompasses the human and the non-human’.⁴⁵

I have found that by bringing an audience to a site and via my moving in relation to the site, the place itself ‘performs’. Attention is drawn to what is already there: the ‘dance’ that is already underway—the dynamic interactions and movements taking place within the particular ecology of the site, in which we (performer and audience) are also participating by our physical presence in the space. Szerszynski, Heim and Waterton describe ‘mutual improvisations that highlight the agency of the non-human’.⁴⁶ My dance is entirely reliant upon and always, already assumes the

⁴⁰ Muecke, 2004, p75

⁴¹ An exception to my avoidance of the term is in instances where I am actually referring to the genre of landscape painting. I have further discussions with Czech Professor of Fine Arts, Miloš Šejn and with dancer Frank van de Ven about their use of *landscape* in Chapter 3: ‘Empty?’

⁴² Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim & Clare Waterton (eds.), Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2003, p1

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Butler famously used the term performativity to demonstrate that gender is not natural or determined, but rather it is culturally constructed or produced, and performed.

Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, Routledge, New York, 1990

⁴⁵ Szerszynski, Heim & Waterton (eds.), 2003, pp3-4

⁴⁶ Ibid., p4

agency of nature that is proposed in Nature Performed: the ephemeral, unpredictable, improvisatory, mutual ‘performance’ by the non-human or natural elements of the place.

Body at the Crux: the tactile fabric of lived experience

My process of embodied experience *as* academic research confronts the resilient Cartesian (and Ancient Grecian) body-mind divide, which effectively banished the body *and* women *and* the entire physical world from the lofty realm of The Idea or Knowledge. As feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz states, ‘...philosophy [as a self-contained discipline] has established itself on the foundations of a profound somatophobia.’⁴⁷ Grosz does qualify this general rule by acknowledging an anomalous line of philosophers who proffer non-dualistic images of body-mind relations, including Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.⁴⁸ *Locating: Place and the Moving Body* attempts to dislodge or diminish the body/ mind duality and other associated ‘oppositions’, such as: mechanistic/ organic, subject/ object, civilised/ primitive, reason/ passion, inside/ outside, self/ other, towards their re-integration as continuums. At the juncture of body and ‘environment’, this project intersects with debates in feminist, gender, postcolonial and ecological studies on the patriarchal underpinnings of dualistic thinking, the legacy of which continues to scar our postmodern reality, particularly the duality of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, as discussed above. The project is situated wittingly at the crux of the friction.

Movement educator Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen stated that her work was based upon a belief that ‘all mind patternings are expressed in movement, through the body [...and] that all physically moving patterns have a mind.’⁴⁹ This project holds as key premises that body and mind are inherently intertwined, that humans (and their ‘culture’) are part of ‘nature’, that the body (with its mind) and its surroundings do not have such definite borders or distinctions as are often inferred.

Also expressing a view of intersubjective relationships between humans and the non-human world, phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty considers the body ‘a sensible for itself’, in that

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1994, p5

⁴⁸ Although Merleau-Ponty’s approach is a very different, and sometimes conflicting, school of thought to Deleuze and Guattari’s, they do have in common non-dualistic ideas of body-mind relations.

⁴⁹ Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Sensing, Feeling and Action, Contact Editions, Northampton, 1993, p102

it is both able to be sensed (sensible) and able to sense (sentient).⁵⁰ According to Merleau-Ponty, we are separated from ‘the things’ or the features of the exterior physical world by the ‘thickness of the look and of the body.’ However he does not view this ‘thickness’ as divisive, but rather as tangibly connective: ‘...the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.’⁵¹ The body’s ability to see and perceive the world around it is our means of relating to it and this relationship—the communication that Merleau-Ponty calls ‘flesh’—is what links us to place:

The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh...It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves...⁵²

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen distinguishes between sensing and perceiving: sensing being the ‘more mechanical aspect involving the stimulation of the sensory receptors and the sensory nerves’, while perceiving ‘is about one’s personal relationship to the incoming information.’⁵³ We all have similar sense organs, but our perceptions are unique, explains Bainbridge Cohen: ‘Perception is about how we relate to what we’re sensing. Perception is about relationship—to ourselves, others, the Earth and the universe.’⁵⁴ Bainbridge Cohen (and other New Dance and bodywork explorers)⁵⁵ expands the traditional ‘five senses’ of vision, taste, smell, hearing and touch to also include the sensations of movement (such as kinaesthesia and proprioception) and visceral activity. She proposes that perceptual processing contains, in both the input and output aspects of the sensory loop, the interweaving of both perceptual and motor components, arguing that ‘movement is the first perception’ and that movement plays an important role in establishing our process of perceiving.⁵⁶ Bainbridge Cohen speaks of a point of letting go of sensing, ‘so that the sensing itself is not a motivation; that our motivation is action, *based on* perception.’⁵⁷ Movement is to me, in my locating improvisations, both a means of sensing and then perceiving

⁵⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Intertwining—The Chiasm’, in The Visible and the Invisible, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1968, pp134-5

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., pp135-6

⁵³ Bainbridge Cohen, 1993, p114

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ such as Lisa Nelson, Simone Forti, Nancy Stark Smith

⁵⁶ Bainbridge Cohen, 1993, pp114-15

⁵⁷ Ibid., p63

(although I also often start consciously sensing from stillness), as well as being my means of responding to that which I sense. Cohen's work could also provide insight into the moments when I find I am suddenly moving in direct relation with the place, no longer aware of following or listening to the senses as intermediary.

Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the body, my body is both perceiver and perceived and this two-way perception the interstice between the place ('things') and my self-body. In an investigation of the relationship between body and place, the realm of the senses was my obvious starting point. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, my locating dances could be said to be dances of the 'flesh' between my body and the place. If the 'thickness' of the perceptual relationship is the 'means of communication', my dance is the 'communication' that transpires. It is through my body's perceptual relation to its surroundings that I peruse and sometimes delve into the 'heart of things', acquaint myself with a place or 'make myself a world.'⁵⁸

The 'geography closest in': *my Body*

'Begin though, not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in—the body.'
-Adrienne Rich

My perception of and response to a place is not the same as anyone else's. To begin with, my body through which I receive sensory information, is sexed, gendered, has its own mix of ancestries, its own unique set of memories, experiences, abilities, etc., as well as its own relationship to the specific place. Reflecting upon developments in feminism and proposing a 'politics of location', renowned feminist poet/ writer and activist Adrienne Rich recalls:

...the need to begin with the female body—our own... [in] locating the grounds from which to speak with authority as women. Not to transcend this body, but to reclaim it. To reconnect our thinking and speaking with the body of this particular living human individual...⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Merleau-Ponty 1968, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Adrienne Rich, 'Notes Towards a Politics of Location' in Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (eds.), Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader, Routledge, New York, 2003, p30

As Rich notes, ‘Even to say “the body” lifts me away from what has given me a primary perspective... [to] say “my body” reduces the temptation for grandiose assertions.’ The statement of ‘my body...’ Rich continues, ‘plunges me into lived experience, particularity...’⁶⁰

My particular body is white (from Anglo-European ancestry, though I did not until recently really consider myself as being/ having any ethnicity at all), fifth-generation Australian, female and trained in various dance techniques. It has at different times during the process of this project been aged between thirty and thirty-five, been very fit, less fit, pregnant, post-natal and grieving.

As a performance maker, I make choices as to what I present and represent to an audience. In the site-based works, which constitute the thesis, I have chosen to present the ‘white Australian’ aspect of my body/identity, (as well as, sometimes, my femaleness). Not being an Indigenous person and growing up in the predominantly white European-populated bayside suburbs of Melbourne in the 1970s and ’80s, I had not, until recently, been exposed to Aboriginal culture. Without knowing the Indigenous creation stories or rituals of maintaining relationship with country, I see and perceive a different country to the country an Aboriginal person sees. Having spent some time with Aboriginal people in the last few years, I am starting to get a glimpse of a different sense of place. Or rather, I have merely begun to appreciate that Aboriginal Australians *have* a different way of sensing place or ‘reading the country.’⁶¹ I cannot presume to know what that way is, but gather it is rich and complex. This realisation has had the effect of changing my own perception of the country to see it as Aboriginal country and my own people’s presence here as that of recent arrival.

‘The body’ in question is usually *my* body. I do sometimes expand from my own experiences to postulate about other bodies and my performance works might suggest some commonality of experience of white Australians’ bodies in relation to this country, but these are inconclusive and untested hypotheses. This is a qualitative project and a self-admittedly subjective one.

Artistic traditions and Methodologies informing the research

This research intersects various diverse artistic traditions. My locating practice is informed by Body Weather and Butoh as well as western Postmodern Dance, yet it is situated in places with

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p32

⁶¹ Krim Benderrak, Stephen Muecke, Paddy Roe, Reading the Country, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1984

an appreciation of 'site' as informed by Site-specific Art and 'the body' as by Performance Art/ Body Art.

Site-specific Art

'To move the work is to destroy the work'.

Thus stated sculptor Richard Serra about the removal of his 'site-specific' sculpture *Tilted Arc* in 1981. The tradition of site-specific art emerging in the 1960s entailed working *from* the place, making the artwork with and about what is already there, rather than placing a sculpture, performance or dance in a space as merely a backdrop. It is the 'backdrop' itself that is interesting to the site-based artist, who refocuses it to the forefront. As Miwon Kwon elucidates in One Place after Another, site-specific art emerged out of minimalism as a movement rebelling against the commercialism of art and the limitations of the gallery system, but has developed into an artistic field that has the potential to articulate the changing roles and experiences of place in the contemporary world.⁶²

Artist Carl André described his 'sculpture as place' to be '...an area within an environment altered in such a way as to make the rest of the environment more conspicuous.'⁶³ Unlike Robert Smithson's massive earthworks and Christo's wrappings of landforms, buildings etc., which were/ are obviously interventionist and imposing, artists such as André and Richard Long interact lightly with site. André and Long's work is anti-anthropocentric, in that it attempts to re-dress the dominance of human over the natural world. Long, whose artworks include his practice of walking across country, states that he interacts with 'nature' and it interacts with him; he makes work 'for the land, not against it.'⁶⁴ Intending to 'paint out the personal cliché' of the human body in anthropocentric sculpture, André's work invites viewers to apprehend the place itself—'that non-human otherness.'⁶⁵

My practice of site-specific performance-making focuses upon the moving (dancing) body in relation to its context. The 'art' in my case, is my body's meeting with this site: the dance between body and place. In a different site, it would be an entirely different dance. In my on-site performances, *Immersion/ Excursion: Killeavy* and *Blasted Away*, I intended (among other

⁶² Kwon, 2002, op. cit., p1

⁶³ Anne Raine, 'Embodied Geographies: Subjectivity and Materiality in the work of Ana Mendieta' in Griselda Pollock, Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings, Routledge, London, 1996, p235

⁶⁴ Richard Long, Walking in Circles, Thames & Hudson, London, 1991, pp12-16

⁶⁵ Raine, 1996, p135

things) to stimulate in my viewers an intensified awareness of their surroundings. That they consciously engaged with the place through their senses was for me a major motivation for bringing the audience to a live site-based performance. Of course, everyone everywhere is constantly being affected by place; no body is ever unmarked by its space. In asserting interaction with country/ place however, I brought these processes to the foreground of my awareness for investigation and creative extrapolation. For the duration of each performance, I attempted to invite my audience to similarly expand their consciousness of these effects.

Breaking from the Proscenium arch

Amelia Jones opens Body Art: Performing the Subject with this quote by theatre revolutionary Antonin Artaud:

We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theatre of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it.⁶⁶

Even prior to the emergence of site-specific art in the visual arts, the dissolution of hierarchy between actor and spectator in theatre initiated by Artaud in 1938 enabled social relations to be profoundly politicised by performative practices. These performance practices, Jones explicates, ‘through such intersubjective engagement, instantiate the dislocation or decentering of the Cartesian subject of modernism’, conceiving postmodernism.⁶⁷ Body art, performance art and postmodern dance have been major players in the transition away from the proscenium arch stage setting, recognising that traditional stage spaces are densely coded with social meanings, hierarchical distinctions and political relationships. The performance forms that were designed to be presented upon these traditional stages are similarly encoded.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, 1938, p96, cited in Amelia Jones, Body Art: Performing the Subject, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1998, p1

⁶⁷ Amelia Jones, 1998, p1

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Dempster, An Embodied Politics: Radical Pedagogies of Contemporary Dance, unpublished PhD thesis, Monash University, Melbourne, 2002, pp 132-137

As Jones demonstrates via her description of works of body art, body artists self-consciously, performatively, enact their bodies/selves as subjects, ‘*as representation*.’⁶⁹ Identifying as an artist within the performance art/ body art tradition, Australian performance artist Jill Orr creates potent image-based performance works. Orr’s early solo images used her body *as* the site and were orientated towards feminist revisions of the body, as well as environmental themes. In *Bleeding Trees* in 1979, Orr was strung up in a dead tree, and, in another image, she was half buried in the earth, her mouth a gaping wound: ‘an opening, through which fear can pass.’⁷⁰ Her recent works (which have also included other performers) reveal the multiplicity of cultural relationships to place, including Aboriginal, white Australian and new immigrant experiences. Often carrying poetic-political statements, Orr’s work, which incorporates live physical performance, video, photography, painting and installation, seeks ‘the humanity reflected in different sites and issues, which have a personal and universal relevance.’⁷¹

Postmodern dance ventured away from the stage to explore new dynamics between audience, performer and space. Choreographer Trisha Brown’s *Roof Piece* in 1973 took place over an eleven-block radius on roofs in downtown New York. In Lucinda Child’s *Street Dance* (1964) audience’s attention was guided almost entirely by a pre-recorded voice drawing attention to features in the street, while Childs and another dancer blended with the street scene.⁷² Dance theorist Elizabeth Dempster articulates a comparison between dance that colonises, conquers or consumes space, such as the ‘masterful occupation’ (of the proscenium arch stage) of classical ballet and the work of avant-garde choreographers of the 1960s who desired ‘to democratise space, and ... were more interested in inhabiting it than in dominating it.’⁷³ In describing the environmental pieces of Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs, Deborah Jowitt observes that the dancer could ‘merge with the ground or call attention to it, losing some self-importance along the way’.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Jones, 1998, p8

⁷⁰ Jill Orr, artist’s statement in *Act 3: Ten Australian performance artists*, Canberra School of Art, Canberra, 1982, accessed at <http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail-LRG.cfm?IRN=4035&View=LRG> on 6/7/08. *Bleeding Trees* was performed during the Third Biennale of Sydney 1979.

⁷¹ Jill Orr, www.jillorr.com.au/CV.html viewed 10/6/08

Orr has been a significant mentor for me over the past few years, as a director of works in which I have performed, and co-tutor in Site-Specific Performance subjects we have taught at Victoria University.

⁷² Dempster, 2002, p134

⁷³ Deborah Jowitt, 1988, p333, cited in Dempster, 2002, p134

⁷⁴ Ibid, p135

A contemporary New York-based dance artist, claiming the tradition of postmodern dance as her lineage, Jennifer Monson describes her recent practice as a ‘navigational’ project.⁷⁵ A multi-year touring project, ‘BIRD BRAIN’, followed the migratory routes of birds and gray whales across the northern and southern hemispheres. It investigated the navigational habits of these animals and worked in the interdisciplinary context of education, community, science/ ecology as well as art/ performance.⁷⁶ Monson ‘looks at patterns in nature and devises choreographic systems that become their own patterns.’⁷⁷

These dance and performance forms that inhabit and engage with place or site without dominating it, have informed my investigation of locating and site-based performance. Further discussion of specific artists and practices will be explicated in the following chapters.

Body Weather (and Butoh)

Min Tanaka famously stated ‘I don’t dance in the place, but I *am* the place’ when he did his daily performances in the streets throughout Japan in the 1970s.⁷⁸ Tanaka’s philosophy and physical training method ‘Body Weather’ engages in rigorous investigation of the body in relation to its environment.⁷⁹ Tanaka’s solo works and the group works he directs for his company Tokasan are often situated in natural environments or non-conventional spaces.

I participated in Min Tanaka’s intensive Body Weather workshops in Hakushu, Japan in 1999 and 2000. Since then, Body Weather training has informed my practice of receptivity to place as I improvise with Australian environments. Min Tanaka was strongly influenced by his teacher and sometimes collaborator, Tatsumi Hijikata, founder of Butoh dance or Ankoko Buto—the ‘dance of utter darkness’ that emerged out of post-war Japan in the 1960s.⁸⁰ I have also extensively trained and performed with Butoh dancers Yumi Umiuare and Tony Yap in Melbourne and attended classes with Butoh’s other founder Kazuo Ohno and his son Yoshito in Yokohama. One

⁷⁵ Jennifer Monson, ‘BirdBrainDance: a Navigational Dance Project’, www.birdbraindance.org viewed 20/06/08

⁷⁶ Jennifer Monson, iLand Dance Projects, <http://www.ilandart.org/danceprojects.cfm?id=3> viewed 20/06/08

⁷⁷ Jennifer Monson, *Flight of Nature* 2005, www.ilandart.org/ILAND_BBD_Presskit.pdf viewed 10/06/08

⁷⁸ Jean Viala and Nourit Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of Darkness*, Shufutomo, 1988, p158.

I have seen and heard several variations of Tanaka’s renowned statement. I will interrogate Tanaka’s statement and its implications in Chapter 4: ‘Empty?’

⁷⁹ See Chapter 4: ‘Empty?’ for more about Body Weather.

⁸⁰ The history and phenomenon of Butoh has been extensively researched and documented elsewhere, so I will not elaborate this history in great detail in this thesis. I do, however, discuss some of its philosophies in Chapter 4.

may very well question the appropriateness of employing Japanese dance technique(s) to embody Australian places. Min Tanaka would argue however, that Body Weather is not a ‘technique’ or even a style of dance and certainly not an aesthetic or a ‘system’ of training or movement. Whereas Butoh was developed as a specifically Japanese aesthetic, arising out of a particular Japanese experience, Body Weather purports to be a more open-ended training for expanding the body’s capacity for any movement. With the insistent ambiguity surrounding what it *is*, I will here attempt only to briefly explain what Body Weather *does* and why I find it a relevant methodology for my research.

Perhaps the most well known of Body Weather practices is ‘MB’ (this acronym is also typically ambiguous, meaning either/ *and* Mind-Body, Muscle-Bone or Music-Body). This is like a dancers’ version of aerobics: a series of exercises sourced from international folk dances and sport, traveling across space in lines to rhythmic music. I continue to maintain my version of this training, which increases cardiovascular fitness, flexibility, co-ordination and tests and extends the body’s capacity to multi-task. Another section of Min Tanaka’s work focuses upon the sensory body. Some examples of this training are: blindfolded explorations; following stimulations directed by a partner’s touch moving one’s body parts in specific directions with varied degrees of energy; or emulating the wind’s influence upon the body. Min Tanaka once left the workshop group I was a part of blindfolded for an hour atop a very steep icy mountain, saying “Experience the sensations!” Tanaka’s ‘dance’ training/ philosophy also encompasses farm work. He sees tending to the land for food as a fundamental part of the cycle of body and place. Tanaka considers that there are clues in the practical and efficient physicality of farm work to be integrated into our dancing bodies.

The practice of Body Weather tasks is beneficial to my sense of orientation in space—my awareness of the relation of my body’s parts to each other, to the ground and to my surroundings. Via this training, I have become more able to move multiple parts of my body in different ways or imbued with different qualities in what appears to be, but is not, simultaneity. It is a practiced quickening to shift my focus from one body part to another, operating my body as a disciplined multiplicity. This rigorous interior focus also extends outside of the body—via the interface of the senses—so that the dancer becomes hyper-aware of the multi-faceted exterior environment they inhabit.

Some aspects of Body Weather are encultured or localised, such as the use of imagery. Many of the ‘images’ for the body Tanaka uses and teaches are inherited from Tatsumi Hijikata and refer to or reflect the Japanese rural environment, such as: seaweed, chickens, cows, moths, incense... (These do of course exist outside of Japan, but are certainly not found everywhere). Often Body Weather/ Butoh performances in Japan contain references via costume and caricature to specificities or peculiarities of Japanese life—both traditional and contemporary. Particularities of the Japanese physicality also influence the typical Butoh aesthetic—I still cannot comfortably squat in Hijikata’s characteristic foetal position: I note that my legs are not Japanese! So practitioners have their own ways of moving in relation to the place, from their own bodies.

Practitioners internationally have adapted the training and performance of Butoh and Body Weather to the terrain and culture in which they are situated. I sometimes use the Butoh mode of imagery to apply localised textures and qualities of a site to various parts of my body. I invent images from the place—cracked clay face, spinifex legs, blow-fly elbow... I acknowledge this as an Australianised ‘borrowing’ of Hijikata’s/ Tanaka’s method. However, most of the aspects of Body Weather that I continue to practice in Australia are cross-cultural or applicable to any environment. To me Body Weather is about stretching the body’s potential in every possible way—muscularly, mentally, perceptually and imaginatively. Although my process has now departed from this work in significant ways, I have found Body Weather to be an excellent foundation for sensing place and have absorbed some of Min Tanaka’s teaching into my locating process.

Approaching Location

The initial intention of my locating dance is to become as physically present as possible in the site or place I have chosen. I work towards becoming present via a multi-sensory listening. Using perception tasks—some derived from Body Weather and some tasks of my own invention, my sensory awareness is heightened. These tasks include: following environmental sounds and rhythms with particular body parts, moving extremely slowly (for example, at a continuous rate of one millimetre per second), embodying specific features or qualities of that place or space via invented ‘imagery’ and working blindfolded with focus upon the haptic experience of sensations.⁸¹ As I undertake these introductory exercises, my body unravels its tensions and releases any cognitive or emotional surface layers—like topsoil, the dust residue of other places,

⁸¹ Many of these research activities will be discussed further in Chapters 2 and 4.

other sites of my human life—until I am actually present enough to *this* moment, *this* place: to listen to it, let it affect me, to respond. Observing my surroundings visually, aurally, kinesthetically and texturally, my body awakens to the place I am in; we have begun to merge. This gathering of sensory information leads into an improvisation, whereby I combine or loosen the tasks, using them as tools or ways-in and develop an exchange of perception and response. Gradually the gap between my perception of an aspect of the place and my response to it reduces, until eventually these seem to fold into each other. I let go of mental decision-making and I am simply *moved by* the surrounding elements, or feel that we are moving together.

However, I do not always reach this stage of fluid inter-relation whereby I am no longer consciously responding to my sensory input or adhering to a self-devised improvisational task—at different times and places I will get to different levels of ‘located-ness’. Obstacles to this desired state of merging might include physical challenges within my own body on a particular day, or the degree to which the place is foreign to me. In a type of terrain which is unusual for me, for example, the desert, (when I live usually in leafy outer Melbourne), it may take me several days of locating before I start to feel the sort of intertwining of energies I experience when dancing in relation to my local area. Like meeting a person from a very different background and belief system, it may take a little more time and effort to acquaint with each other. Sometimes an inexplicable sense of resistance arises—of something wrong, which I interpret as coming from the place itself. At these places, I have come to wonder whether I have stumbled unwittingly onto Aboriginal men’s country, or across a sacred site that contains knowledge not meant for me, or if something has occurred at this place that has marred it.

My locating dances are integral to the process of gathering material that informs the performance I then make for a site. The locating dance on its own is not necessarily performable; it is for my own experience of acquainting with or becoming closer to the place (which is a research methodology, but not, as yet, ‘performance’). The next stage in the process is performance-making. If the improvisation with the site or place is the *locating* phase, the creating of a performance that enables the locating dance to be witnessed is the phase of *audiencing*.

Audiencing

Observing another dancer on the beach during the ‘Osprey Tour’ 2002, Jennifer Monson wrote:

When she came out of the water I felt like she was in another state- more connected to the landscape, responding to the rhythms and energies of the environment. She was elemental, moving through one element after the other. She did an amazing current of air dance along the edge of the surf into the wind. I could see how much her body has learned how to navigate and transform her experience into dancing. Later she was arching in the wet sand- the water rushing up around her. It was so beautiful, so surrendered, so integrated. I felt like it was too beautiful. Suddenly I had a slew of external judgment. Is this Art? It's such deep personal, sensual experience. How is this experience mediated into an abstract artistic expression?⁸²

Monson in these final lines encapsulates a dilemma I have similarly encountered in the course of this project. I also feel that a stage of designing the work prior to its performance is necessary, to translate or 'mediate' the experience in order for it to be received by others. In the following chapters I detail and discuss the process of developing works for performance. Concurrently to the physical locating process, I gathered information about the site's history and ecology and considered its potential significance in a broader social, environmental and/ or political context. My engagement with theories of place and art/ performance also informed this gathering stage. I stepped back slightly from the immersed experience of the locating phase to design the performance visually and conceptually. I wove (some of) the local information and theoretical/ conceptual material into the performances in various ways, represented via text, costume, symbols, props, character, sound or visual image. Decisions about audience orientation to the site and the work were a crucial part of this process, as I framed my body's relation to the site from their perspective. In keeping with the close-range, immersive engagement of the locating phase of the research, in the audiencing phase I created the works in structures that attempted to engage viewers in less totalising, objectifying or colonising modes of perception.

Although the entire process of this research could be delineated into three phases: locating, performance-making and finally performing the work, the three are rarely so cleanly separable and there are many (overlapping) sub-phases. During the dance of locating I am also often considering the next stage of developing these findings into a performance. Ideas for theoretical exploration sometimes arise while I am locating, as do questions about the site's history, which I may later pursue. From conceptual and design decisions, I frequently hop back into the immersive mode, checking the view from there. By listening to place through my body, mental

⁸² Monson, 2002, www.birdbraindance.org/projects.cfm?id=3&sel=4 viewed 1/07/2007

and intuitive connections occur. Even during the performance, new aspects of the place emerge for me, as my locating dance must acknowledge that an audience is temporarily a part of the site also. This fluid yet rigorous multiplicity of approach I hope generates performance work that is informed by and reveals some of these aspects of the place—historical, social, theoretical, etc.—without departing from the lived corporeal experience of being-here.

Orientating the Exegesis

The next two chapters chart the creation of the on-site performances. In Chapter 2: ‘Immersion’ the notion of ‘dancing as locating’ is put into practice as I explore my body’s sensory experience in relation to the site of the ‘Killeavy’ farm property, in my research and development of *Immersion/ Excursion: Killeavy*. I experiment with weaving Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological ideas and Gilles Deleuze’s notion of ‘smooth space’ into my perception of a place. The chapter discusses my choices for presenting the material of the site as I did: as a walking excursion, which included the audience as active participants in the place.

In Chapter 3: *Blasted Away*, I experiment with my locating practice in an urban setting: the city of Melbourne. From a squiggle on a rare map, I am led to create and perform *Blasted Away* at Queen’s Bridge, where a waterfall across the Yarra had been an important crossing for the Kulin nation and also marked the site of first European landing in Melbourne by Grimes’, Batman’s and Fawkner’s parties in the 1800s.

Chapter 4: ‘Empty?’ explores questions pertaining to my methodology through an account of two workshops attended in Europe with Frank van de Ven and Miloš Šejn. Aspects of Body Weather training are described and interrogated in more detail, most significantly the notion of ‘emptiness’. Other important ideas and physical states that arose from the workshops included the ‘permeability’ of the body and the attempt to dance in relation to two places at once.

Chapter 5: ‘In Flux’ charts my experiences of place, body and identity as a traveler visiting European places that my ancestors came from and contemplating Australia from an antipodean angle. The intense familiarity I felt at certain sites contrasted with the experience of alienation in other places, became the subject of a short performance work entitled *Foreign/ Familiar*.

Chapter 6: ‘Still Landing’ and Chapter 7: ‘Sorry’ both refer to desert sites of the Northern Territory and to different aspects and stages of the development of the video work *Still Landing*.

Ken Gelder and Jane M Jacobs' theorising of Freud's notion of the Uncanny in relation to place in Australia accompanied my locating dances and *re*-locating process—the overlaying of embodied memories from Europe onto the contrasting environment of Central Australia. Stephen Muecke's commentary on Indigenous philosophy traveled alongside my journey with some Warlpiri people from Yuendumu to Lajamanu.

'Sorry' emerged after a personal experience of loss. The chapter moves from my experience of my body in grief in relation to (or absence from) place, to recognition of an underlying grief at the core of the nation. This chapter was written in the course of shooting, editing and creating the installation performance *Still Landing*, which was filmed on Warlpiri country at Puturlu, near Yuendumu.

The locating dances and their performance outcomes are my attempt to engage with and articulate my experience of a number of Australian places selected as sites. My initial focus for this doctoral project was to explore my sensory dance of place amidst theories of human engagement with the non-human world and to make performance with an anti-anthropocentric intent. Within a year of undertaking this research, however, the discourse of cultural identity came to the fore of the project and remained there. Upon exploring the relationship of body and place in Australia, the fact that my very presence in this country is owing to the exploitations of colonialism became an inescapable issue (or an issue I chose not to evade). The locating dances and performance works that comprise *Locating: Place and the Moving Body* acknowledge the colonial history that my body's whiteness insists I include as part of my identity.

2. Immersion

To be immersed in place is to be surrounded by it, with a reduced sense of separation between one's self-body and the surrounding world. This chapter explores the proposition of 'dancing as locating' in the bushland along the banks of the Yarra River and at the ruins of an old house and cattle farm property in Eltham, Victoria. It includes examples of physical experimentation with theory in the early stages of the research, as I explore Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'flesh' in my perception of a place. Arranged roughly chronologically, the chapter charts the various stages of research of the site (locating) and creation of the performance (audiencing). It considers modes of representation that might facilitate an immersive experience of place for an audience. It engages with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's thoughts on 'smooth and striated space', as well as their description of 'becoming' in its relation to representation in performance.

Some writing in this section is an attempt to speak from within the experience of perceiving and dancing, as a continuation of the dance and the place—in this sense the written word itself aspires to 'immersion.' Via the interspersed of this descriptive-immersive writing from locating improvisations and information from historical and ecological research of the site, a discussion starts to emerge about knowledge and place. As a dancer and site-based performance artist, what I know or might perceive about a place involves intuition, sensation, feeling and imagination—all arguably subjective modes, in contrast to the 'specialist knowledge' I encountered through my research with historical societies and a local naturalist. In a sense these divergent ways of knowing actually *produce*, from one place, different places. This chapter considers the selection and layering of information from these potentially incongruous sources.

Early Experiments and Processes

Intertwining

Land artist Richard Long, renowned for his works of art that either consist of or derive from the act of walking across a section of country, comments on the reciprocity entailed in sensory engagement with the natural world. According to Long, touch, in whatever form, sets up 'eddies in the flux of life', which can continue to effect responses through time and space far beyond the

original contact.⁸³ Touching the world, to Long, is not just about hands or walking—but also about eyes, ears and mind: ‘It’s the touching and the meaning of the touching that matters.’⁸⁴

Long’s observations echo Maurice Merleau Ponty’s philosophical study of perception. In ‘The Intertwining—The Chiasm’, as introduced in Chapter 1: ‘Locating’, Merleau-Ponty explores bodily perception in relation to the ‘things’ of the world via his notion of the ‘flesh of the world’. In the initial phase of my locating research at Eltham, I read this text with a view to experimenting with its ideas through movement. After reflecting on Merleau-Ponty’s essay, I went to the river and did an improvisation, with the intention of consciously applying Merleau-Ponty’s ideas of the ‘coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body’⁸⁵ to my fieldwork practice. My perception expanded profoundly and immediately. Following this improvisation (and before I had gathered my critical, editing brain) I poured these words into my notebook:

I sat on the rocks near the further away rapids and looked and sensed the place around me for a long time, starting to feel an overlap, the ‘coiling over’ of the river and my body, the rocks and my legs sitting on them, the skin on my face and the breeze. Seeing them, I enveloped them, melted into them, felt the boundaries blur between us. I started to move from this place, consciously at first, then still consciously—perhaps hyper-consciously, but with an involuntariness also, almost danced by the place—energy of my body extending out into it, as the energy of the rocks, swirling, falling water and wind extended into me, my body and the movements it was making.

I felt again as I have only on rare occasions before that I was not dancing at all but relating to the place, sensing it on all levels, sinking into the air around me, my entire body, not just parts of it aware of sensation outwardly and inwardly at once; the complexity yet unity of experiencing the things around me, my face melting with the water, my insides chuckling outwards with the bubbling streams and waterfall, my mind observing all of this experience and already trying to give it words. It started from a deep and soft appreciation of the beauty of all living things, needing to move with it. Movement started as direct result of perceiving, then became the mode of

⁸³ Long, 1971, *op. cit.*, pp20-24

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 17 & 20

⁸⁵ Merleau-Ponty, 1968, *op. cit.*, p146

sensing, perceiving, exploring, acquainting, relating, locating. I was incredibly powerful yet entirely humble... felt like an animal. My face morphed into my body.



Stealththing

Another exploration in the early phase of researching the area along the Yarra River in Eltham was a sort of deviation from the Situationists' *dérive*. As an adjunct to walking the bush tracks, I challenged myself to alert all living things to my presence as little as possible.⁸⁶ This was like playing 'invisible', as well as silent and scentless. I could not 'hide' from all living things, but I could attempt not to alarm them. It felt a bit like being a spirit—I tried to be lithe and light, traveling swiftly and silently through the forest. I imagined drawing my own energy field inward and down to the earth, my body soft, my breath even and calm, attempting not to startle the birds, kangaroos, dogs or even the trees with erratic sharpness. My feet searched out the soft grassy tracks rather than crackly sticks or crunchy stones and I was literally 'treading lightly on the earth', barely leaving a footprint as I passed. I became quite good at this quiet passage through space, at a very slow careful pace, but adding speed to the challenge forced my level of awareness to accelerate in manifold ways. The task was now to traverse space as quickly as possible, causing the least impact upon it.

The rapidity of my pace meant my perception had to be delicately yet sharply focused in all directions at once: I could not get too excited or 'heady', however, as my energy field then expanded and would be noticed by the dog down the hill, which would bark, alerting all the

⁸⁶ The Situationists and the *dérive* are introduced in Chapter 1: 'Locating'.

animals *and* people to my presence. It seemed to help to keep my energy low in my body—moving low to the ground, led by my hara—that energy centre situated beneath the navel, around which many traditional and contemporary Asian bodywork practices are based.⁸⁷ The lowness to the earth included my feet, which, similar to Muecke’s observation of ‘the Aboriginal way’ of walking, ‘skim[med] the surface – no more than a couple of millimetres above the ground’, so that, even at my fast pace, my locomotion resembled ‘drifting’.⁸⁸ I called this rapid traversing of country with minimal effect ‘stealthing’. My emphasis in this preliminary stage of my locating research was upon the experimental walking/ locomoting practice, yet I was also seeking a site for a performance. It was via the practice of stealthing that I came across the ruins of an old house and European garden amidst the eucalypts.



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I was sitting upon an old upturned refrigeration box in the dilapidated garden on a small hill by the river, when a man approached me. The stranger introduced himself as Felix, who had lived in the area all his forty years. He had a tinge of mischief about him that I was intrigued by and

⁸⁷ In Chinese and Japanese tradition, the hara, Dantian or Tan t’ien is considered to be the physical centre of gravity for the human body, and by extension the seat of one’s internal energy. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dantian>) Forms that use the hara include: Tadashi Suzuki’s physical theatre training, Butoh, yoga, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Aikido and other martial arts.

⁸⁸ Muecke, 1995, *op. cit.*, p8

⁸⁹ Unless otherwise acknowledged, I took all the photographs included in this exegesis.

particularly that he was poking around the site of the old homestead on his lone Sunday exploration as I was. And he had knowledge about its past. The house was demolished six years ago, leveled he said, and the property had been incorporated into Parks Victoria's domain, becoming public land. Felix was curious about what flowers would come up there this spring: a couple of years ago there had been a field of red poppies right there in the kitchen area, but he could see some different plants coming through now. Indeed, I had recalled the classic children's story 'The Secret Garden' when I had found this place with its budding daffodils, blossoms and roses amidst the native bushland.

'The Morrisons' had inhabited the place, which they had given a name: 'Killeavy'. Felix admired that they had "really known what they were doing" building there in those days—"did it properly", referring, I supposed, to the garden, construction and location. He picked up and gave me a piece of broken plate with a bit of blue decorative edging: "That was what the Morrisons used to have their salads on when they came up from swimming in the river!"

Becoming-Matilda

Before Felix had appeared as if from nowhere, I had been doing a locating dance near the old incinerator and a sense of a woman had come to me, whom I called 'Matilda'. Sort of ghost of housewife—I imagined her wearing a ripped 1900s dress covered with ash as if she had materialised out of the incinerator. I found myself 'as' this character, tending her garden, doing domestic actions in the various 'rooms', the floor plan of which was still just evident by lines of bricks and rubble on the ground. I looked out from 'my' hilltop, as if I were the lady of the house, at the hills and river and also at the electrical towers as if remembering the place before they were there. The dance had a sentimental, nostalgic feel to it: I sang 'Waltzing Matilda' into the echo-y water tank. I allowed myself to be sensorially affected by my surrounds—melting into the tune of birdcalls and sway of wind, inviting their effects upon my body, but I kept returning unintentionally to the gestural and pedestrian actions of this woman. She was not always mature: sometimes she was a little girl picking flowers and running freely across the field and other times she was frail and old, but I felt somehow that the multiple Matildas were indeed the same person. Morphing through various ages—maiden, mother, crone, ghost—the woman I was imagining and 'becoming' via my dance seemed to traverse multiple times at once, reflecting the many layers of time evident in the place itself: its stages of evolution from native bush to cultivated and active family home, to its current disheveled return to native bushland.

When I refer to ‘becoming’ (as in a walk becoming-a-dance or myself becoming-Matilda), I am borrowing Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s notion, which they here define by what it is *not*: ‘A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification...’⁹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari emphasise also that neither does a becoming occur in the imagination; becomings are ‘perfectly real’.⁹¹ What is ‘real’ however, is the becoming itself: ‘a human does not ‘really’ become an animal... Becoming produces none other than itself.’⁹² It may be ‘real’ for the human that she is in a state of becoming-cat, for example, but it does not evolve that she ever actually turns into a cat. This concept is similar to my experience of practising Butoh ‘images’, which were introduced to me at different times by Min Tanaka, Kazuo Ohno, Yumi Usumare and Tony Yap, all of whom explained this work by way of the imagination, which according to Deleuze and Guattari means they are not the same as becomings. However, although a Butoh image, for example, a moth fluttering on one’s forehead, begins in the dancer’s imagination, I am suggesting that the dancer’s subsequent embodiment of the image is a becoming in the Deleuzian sense: the dancer is ‘really’ in a state of becoming herself with a moth on her forehead.

In Butoh/ Body Weather contexts, I have been taught that embodying an image is not to be done by imitation/ mimesis, ‘acting’ or trying to construct the outward appearance of the image for an audience (representation). The task is rather to actually find—via memory or imagination—the physical sensation of the experience and to allow the body to move from and with this image. At this point of vivid corporeal memory or imagination, I have felt my body to be in a state of becoming the image. Although an audience may not entirely ‘get’ the given image, I suspect that they register some sort of transformation in my body. (I have witnessed other dancers performing imagery-based movement and appreciated shifts in quality and intensity of both their movement and presence.) As I will describe on the following pages, part of my locating practice also at times involves such becomings, such as my upper body becoming-wind or my legs becoming-dry sticks.

In my improvisations at the homestead site, I felt my body shift between becoming this female character, ‘Matilda’ and ‘being myself’ negotiating and responding to qualities of the old homestead site in each present moment, as in my more usual locating dances. Sometimes I may

⁹⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, The Athlone Press, London, 1988, p237

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p238

⁹² *Ibid.*

have even felt an older force, like a deep kinaesthetic drone, coming from the land itself and/ or its earlier human inhabitants. But it was ‘Matilda’ who was specific, clear. On various occasions as I danced at the site of the Morrisons’ property, scenes, stories and feelings played themselves out through me as if I were in a dream. Indeed, I often found myself in a trance-like inter-relation with the place. It felt as if the place were ‘dancing me.’

Although I was in the mode of ‘locating’ when I sensed ‘Matilda’s’ presence, images were coming to me that constituted the beginning of the ‘audiencing’ phase and later these actions became part of the performance work. Hence this woman’s presence had no sooner arrived than she had become a ‘character’ to me. This blurring of the phases typifies the resistance of my site-based processes to adhere to absolute distinctions.

The Morrisons’ Place

Having selected the remains of the Morrisons’ house and garden as the site in which I would probably develop a performance work, I returned to the property regularly over several weeks to gather sensory information or ‘data’ via locating dances. Although I had the eventual goal of creating a performance, my focus was still upon exploring experiential processes. The following are some notes written from these improvisations, in language sprung of its own still-sensing experience.

The wondrous spring winds—quite chilly today but fresh and literally uplifting—gave impetus to an airy exploration. I was carried like leaves by the wind, becoming part of the air, smoke from the incinerator. This developed into a sequence that started standing as a brittle, tree-like figure in the incinerator, then my body’s density dissipating and wafting into smoke, becoming-spirit of Matilda and gradually materiality seeping in from the feet up, becoming-flesh of crone Matilda. I felt her arrive in me. Very easily, before I’d even tried, and subtle, not the exaggerated old woman I’ve been before. I think I may have summoned a real spirit of the property! I then walked as a combination of a bundle of sticks and crone Matilda, allowing the dry crackle of twigs beneath my feet to infiltrate the quality of my legs, whilst maintaining the body of the old lady.

At another stage of the dance I found myself grasping at grass in despair—trying to get back to earth, ‘the way it was’, a sense of belonging/ groundedness, or something... squatting and gripping the grass until it broke off in my grip and I fell backwards, legs fell open and I lay

awhile still, staring at the wind in treetops, then with a silent scream I gave birth, gathering an imagined child from between my legs.

Another day, a beautiful sunny afternoon with fresh breeze. The wind is certainly special here. I did a slow listening locating dance on the grass behind the tank. Started with setting myself the task of moving at one millimetre per second, then following the minute movement of grass moving in the wind—and again that transformation started to occur, towards a trance-like state: deeply feeling with my body, being ‘taken’ or ‘danced’. I sensed detail, sometimes tuning in to a singular focus: torso rippling with the shadow of windy branches on dappled sunlit grass.



Lying down I appreciated a close-up view of the grass (which looked red-orange by the angle the sun was hitting my eye) and felt the sensations of many parts of my body experiencing grass differently at once: bristly on lips, face, luxuriant against my foot’s arch as it slides through the grass, prickly on the sensitive skin of my belly.

I was startled momentarily to see the solid presence of a large kookaburra sitting on a branch of a gnarly dead tree only a few metres from me, watching intently and incredibly still. He followed me as I moved down the path a bit. “Kookaburra sits on the old gum tree-ee, merry, merry king of the bush is he-ee, laugh! Kookaburra laugh! Kookaburra gay your life must be!” I sang, as I danced, taunting him. He didn’t laugh, but stayed around, seeming curious and to quite like what I was doing. How do I know that? I don’t know... What I was doing wasn’t much, was by now very minimal and quiet—a gentle, un-laborious exploration.

Whilst dancing for the kookaburra I stepped on an ant nest of enormous bitey-type ants and just noticed in time as one wandered through the gap between my bare toes. Like electricity I jumped, leapt, bounded away.

One time I saw a massive eagle soaring overhead, very high in the sky. I followed its flight with my gaze and spine. I was sure he/ she was, like Kookaburra, keeping an eye on me: what was I doing in his/ her territory? The arc of its flight crossed the arc of the new crescent moon which I only then noticed, so faint in the blue of afternoon.

I kept moving in different areas around the site, trying to loosen my crackly neck, spine, hips as I went. Felt a bit lost at times early on and would return at these moments to stillness or a simple slow sensing walk until a new whim or wave took me. Noticed that wind makes the leaves of the big European oak tree sort of flap, while the same gust makes the gum leaves on upper branches of eucalypts tousle wildly. On the 'meadow lawn', as I called it, near the old oak, I imagined having a quaint Devonshire tea with imagined guests, in 'true' European-Australian country style... I oscillated between the 'civilised' tea-party and 'natural' world: morphing into 'being danced' by the sounds of insects, movement of grass, sensation of wind. Eventually I barely noticed I was moving at all, though I was, always in at least one area or part of my body, not trying; just experiencing, relating, curious yet not restless.

Erasure

White Australian place-making processes involved clearing the bush and its native inhabitants (both human and animal) and replacing them with European plants, trees, animals, religions and lifestyle. This area was no exception. In the late 1800s white settlers cleared the vast majority of trees in Eltham Shire for farming and planted some European orchard-style trees. Maps at the local library revealed that there had been a 'Reserve for Aborigines' allocated just upstream from the hill occupied by this property. The Reserve was a small plot compared to the large sections claimed by squatters or bought for a few pounds from the Crown. On later maps even this Reserve disappeared.

Place theorists, such as Paul Carter and Stephen Muecke, have discussed the erasure of what had existed prior to European settlement/ invasion as a symbolic act of colonisation. *Terra nullius* implied a great empty land, a void, available to be claimed and inscribed by the white invaders.

But Carter in his reflections upon poet John Shaw Nielson's work, points out that colonialism actually *produced* empty space—'by way of land clearance, child removal and human transportation.'⁹³ These very acts of erasure exposed the fallacy that was *terra nullius*: if it was already empty, why the need to clear? Carter speaks of an 'environment of loss, psychic as well as physical.'⁹⁴

At the site that was the Morrises' property, the native bush is now growing over and through the house site, attempting to erase or at least effect a fading of the European culture, history, behaviour and things, in an ironic role reversal. The stubborn remnants of the decades of imposed civilised life and the native flora and fauna, not so different to how it would have been pre-cultivation, are all present, testimony to the layers of life that have existed and are still existent in this place: intertwined, tangled, gnawing at each other, yet co-habiting.



Matilda started to do some conventionally masculine activities in my improvisations—chopping wood, building walls, digging a grave, as well as the 'womanly' gestures of nurturing children and tending to the home. I thought about the colonial woman's role in pioneering country life. I sensed my Matilda had spent much time here as the only adult and I thought I felt her grief for at least one loved one. I recalled stories of isolation and hardship-on-the-land from my high school Australian Literature class. An image from Lawson's 'The Drover's Wife' came to mind, of the

⁹³ Paul Carter, 'Uneasily Along the Sand: The Poetic Line of John Shaw Nielson' paper at The Poetics of Australian Space conference, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2005

⁹⁴ Ibid.

‘gaunt sun-browned bushwoman’ holding a baby on her hip with one hand and chasing a lethal snake with a stick in the other, whilst screaming at her four other ‘dried-up-looking’ children to stand back.’⁹⁵

In Eve Pownall’s preface to the 1975 (fourth) edition of Australian Pioneer Women, she discusses the difficulties of researching women in Australian history, when few history books (of her time) even ‘recognized the presence of women in the country before about 1850, beyond a passing reference to Mary Reiby’s success in business, and tributes to the drive and crusading force of Caroline Chisholm.’⁹⁶ Pownall’s account sought to rectify the assumption that women settlers ‘have been engaged almost solely in housekeeping, childbearing and rearing’, by illuminating the figures ‘seen only dimly through the murk’ of a history written by and about men.⁹⁷ However, ‘there is much that cannot be pinned down’ and Pownall explains, that often she would uncover ‘something that was less than a story, a hint, a few vague statements, a name or two, and a ghostly figure seemed to stand behind those others whose records and story could be vouched for.’⁹⁸ It was this ethereal background archetype of Pioneer Woman that Matilda represented to me; she seemed to have become a (displaced) spirit of the land.

Pownall’s history is, of course, history itself now. It would come under the category of glorifying and celebrating women’s participation in the colonial project, which (two decades on) Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath and Quartly in Creating A Nation inferred was a naïve and inaccurate position. Grimshaw et. al. reject the uncritical glorification of the figure of the pioneer woman. This kind of representation also effects an erasure, as it fails to acknowledge the brutality and exploitation of dispossession of Australia’s Indigenous peoples to which white women settlers were also complicit: ‘In agency there is also responsibility.’⁹⁹

In the performance I developed at the Killeavy site, I represented this white woman’s story as one layer of the place—and one that I relate to as a white Australian woman several generations later, amidst many other stories—European, Aboriginal and non-human—of this place.

⁹⁵ Henry Lawson, ‘The Drover’s Wife’ in Brian Kiernan (ed.), Henry Lawson, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1988, p96

⁹⁶ Eve Pownall, Australian Pioneer Women, Melbourne University Press, 1975, p5

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p6

⁹⁹ Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly, Creating A Nation 1788-1990, Melbourne, 1994

Smooth space

I took photos at Killeavy, experimenting with a digital camera, and I realised after awhile that I was attempting to bring senses other than the visual—such as the haptic and kinaesthetic—into the visual medium of photography. I dragged the camera through grass with the grass pushing up against the lens, moved the camera as I snapped the sky, got incidental glimpses of my body parts in the frame, took shots from odd angles whilst rolling on the ground and did extreme close-ups of minute objects or details.

I apprehended that the close-range vision I was exploring with the camera said something of my inter-relation with place in my locating dances. In my immersive, sensory encounter with place, I was trying to experience Killeavy as a ‘smooth space’. Deleuze and Guattari refer, in their discussion of Nomad Art, to ‘smooth space’ as being associated with close-range vision and tactile or haptic space, as contrasted to ‘striated space’ which relates to more distant vision and optical space.¹⁰⁰ They claim that painters paint with close-range vision even if their paintings are viewed from a distance, composers work with close range hearing while their listeners hear from a distance and writers write with short-term (close-range) memory, while readers are assumed to possess long-term memory. They quote Cezanne who needs to no longer ‘see’ the wheatfield, in order to paint it, but needs to ‘lose himself without landmarks in smooth space’.



Deleuze and Guattari give examples of smooth spaces: desert, steppe, ice and sea—‘local spaces of pure connection’, not delineated by constancy of orientation or inertial points of reference—

¹⁰⁰ Deleuze & Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 1988, pp492-4

without obvious stable landmarks.¹⁰¹ Killeavy was not one of these exemplary ‘smooth spaces’ (there were physical landmarks, points of reference present), but I hoped to bring some of the quality of the ‘smooth’ mode of perceiving space, into my exploration of it.

Studio Practice

Alongside my on-site study I improvised regularly in a studio at Victoria University, where I would observe any residual influences in my movement from the place in which I had been recently immersed. The premise of this experiment presumed that the space of the studio was somehow ‘neutral’, which I knew was not the case—it was, in truth, yet another site. It was nonetheless a site that enabled some distanced consideration of and departure from, my locating practice at Killeavy. My hypothesis was that some traces of my experience of the place would have been absorbed into my body’s recent memory and may emerge in the studio as an improvisational language reflecting the site of Killeavy more abstractly. Around this time I had a sense that something exciting was happening in these studio reflections upon the site. In the absence of specific features, landforms, points of reference or orientation, the kinaesthetic and sensory memories of Killeavy and the surrounding area became merely points of departure for my dances in the studio. I would get a sense of wild formlessness, as if the shapes I was making were incidental to the forces carrying them: impulses arose that had no planned outcome and would often surprise me. My process of *re-locating* the ‘locating’ dance seemed to transition the dance itself from striated space (responding to specific features—river, trees, birds, rocks—at the actual site) to smooth space, the memory of my perception of its features pushing my movement into a space of unbounded possibilities and freedom.

Smooth space—this area of creative aliveness—is difficult to analyse, even to discuss, as it evades the organising mind of analysis. As soon as it is described it departs the haptic-close-smooth and slips into the orderly perspective of the striated. Academic treatment of artistic process may produce a similar dilemma. Yet I am attempting to express from and about a zone of unstable expression—both in performance and in writing.

Gathering the Archive

Concurrently to the various forms of physical research described above, the gathering of other data about the site also constituted a significant part of the ‘locating’ phase for this work. Like the

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp492-500

physical locating dances in the early stages of acquainting with the site, the gathering of other information was not yet arranged in any particular order. The sifting and arranging of material happened later, in the phase of ‘audiencing.’

Historical Data: Excavating Killeavy

As part of my collecting of data for this work, I visited the Kangaroo Ground Museum for a gathering of history buffs, who were generous in sharing their knowledge about the area *and* the Killeavy property. I even met a woman who, as a child, had had the same governess as the Morrison children and had gone to their place for lessons. The mother of the children with whom she had shared lessons was Beatrice Morrison nee Irvine. ‘Bea Morrison’, she told me, ‘was the sort who would always have a two- or three-course proper meal ready on the table for the family and visitors.’ Beatrice had been a widow for as long as this woman could remember. Beatrice’s father was Sir William Irvine, who had been the lieutenant governor of Victoria for a time. The historian also gave me a lead to some memoirs by Bea Morrison in the Eltham District Historical Society’s archives. Three of the Morrison children are apparently still ‘around’: a son and two daughters.

I chatted to another local historian who had some knowledge about the ‘historic’ European trees at the Killeavy site and told me that Panton had owned the land at some stage prior to Irvine. On discussing my project and in response to my questioning if he knew anything about the Wurundjeri people’s inhabitation of the area, he stated bluntly,

“The Blackfellas believe they belong to the land and whitefellas believe the land belongs to *them*”.

In this historian’s statement that simplistically represents entire world-views and lifestyles, is embodied the crux of the ongoing Indigenous-colonial friction/ debate in this country. How can such fundamentally opposing relationships to land be reconciled?

In retrospect I realised his sweeping statement also possibly covered the fact that, as a self-proclaimed ‘expert’ of the area, he knew very little about Wurundjeri history.

The Eltham Historical Society provided me with a copy of the letter written by Beatrice Morrison to the then local history buff, Mrs Shellard, before she died, as if she knew that someone would one day come researching her story. (The letter was dated May 8th, with the rather crucial

omission of the year!) It was a wild feeling for me, that I had imagined this ‘character’ whilst dancing and now had a letter written by her in my hand. The Eltham historian also gave me a copy of an excerpt from a Victorian Ministries catalogue about Mrs Morrison’s father, Sir William Hill Irvine. From these two documents (in particular Beatrice’s letter) the following story unfolded, which I later partially recounted, through both movement and words, to my audience.

The path from the corner of Reynolds Road and Yarra Braes Road is probably the original driveway that Sir William Hill Irvine drove in and out of to work in Melbourne, having one of the few motorcars in the area. Irvine had come from Ireland to Melbourne in 1879, where he consequently became a Supreme Court barrister and the Attorney General, Chief Justice and Lieutenant Governor of Victoria. His illustrious legal and political career also included a short stint as Premier of Victoria from 1902, elected in the second state election in which women, (though not Aboriginal women), voted. He resigned in 1904 due to ill health and possibly decreasing popularity after his harsh response to the railway strike of 1903. Irvine bought the block of land on the Yarra in 1908, which was then a famous jersey stud farm. He built a small house, ‘Killeavy’, above the river, which he used for some years as a family holiday house. In around 1912, Sir William, his wife Agnes Somerville and their three children: Beatrice, William and Agnes, came to live at Killeavy, extending the house. A governess first educated Beatrice, William and Agnes at home, but they were all later sent to boarding schools. In 1923, when Beatrice married James Morrison, a Tasmanian, they, the Morrisons, took over the residence. Mrs Morrison lived the rest of her days here, until her death in the 1980s.¹⁰² The original house was destroyed in the 1939 bushfires (Black Friday), but was rebuilt on the same spot with the original bricks.

Beatrice had six children and was very busy while they were young. Her husband ran what had become a small cattle farm until his death in 1936. (I have not found out how James Morrison died.) After her husband’s death, Mrs Morrison became highly involved in the community of Eltham shire. She lists in the letter her children’s names, professions, family and residential details: her son James died in a car crash in New Guinea. She writes:

¹⁰² I do not have any more specific date than this; the letter she wrote as an elderly woman is un-dated, and I could not find any Irvine or Morrison graves in the cemetery, though they are supposed to be there somewhere.

All these family lived at home in their early days and all of them and their many children still regard it as a home and are constantly here—although they are only half Irvine they still belong in thought to my family.

Beatrice's siblings and their children *'also regard Killeavy as a second home and remember their grandfather with love. They spent most of their holidays here and still come often.'*¹⁰³ The letter mentions other old families of the area: the McColls and Logans intermarried and settled originally *'just below here'*, when Dry Creek ran into the Yarra, in a small Gaelic speaking settlement. Beatrice remembers seventy years *'ago'* there were still remains from this settlement—chimneys in the bush, a post and rail fence, sweet briars and an old apple tree, before apologising graciously for her *'aged reminiscences'* and concluding her letter.

Beatrice Morrison nee Irvine was becoming uncannily tangible to me, considering I had experienced feelings and even actions of this woman's life already in my dances. She had indeed inhabited the site as *'maiden, mother and crone'*, as my *'Matilda'* had suggested to me. I had almost known her story already through my locating dances becoming-Matilda. I do not attempt to explain this phenomenon and it is not usually a part of my locating dance. Beatrice was recalled by local history in reference to her father Sir William Hill Irvine, a significant public figure in the area. Yet it was Beatrice who had come (as *'Matilda'*) to *'visit'* me and I sought to re-focus the Killeavy site's history from the perspective of the woman of the house.

Ecological Data: a naturalist's perspective

By chance, a friend of mine had extensively explored and researched the flora, fauna and ecological system of the area, specifically focusing upon the Killeavy property. An amateur naturalist, he took photos of flowers for a register of local species kept by the park ranger. We went for a walk together around the area and he generously shared some of his vast knowledge with me:

The Morrisons' property is an ideal case study for botany of the area because of its location on the hill, including all aspects—North, South, East and West—which are each distinct ecosystems, home to hundreds of species of plants, trees, flowers, grasses, birds,

¹⁰³ Ibid.

insects and animals. It is even the stronghold of some extremely endangered species of plant life, including the sought-after greenhood orchid. Typical of hill environments, the eastern side is always green and moist while the western is always dry. A quite clearly defined contrast is apparent from the ridge of the hill. Introduced grasses, particularly the sweet vernal grass-weed (recognisable by the pungent smell of its roots), a preferred grazing grass for cattle, are remnants of the Irvines'/ Morrisons' (and/ or earlier owners') farm. These weeds have spread rampantly throughout the area and are destructive of the native ecology because they hold back the native grass species.

The poppies at the house site were opium poppies, planted by squatters in the 1980s to 1990s before the house was demolished. On the eastern side of the house was the vegetable garden and just about everything in that vicinity is introduced species. Sulphur crested cockatoos (quite rare here) seem to like the hawthorn bushes/ orchard trees there. There are also many bellbirds in and around the garden (and in the next part of the park eastwards, adjacent to the garden), which tend to live on the fringes of disturbed areas. They are native, but in plague proportions here (and in many parts of Australia, being the country's most territorially aggressive bird). The bellbirds have a destructive impact on the eucalypts, playing a part in the stripping of leaves. As a sort of balancing agent, the carrawongs steal the bellbirds' eggs from their nests, keeping their population down. Magpies also are balancers of extremes in the area. The presence of wedge-tailed eagles in this area is a sign that the ecosystem is healthy. These raptors are considered the vulture-like 'cleaners' of the ecosystem, hunting for dead animals and 'cleaning up' carcasses.

The Wurundjeri people were shot and poisoned by settlers on the other side of the river, but found less enemies among the settlers on this side. When they got across to Sweeney's land (just further downstream on this side), they were safe. It is said that they had corroborrees on Sweeney's land and helped build his house. It would have been better hunting ground on the other side however, as more open space there would have been conducive to a larger population of kangaroos. Scar trees in this area often just have the 'knots' removed from the tree, which were used as bowls. The western aspect of the hill held more prospect of food sources for the Aboriginal people, orchids being a major source— part of the flower would be collected and crushed to make bread-like cakes.

The Irvines/ Morrisons' cattle would have grazed in the clearing on the eastern side in summer and back up on the western side where electrical towers now stand, in winter. Kangaroo and wallaby paws are very soft in their impact on the ground, but hoofed animals compact the ground. Cattle dung is also destructive to the native bush.

Towards the crest of the hill, the naturalist points out some echidna scratchings in the soil, each containing an ant or two. Over the crest to the west is a drier environment of tough bush, fallen branches and tiny but vibrant flowers. Rare and endangered plants are extremely common in this area. He identifies by name about twenty different species of plant life in a single square metre of random bushland, including a few tiger orchids. These orchids produce the sexual scent of a wasp, attracting wasps to pollinate them. They have a special fungus-soil relationship and require a delicate balance to be maintained in their environment, or they will quickly disappear. Their presence indicates a healthy ecosystem.

My naturalist friend sat down in a clearing by the river. I asked him about his physical engagement with the land. He said it is mainly a very close to the ground observational relationship, focused on the visual, as he is constantly photographing his findings. Rarely would he touch the plants. He showed me some photos of the tiny flower specimens on his digital camera. He did indeed have a highly developed visual sense of these minute, sometimes almost invisible species and was able to spot them metres away. He didn't miss much; his sharp mind and quick endless flow of informative talk were exhausting and mind-boggling to me. Or maybe it was the fact that all these words naming the bush were making me feel alien to it, when I had thought I was quite well acquainted. The naturalist obviously had a very different 'locating' process than I did, a much more cerebral one.

Finally, back up the track towards his house, the naturalist points out a fenced off area and said the ranger erected these fences to protect zones where the very rare orchids grow. In passing he mentions that Lady Morrison had been a keen bird observer and had kept the cattle off this area, recognising it to be a special zone. Her discriminating use of the land (that was only allowing the cattle to graze on some areas) is partly responsible for this still being such a special area for flora and fauna.

Knowledge and Place

The naturalist's information about Mrs Morrison excited me—her appreciation of birds indicated to me that her relationship to this place was more than incidental or practical. The impact the Irvines and Morrisons had upon this environment is obvious, still evident in the homestead's remains and surrounding land—the weed grasses from their introduction of cattle, etc. But what effect, I wondered, did this place have upon the Irish settlers themselves? And upon their bodies? No specialist could answer these questions. My own imaginative-intuitive-corporeal modes of research (in combination with the historical and ecological data) were the closest I would get to a sense of comprehending this 'knowledge'.

After my walk with the naturalist around the property, I realised I did not want any more 'factual' information about the Morrisons' place. I knew I could have tracked down the three children (or at least one of them), but that would have been somehow too close to the 'reality' or actual history of the place. Even meeting the woman who had been to Killeavy as a child for lessons, was a bit overwhelmingly close. And the naturalist's detailed analyses of the local flora and scientific division of the area into vegetation-climatic zones, though very informative, over-awed me also. Once everything has a name and is scientifically explained, I feel at a distance from it. It is then harder for me to find sensory kinaesthetic relationship with the place, to experience my own immersive relation, which involves subjective modes such as imagination. The knowledge of these historical and environmental experts (albeit amateur) somehow threw into doubt my own less tangible knowledge of the place.. As Elizabeth Grosz has noted, scientific knowledge has been more highly valued than embodied, experiential or corporeal ways of knowing, according to the inherently somatophobic models of knowledge which are ingrained in our society.

Clare Waterton in her paper 'Performing the Classification of Nature' in Nature Performed describes an experiment, which brought scientific and corporeal/ aesthetic epistemologies into relationship and revealed the performative aspects of contrasting classificatory practices.¹⁰⁴ The botanist Waterton used the 'National Vegetation Classification' system and a choreographer employed a system of 'choreographic categorization related to movement in the human body' in a dual investigation of the same patch of grassland.¹⁰⁵ She suggests that these two divergent practices both involve improvisation, contingencies, embodiments and sensory disciplining,

¹⁰⁴ Clare Waterton, 'Performing the Classification of Nature' in Szerszynski, Heim & Waterton (eds.), Nature Performed, 2003, pp111-129

¹⁰⁵ Szerszynski et. al., Introduction, Nature Performed, 2003, p8

which oppose abstract systems of classification.¹⁰⁶ Waterton's comparison or paralleling of these very different practices in relation to 'nature' is unusual in ascribing a value to the non-scientific practice of the choreographer that is equivalent to the official botanical system she employed. These different classificatory systems, she implies, produce contrasting perspectives and knowledges about a place—even different places, but both are valid, informative and both are fallible.

As a maker of performance of place, my task is not to know everything and certainly not to present everything I know. I resolved to sew together *some* of the factual information, some of my interpretation and experience of the gathering of information and some of my own imaginings of and inter-relation with the place from the locating improvisations, through my movement and words, in some artful way—a weave. I also determined to leave some gaps, openings for audience to add their own layers of imaginings, interpretation and experience. Unlike the historical and ecological approaches to place, a performance in relation to a place enables subjective, creative and untrustworthy lines of flight. A site-based performance is an offering, which can draw attention to, and correlations between, aspects of the site and its larger context, or focus in on the most minute detail or moment. In many respects the practice of performance is a more open-ended approach to place than other forms of knowledge or practice and thus produces a place with different potentiality—one that I believe is vibrant and activating.

Audiencing

Killeavy was selected as the site for a performance event for the reason that it contained multiple discernible layers and stories representing human interaction with place and because I had developed a physical rapport with it. Over the course of about eight weeks, I had gathered sensory, imaginary, historical and ecological data about the site. The locating phase of the research transitioned into the phase of audiencing, as I planned to devise a live performance for an audience on-site at Killeavy, which would utilise some of this material.

Immersion

I invited a witness to the site with whom I could discuss and demonstrate some of my ideas. I talked to my visitor about some of the information, thoughts and experiences I had been gathering as we walked the undulating path to the site. At the site I danced in a similar exploratory mode as

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

I had been doing alone. I had not instructed her to be anywhere particular, but was slightly surprised that she wandered around, not necessarily observing my dance! Her presence yet un-audience-like meandering while I was doing my improvisation initiated questions and ideas about witness/ viewer/ audience's role and relation to me as 'performer'. What level of attention does my 'performance' demand, or what sort of attention? My (presumed but unformed) plan had been to steer the audience's focus to my movement throughout, with a 'narrative-like' pattern and a 'guide' to signal where they should place themselves, when to follow, stop, etc. But now I was enjoying the drifting relationship of my visitor's exploration around the site, following her own desire and curiosity, while being aware of and sometimes-witness to my movement. I might invite the audience to take greater responsibility for their own experience: let them 'pay attention to what they pay attention to', immerse in and perceive the site and the performance in their own ways. This would allow them to physically negotiate their place with(in) this place also; to be also in a process of locating.

This concept appealed to me for its alignment with another major concern of *Locating: Place and the Moving Body*—my aspiration to include humans as *part of* the environment or site, in an anti-anthropocentric relation. The audience would experience me relating to my surroundings, performing *with* the place, whilst they could also be exploratively relating to their (new) surrounds. Inspired by land artist Carl André's aim to make art that 'invites viewers to apprehend the place itself',¹⁰⁷ I would endeavour to re-situate humans (performer and audience) with/in the world (at least in the microcosm of this performance), in a non-hierarchical relation to the things around them.

The familiar way I had imparted information about the site to my witness as we walked towards the site motivated the way I later introduced the performance and place to the audience. Giving the event the title of 'excursion' would also suggest a more active involvement from the audience, as well as an outing or educational journey/ adventure (the site being accessed only via a walk down and up a hill).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Raine, 1996, *op. cit.*, p135

André's work is discussed in Chapter 1: 'Locating'.

¹⁰⁸ On the publicity material I also warned the audience to wear walking shoes /boots and long pants in case of snakes. Thus, before they even arrived at the performance, I had attempted to prepare the audience to be active participants in the event.

Refraining from instructing the audience where to be or what to perceive would allow audience members/ participants to choose their own 'frame' for my performance by positioning themselves wherever they liked in relation to me. Audience members could choose to view me from behind long grass, through trees, from above by climbing a tree, or they may not watch me at all, but wander off, or find the eagle's flight or the mob of kangaroos far more interesting. I would indeed encourage them to watch the eagle fly overhead instead of my dance, if we were lucky enough to see one. This may not produce the most 'effective' or engaging performance in the familiar way of being taken on the performer's 'journey', but for this process it seemed an appropriate mode. More like an installation-perceiving atmosphere, I hoped that this format might awaken broader sensorial alertness in my viewer-participants by its reconfiguration of the usual performance etiquette.

This notion of performing *with* the site raised other decisions, such as the positioning of my gaze and my relationship to the audience. Given the reality of their presence within the site, it would be inauthentic to ignore my viewers and attempt to perceive the place as if I were there alone. But if I were directly inclusive of their presence, looking at them, performing to them and therefore allowing the audience to influence my dance, the deeply ingrained convention of performance etiquette would force them to pay most of their attention to me and much less to the place. I may also feel that my process of multi-sensory listening to place was overly dominated by my awareness of the presence of these people. I started to ponder the possibilities of a more abstract inclusion or acknowledgement and determined to switch modes of focus at different stages throughout the event. At times I would directly address my audience, sometimes I would clearly indicate that I was sensing the place *before* the audience and at other times I would include the audience in my sphere of perception, but only as elements of the site equal to the wind, the trees, birds and other life in the moment.

Sifting the Data

As I approached the task of weaving the historical and ecological data together with my artistic, theoretical and embodied insights to compose a performance, I reflected upon Jill Orr's place-based work *From the Sea* in Warnambool (2003), which I had performed in. This project involved historical references that were presented in abstracted forms: Orr evolved the factual research into an artistic outcome. I admired that her work retains its integrity as an artwork, never becoming swamped in information. On the contrary, the power of her performative images is in their simplicity. In discussion with Orr, she states that she rarely uses much of the information

that she has gathered, but rather uses the ‘triggers’ of a character or image that she has gleaned from the research.¹⁰⁹ Even in the gathering stage she sets some boundaries as to the information allowed in. With the *From the Sea* project, ‘anything that came from the sea was fair game’. This constraint included the stories of ghostly passengers of the many shipwrecks along that coast, including the seventeenth century Portuguese ‘Mahogany Ship’ wrecked on the rocks at Warrnambool, as well as allusions to the current-day boat people. Any other local stories that did not come ‘from the sea’ were however outside of her criteria. Always labeling her work a ‘poetic response’, Orr does not intend to document and represent a factual history, or even fully ‘tell a story’. The visual images she creates evolve from the actual history (documented or recounted to her by local people) and her own intuitive/ imaginative response to the place. Orr describes her work as an ‘untrustworthy history’ that ‘hovers in the liminal space’. In developing this work, Orr consulted with (and included as performing participants in the work) the Aboriginal people and other local community sources. She is thus aware of the vast mass of stories beyond that which she actually includes, but believes that ‘Knowing what [she] has left out gives weight to what [she has] put in’. Her works, then, are a distillation, and from this distilled moment she trusts that the audience’s reading will ‘open it out again.’¹¹⁰

Installation artist, Ann Hamilton, talks of the process of ‘reading’ a space/ site for her purposes of art-making:

walking its host-space’s streets, breathing its atmosphere, foraging in its economic and political history, literatures, languages... having conversations with herself, the curator of the installation, supply source for materials, people working on the installation...¹¹¹

Let me reiterate Hamilton’s word ‘foraging’. This is not a scientific approach to research! When I approached gathering information about the Morrisons’ place, I followed leads, sought out that which stood out to me from the gamut of historical and ecological information I uncovered, allowed my own subjectivity and imagination to influence/ interpret the material and left gaps in my knowledge almost intentionally. In the later stages of audiencing the Killeavy site I realised I

¹⁰⁹ Jill Orr, interview with Gretel Taylor 27th August 2007, Melbourne

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Joan Simon, Ann Hamilton, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 2002, p15

was negotiating the boundaries between ‘research’ and ‘art-making’, when I started to feel creatively immobilised by having *too much* factual material.¹¹²

Ann Hamilton also discusses how her installations contain ‘self-reflexive analyses and self-contained social systems’ and generate a ‘cyclic, internal economy’.¹¹³ In my presentation of the Killeavy site, I decided to make the aspect of process overtly apparent, to build in to the work a degree of self-reflexivity. In keeping with the non-chronological traversing of temporal zones of Matilda/ Beatrice Morrison’s life in my dances and the evidence of multiple periods of time present in the site itself, the form of the work also included references to various stages of its making. I narrated the story of the place as I had experienced it, including people I had met in the fact-gathering process, moments of sensory insight from my improvisations at the site, my thoughts during the performance-making process, interjected with commentary on the present conditions. Sometimes these interjections about physical occurrences in the moment were directed to individual audience members, other times to the group: “That’s the hoot of a Powerful Owl”, “The grasses are flowering at the moment—do you get hay fever?” I would make comment upon ants—the bitey variety—that make you leap and yelp; mosquitoes; textures; itchy skin from grass, sore calf muscles from climbing the hill... examples of affectedness of body by place.

By this random traversing of time I hoped to bring to audience awareness the many layers of life present at this place—the place’s memories, but through the subjective frame of ‘as discovered by me in 2004’. By this strategy I hoped to also invite validation of each audience’s personal perspective and experience. As Simon writes about Hamilton’s work, ‘Once we cross the threshold of a Hamilton installation we are implicated in it,’¹¹⁴ I sought to make explicit the audience’s role in the performance, as inclusive, self-determining participants.

¹¹² The archival data I presented earlier in this chapter is only a severely edited fraction of the material I collected in this process.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p15



The on-site performance: *Immersion/ Excursion: Killeavy*

Attempting not to grasp any of the information I had gathered too tightly, I returned to the site of Killeavy, now familiar to me on many levels, with a view towards shaping the performance and its presentation. I re-visited and consolidated much of the physical and narrative material that had arisen in my locating dances and the performance structure ‘fell into place.’ Some writings from the dances that formed the score/ choreography that I then performed at the site can be found in Appendix 1.

Shifty Personas

I considered the balance between ‘being myself’ relating to the place via locating dances and representing Bea Morrison’s story via my dance. I decided to allow my imagination/ memory/ research of Beatrice to flicker through, from time to time, in her various guises, but mainly to be myself in the present day, the actual performed moment. I wanted to retain aspects of the locating improvisation, abstracting a definitive historical narrative, staying available to new developments and immediate influences, perhaps even other spirit presences of the land. I remembered that this

performance was in itself research, so I used an experimental format, new to me, to explore my ideas. I did not know if it would ‘work’.

I planned to personally meet the audience and guide them to the site, telling them about my experience of acquainting with this place, the people I met along the way and information they imparted. This was partially inspired by Forced Entertainment’s bus tours of Sheffield, whereby the company members acted as tour-guides whose explanations of sites were entirely in relation to each guide’s own experience of it, effecting a personalising of the city, claiming one’s own map of social/ psychological associations.¹¹⁵

But then switching to my sensory perceptive mode to improvise, perform dances... this was the tricky bit. Shifts between telling it and dancing it—from the verbal, social mode of walking along with a group of people, many of whom I would know, to my subtle, kinaesthetic listening to place was a challenging gap to bridge. I needed to be clear in these transitions: do the different modes blend sometimes and other times have clear (perhaps spatial) structures to delineate boundaries? The switching of performative modes became part of the choreographic structure of the work: I would greet and meet audience in ‘social’ mode, then walk down the hill with audience, verbally sharing my thoughts, stories and information about the site in ‘tour-guide’ mode, then on arrival at the bottom of driveway, depart from group, leaving them to watch me walking away up to the homestead site to assume my ‘spirit smoke dance’ mode. An appointed guide would temporarily take over as leader of the audience to initiate their resuming walking again when I was fifty meters ahead... After the ‘spirit smoke’ dance I would transform several more times, returning to tour-guide mode to impart various snippets of information—ecological, historical and random ‘other’—then return to movement mode for an extended period to conclude.

Reflection

In conversation with audience members after the on-site event, some comments included that they had ‘never experienced anything like it’ and they enjoyed the ‘freedom’. A few audience members did wander off (as I had invited) and had their own ‘adventures’ during the performance—someone climbed a tree a long way back from the area in which I was dancing and had a very distant view, another found some fragments of crockery encrusted in the earth.

¹¹⁵ Tim Etchells, ‘Nights in This City’ in Nick Kaye, Site-Specific Art, 2002, pp13-25



However, I noticed that *most* of the audience ‘stuck together’ in a clump and arranged themselves around me in a formation as close to a conventional audience-performer relationship as possible, whenever they had the opportunity. I later reflected upon this aspect of the work with some performance-making peers, who shared an interest in activating or engaging audiences differently and we discussed (and even workshopped) how I could have more effectively invited *Immersion/Excursion: Killeavy* audiences to perceive the site.¹¹⁶ We decided that offering very clear ‘scores’ for the audience, that provided parameters for their behaviour on site, would have contained the experience within some structure (albeit a different one from that they were used to), which may have enabled people to feel more comfortable and therefore more likely to be open to new experiences. Examples for these ‘scores’ or parameters could be:

At some stage during the performance, observe your own breath.

At some stage during the performance, take a moment to look at the sky.

At some stage during the performance, try not looking directly at the performer.

At some stage during the performance, listen to your own footfalls as you walk.

¹¹⁶ Sophia Cowen, Meredith Elton and Gretel Taylor, ‘Active Audience’ collective, meeting 30/ 08/ 2007

At some stage during the performance, imagine that your back can ‘see’.

At some stage during the performance, bring your footfalls into step with someone else’s.¹¹⁷

I would not have wanted to layer this many instructions over the already too-wordy information that I included in *Immersion/Excursion: Killeavy*, but if I re-made the work with far fewer words and less allusion to narrative/ character, this could be a more effective way to steer audience’s experience towards appreciation of the subjective and the sensory. Setting these types of invitations for audience members might have paved the way for more individual experiences of the site and work. I had, in the actual version of the work, underestimated the effect and power of the collectivity. Being constituted as a group, which we are accustomed to as an audience, carries great force and influences behaviour within the group. Possibly very specific guidelines would be required in order to effectively disrupt the convention. The realisation also came to me clearly in retrospect, that the audience would experience more of their own agency if I, the performer, did less.

Post-site studio showing & evaluation

Following the on-site performances of *Immersion/ Excursion: Killeavy*, I invited a few colleagues to witness a studio improvisation: as a ‘post-site’ event. The idea of reducing the residue of the place to my body’s memories in the supposedly ‘placeless’ realm of the studio had always been a premise that I knew was a fallacy, but it became instead an interesting overlay of two places: the studio and Killeavy. The old studio on the edge of an oval in view of another river: the Maribymong, in Footscray, was indeed not empty nor neutral but had its own atmosphere and even its own set of weather conditions—the warm and volatile northerly winds swept in the open doors, bringing with them a poor bird that got disoriented and flew around the ceiling while I performed my improvisation...

For this improvisation I used a rough soundtrack of samples recorded at the site and created a simple installation in the space with a curved line of found objects—rocks, sticks, fragments of tiles and plates, a child’s hair clip, a rusty thing that may have been from a piece of farm machinery—arranged in order from smallest item closest to audience, to the largest further away, across the floor. The open doors at the entry to the studio as well as at the rear provided a visual ‘window’ to the world beyond this contrived thing called a ‘performance’. Indeed it was an

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

invitation to the outside to come in also, as did the bird. The only structure I set myself in terms of ‘choreography’ was to start and end in that doorway.

Liberated from the attempt to ‘be appropriate’ or ‘fit in’ to a place (in my ‘locating’ quest), the studio allowed for improvisational departures from the physical and thematic material generated at the Killeavy site. The floor enabled movement to work on multi-dimensional planes: rolling on the ground, traversing the various levels and covering more space more quickly and with greater ease than on site (with its prickles, very uneven ground, scratchy twigs, rubble, insects, allergenic grasses and potential snakes). I wore an adapted version of the costume I had worn on-site—a more comfortable version, that was more like myself and less like Mrs Morrison, with bare feet instead of lace-up boots. I found myself sometimes touching upon resonances of Beatrice’s character, but more often exploring remembered particular textures of the site, imagining its breeze affecting my dance, mimicking the flapping of the oak leaves or recalling the rough bark of the fallen tree against my arm, then allowing the source image to fade as I worked merely with the movement shape and pattern derived from it. I found that I was also dancing from my recollections of the Yarra River spot near my house (about two kilometres away from Killeavy), the specific site of Killeavy extending beyond its boundaries in my memory that was resistant to ‘rules’.

An audience member who had witnessed the on-site event also, noted that in the studio improvisation my body retrospectively intensified some aspects of site and diminished others. Another viewer who had not attended the site performance commented that she recognised my relating to various people at different times and wondered if I was *being/ becoming* various people at different times also. She saw that sometimes I was working from externally seeing or hearing something/ somebody that I responded to and other times was working from an image, texture, sound that started within me. She also made connections between the found objects of the arc pathway and my movement, although I was not directly relating to the objects.

The studio improvisation felt like a return to ‘uncluttered art’ for me. The on-site Killeavy piece felt, at the time and even more clearly in retrospect, like it needed further filtering. In spite of my wariness that the on-site work could become cluttered, the overload of thoughts, information and images had swamped my perspective of how to present it as an artwork. I had been aware of this in the later stages of the process, even a few days before the showings deciding to chop up my

notes and offer them to the audience as random slices, as ‘tickets’.¹¹⁸ If I had left the work and gotten distance from it at that stage, then returned to it with fresh eyes, I may have been better able to edit and select material to present and made it less of a lecture and more of an artwork.

My attempt to transition between ‘talking self’/ social and dancing, sensing self was perhaps the most challenging aspect of performing this work. The shift to language immediately orders thoughts, gives experience a name and arranges it in a set of orientations never entirely accurate to vital, multi-directional, close-range life. Language could be construed as being on the verge of becoming striated space. Even as I describe an experience of deeply embodied sensory immersion in words it starts to flatten out, to become ordered, limited, to lean towards striation. One of my challenges in *Locating: Place and the Moving Body* is to bring the embodied into the analytical as much as possible. An embodied analysis or the examination of sensory experience is perhaps something of an oxymoron. In Deleuzian terms, I am attempting to reveal ‘zones that are not completely determined or localizing, where things may go off in unforeseen directions or work in unregulated ways’. However, I desire to bring something from that ‘plane of immanence’ prior to thought, language or mental organisation, *into* the later stage of thought process, analysis and presentation/ performance.¹¹⁹ In a similar vein, the different types of knowledge or practices of place explored in the research of Killeavy—historical, environmental and embodied or experiential knowledge—produce, in effect, different places, and might be considered to sit uneasily together.

In a parallel conundrum to that of embodiment versus language or analysis, there is a tension between immersion in ‘smooth space’ and the creation of a performance work that is possibly unresolvable. There is probably no such thing as a ‘smooth space performance’. The act of representation is itself an act of striation. It is thus perhaps impossible to truly share my locating improvisations with an audience. I did not find the level of engagement or ‘located-ness’ with Killeavy in the performance as I did (only sometimes) in improvisations alone at the site. The audience’s presence at Killeavy, my relating to them in social mode and engaging with cerebral, factual information all served to distance me from the close-range haptic realm. As explained in the Chapter 1: ‘Locating’, the locating practice is my process and the performance is something else, derived and composed from it. In *Immersion/Excursion: Killeavy*, I tried to retain some of the process *within* the performance and met with a frustrating irony. The work also engaged a

¹¹⁸ Examples of these ‘tickets’ are in Appendix 1.

¹¹⁹ Rajchman, John, *The Deleuze Connections*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1991, pp5-16

narrative, albeit a non-linear one, of Bea Morrison's life and alluded to a meta-narrative of white settlers' relationships to land. It was via the smooth space of my locating dances that these narratives had arisen, but by creating these narratives I again ironically departed from the smooth into a striated mode. Although all of the ideas and information included in the performance had occurred through my engagement with this specific site, the performance was possibly charged with too many (potentially conflicting) desires.

3. Blasted Away

Michel de Certeau's describes the city:

It is a flexible and continuous mass, woven tight like a fabric with neither rips nor darned patches, a multitude of quantified heroes who lose names and faces as they become a ciphered river of the streets, a mobile language of computations and rationalities that belong to no-one.¹²⁰

This section of the research explores kinaesthetic experience in the city. Experimenting with 'locating' and 'stealth' practices in Melbourne's Central Business District, the chapter investigates ideas of urban space theorists such as Michel de Certeau and the Situationists in some ground-level pedestrian interventions. The city is considered as a living, moving mass, a community or network, rather than merely geographically defined. This mass that is the city is not only the striated formation of buildings arranged along streets, but also the life within and throughout its architecture. Miwon Kwon extends the possibilities of 'site' to encompass a network of social relations: a community.¹²¹ It is thus not merely the geographical location or the structures and spaces of the city which I am attempting to locate myself within, but the community of the city, comprising business people, shoppers, tourists, students, junkies, homeless people—all the myriad peoples of Melbourne who become the 'site' in my site-specific experiment of stealthing in the city.

As well as this more fluid breadth of urban space, the locating dances and the performance they develop into incorporate a sense of the *depth* of place via acknowledgement of the co-existence of the multiple temporal dimensions of a particular site. Curiosity about the place *before* and beneath the modern city leads to the research of a site significant to both Aboriginal and European histories. That the site referred to by my performance is in fact not visible today because it has been 'blasted away' by the European settlers alludes also to the 'missing history' of colonial violence in the erasure and exploitation of the Indigenous people.

¹²⁰ Michel de Certeau, 1984, op. cit., Introduction p (i)

¹²¹ Kwon, 2002, op. cit., p5

Urban Textures

Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas discuss Lefebvre's and Constant's work in relation to the Situationists in a collection of essays on modern architecture and urbanism. According to Kofman and Lebas, capitalist planning of cities is:

not a practice of 'order' but a strategic and punctual practice of power promoted and executed by the state, with its objective being the extraction of profit from every possible aspect of everyday life. In this practice, planning promotes a virtual disembodiment—fragmenting the body's activities, disorienting the senses, and giving sight empire over the other senses.¹²²

In rebellion against the city's tendency to desensitise and disembody, as Kofman and Lebas have suggested, I tried to remain highly aware of my body's experience whilst negotiating the city streets in Melbourne—my breath inhaling polluted air, heart beating hurriedly, my feet in contact with the concrete ground.

Studies of movement in the city have frequently discussed the act of walking. As introduced in Chapter 1: 'Locating', Michel de Certeau demonstrates how the pedestrian, by her practice of walking, subverts the grid pattern devised for surveillance and control from a vantage point above the city.¹²³ De Certeau describes the way walking, as a popular practice, 'work[s] within and conscript[s] the strategies of imposed systems to resist those same systems'.¹²⁴ The notion of the flâneur or 'idly strolling gentleman', evolved by nineteenth century literary figure Charles Baudelaire and later extended by Walter Benjamin, has been re-construed by dance historian Lena Hammergren in her attempt to 'walk through the past with kinaesthesia'.¹²⁵ Enabling a woman to participate in a public leisure pursuit that was traditionally exclusive to men, Hammergren reconfigures the flâneur to the feminine 'flâneuse'. Hammergren's flâneuse seeks to extend and alter the visual dominance and mental mastering implicit in the flâneur's observations. As Hammergren notes, in Benjamin's writings, 'sight is 'the singular key to unlocking society's secrets'. Hammergren's project, by contrast, entails observing and responding 'in the flesh'.¹²⁶

¹²² Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, 'Recovery and Reappropriation in Lefebvre and Constant', in Jonathon Hughes and Simon Sadler (eds.), Non-Plan: Essays in Freedom Participation and Change in Modern Architecture and Urbanism, Architectural Press, Oxford, 2000, p86

¹²³ Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the City', in The Practice of Everyday Life, 1984

¹²⁴ Mark Minchinton, 1994, op. cit., p14

¹²⁵ Lena Hammergren, 'The re-turn of the flâneuse' in Susan Leigh Foster (ed.), Corporealities, 1996, p53

¹²⁶ Ibid., p54

Her discussion is metaphorical or theoretical only, used as a mode of framing the writer's relationship with the past as a bodily experience. I recognise similarities in Hammergren's hypothetical practice of the reconfigured *flânerie* with my own *actual* walking explorations in the city of Melbourne.

As outlined earlier, my walking practices stemmed from the Situationist spatial intervention of the *dérive*. This practice shares some commonalities with the *flânerie*, in that it is a non-conformist mode of pedestrianism, with emphasis upon the observations and whims of the practitioner, rather than instrumental use of one's body oriented to a destination, or for any purpose other than the experience of the passage itself.¹²⁷ Although de Certeau has demonstrated that the pedestrian inadvertently undoes the prescribed order/ pattern of the city, the *dérive* and the *flânerie* are both more conscious attempts to interrogate the order of the city. Guy Debord's notion of the *dérive* encompasses the potential for activities other than walking, however, and indicates to me a faster pace than the leisurely stroll of the *flâneur*.¹²⁸ With this playful-constructive experimental approach, a passage through the city testing for influence by place is indeed very stimulating; there is endless material to be affected by. My emphasis was perhaps more upon the corporeal-geographic effects than the psychogeographical,¹²⁹ but being so open physically and perceptually to my surrounds was also inevitably emotional. I had determined for these walking explorations to remain available to the urban stimuli, but noticed that the many hard edges of architecture and human activity in the city did make this task challenging, tending to discourage my intentional practice of receptivity. I observed my own resistance to 'taking in' some unpleasant sights, sounds and smells—particularly the signs and actuality of the homeless, the drug addicts, the drunken, the beggars and, most disturbing of all, the occasional homeless, drunken, drugged and begging Aboriginal people who hang around certain corners. I refused to succumb to my inclination towards perceptual numbness—I consciously kept my own 'edges' soft, open to affect. Sometimes distressing, sometimes elating, I attempted not to judge my experiences in this unpredictable environment as positive or negative, but to perceive them as urban textures.

¹²⁷ These walking activities also share the dimension of class—requiring leisure time or 'idleness', which, even in the case of 'poor' experimental artists, occurs only in a period of modernity and privileged society whereby we have time beyond subsistence activities. (This note also applies to my 'locating' dances.)

¹²⁸ Debord, 1958, p1

¹²⁹ I use 'corporeal-geographic' as my adaptation of the Situationist term 'Psychogeography' (described in 1: 'Locating'). By corporeal-geography (and later corporeogeography) I mean to emphasise the study of effects of the external environment upon the physical body, rather than the effects upon the 'psyche' or mind implied by Psychogeography.

I also practiced ‘stealththing’, testing if my deviation from the *dérive*—of rapidly traversing space with maximum awareness and minimum impact, as developed in the semi-bush of Eltham, could be re-located to the city. One cannot literally hide from people in the city, but one can definitely become highly anonymous, blending in to the grey-black moving masses of the weekday metropolis. Many people do, I am sure, pass through every day without being really *seen* by anyone else. My performance training has taught me how to draw and direct audience’s attention, but now I consciously inverted this capacity, attempting to walk and catch public transport around Melbourne *without* being noticed. I tried to look ‘generic’, wearing blue jeans, a black jacket and sunglasses whenever possible. I would drink a coffee in a café, then go walking at a median pace to that of pedestrians around me, attempting to keep my energy low in my body and my gaze withdrawn, with an attitude that I was on my way somewhere. Later, when I had narrowed my field of participant observational study to one area, a predominantly corporate zone, I would wear a suit and medium heels and walk around the streets, occasionally asking ‘other’ business people for the time or directions, surprising myself by getting away with my ‘act’.

Another experiment was an attempt to travel through the city with a sense of ‘smooth space’, allowing a blurring of the highly striated environment. This was a little like swimming through the city, my peripheries merging with the world, the multiplicities of which melted into a singular liquid mass via my perception.

It’s like the Yarra River has entered my being, flowing through me—slow but continuous as I journey through the city, aware on a different level, oozing through the streets, drifting meandering, never-stopping, all-enveloping. I seep into things as I pass, flow over and through, not stuck by hindering snags, melting through crowds, seeping down cracks in the pavement, gaps between buildings—I do not want to be invisible but to blend, merge with the life of the place. I am fluid to it as it is to me—not perceiving landmarks or orienting myself as an individual entity in relation to other entities, instead I experience it all as a mass or wash of sounds, movements, merged shapes and textures.

An old acquaintance saw me at Flinders Street station and was offended by my lack of recognition of him. (I did not notice him until he approached and spoke to me and then it took me an unusually long time to register who he was.) I could not very well explain, that I was not seeing individual things or people today; I was practicing smooth space.

I noticed that it was the visitors, the tourists, who stood out from the crowd of Melburnians who were going about their business along their habituated pedestrian trajectories. It was the tourists' 'job' to 'see the sights' and the unfamiliarity of a city to its visitors seemed to affect their bodies in an uncertain but open orientation. They were paying a different sort of attention—a heightened one—to the world around them in their attempt to locate. My role as an explorer/ locator of place was therefore in some ways similar to the tourist's, although I have lived in and around Melbourne for my entire life. I was observing and perceiving my own city anew, open to its corporeogeographic and psychogeographic effects and imaging its undercurrents.

I did some locating dances in the streets, allowing my senses to be affected by the hectic hyper-stimuli of passing pedestrians, traffic, trams, shops blaring music and sales pitches, smells of coffee, oily food, cigarettes, old urine, sweet sickly soaps... I attempted sometimes to 'dance everything'—every ping, beat and bleep creating a twitch or rumble in some part of my body in an endless, arrhythmic, erratic overlay of patterns too dense to decipher. This was exciting for a while, but exhausting, and it quickly filled me to overflow and had me searching for space, pause, openness between the multi-leveled activities of the city: the sky, a quiet corner, a patch of green.

A difficult yet interesting aspect of this process was the fact that every time I did a locating improvisation in the city—which was intended as my physical research, not an outcome or performance—I was incidentally and unintentionally 'performing'. It was impossible to ever be solely investigating the geographic site; there was always this factor of the effect I was having on those who witnessed my process. But, as I realised, the people in the city *were* the site, the passers-by were a significant and inseparable part of the current place, so I acknowledged them as such and responded to them as I did other elements of the space.

In my locating improvisations in the city, the boundaries between 'performing' and 'everyday being-in-the-place' were hazy—for me and, I think, for my incidental audience. The task of locating is to work towards blending in, finding inter-relation with a place. In the urban context this meant that my movements were often pedestrian actions, similar to those I observed others doing. So an observer might not realise I was conducting a (non-functional) movement process. If I was eating, walking to a destination, waiting for a mode of transport, reading, talking/ texting on the phone, I was consistent with my surroundings and therefore not noticed. As soon as my engagement with these activities built to something beyond functional however—even if I were

just repeating the same pedestrian movement over and over on the spot, I would suddenly be starkly anomalous to my surroundings and possibly seen as a weirdo and/or ‘performing’. If the people of the city *are* the site, I was at these moments in a sense dislocated from the site. Even if I was imitating the actions of other city people, an observer might realise that I was not enacting them for a recognisable purpose, but rather, I was ‘performing’ the actions and this would deem my presence to be out of place, on a social level.

I sometimes brought my partner along to film my practice, for the sake of documentation and also so that I did not feel like such a weirdo. The presence of the camera seemed to legitimise the activity (or non-activity) to my incidental audience. I sensed some acceptance from passers by: there was (they presumed) a recognisable, nameable activity going on—filmmaking.

Locating a Performance Site

The locating dances and *dérives* I had been doing felt limited to me: I was only adding another activity to the present-day world of Melbourne city—perpetuating the busy-ness. In the performance work I would make in Melbourne, I wanted to somehow do more (or less?) than this. I desired to subvert/ invert/ revert/ divert attention away from the mercenary metropolis sitting upon the land, to the country itself and the small speck of its life that we urban inhabitants represented. I sought a site of some significance to both Indigenous and European heritage, which would preferably serve also as a reminder of the previous contour of the land.

In Ancient and Modern, Stephen Muecke poignantly remarks that at the time of British imperialist endeavour in this Great South Land, Aboriginal people were considered ‘not quite human’ and indeed they *were* not, if to be ‘human’ was to ascribe to ‘an intellectual discourse of humanism that was used to putting Man at the center of the world and above Nature’. Muecke argues for a different notion of the human and of modernity, pointing out that Aboriginal societies’ sustainability ‘depends on retaining their places’. ¹³⁰ In alignment with the anti-anthropocentric orientation of my work, I wanted in this next work to ‘remember’ the Melbourne landscape prior to its urbanisation and bring to the audience’s awareness that, in a less-linear sense of temporality, this ancient country is still present beneath and *with* the urban life built over and through it. While I embarked upon my investigations of inner city life, immersing in the frenetic urgency of corporate streets, I thought about Aboriginal time and Indigenous Australians’ perspective that country is enduring, the Dreaming continues. As Muecke observes:

¹³⁰ Muecke, 2004, p14

In Indigenous Australian country, where sustainability has existed for thousands of years, time has none of the urgency of the imperial power seeking to improve quickly its capacity to exploit nature.¹³¹

Muecke suggests that the displacement of Aboriginal peoples caused by imperial expansion intensified the Aboriginal sense of linear time, causing a development of a historical consciousness. He discusses the work of Tony Swain who proposed ‘the origin of linear time as a fall from place’, to illustrate that the act of migration, which breaks lived connection with place, brings about a linking of identity with history (time) rather than place. Through relationships with ‘strange visitors’, Aboriginal peoples have adapted their way of being to accommodate ‘strangeness’ and these changes have involved the incorporation of cumulative time.¹³²

As I wandered through Melbourne in 2005, I tried to imagine the land before the city, before even the town that was the first white settlement. I was reminded of a piece of graffiti I had seen scrawled a few times on public benches and walls: ‘Beneath the city: the beach.’ I used to remember this amidst the imposing skyscrapers and business-like hubbub of urban life, or through the bustling peak hour crowds that I found claustrophobic along Swanston Street or the Burke Street Mall. Indeed the sea *did* have a shoreline and deposit seashells as far upriver as South Yarra between five and eight thousand years ago,¹³³ but more recently, the area of Melbourne was a swamp!¹³⁴

The Archive

Cartography

In the development of *Immersion/Excursion: Killeavy*, I found a site for the performance and then sought information about it. Conversely, for this urban project I was led to a performance site via cartographic and historical data, before I had even visited the geographical place. In the Rare

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, p15

Muecke observes that in regions of Australia where imported versions of time have had less influence, place is the focus of death rituals. Genealogy in these regions (identity through parents and grandparents) is de-emphasised; relationship to the deceased is maintained ‘through their country, connecting country in a web of relatedness overlapping with the structure of kinship.’ (p15)

¹³³ Kristin Otto, *Yarra*, Text Pub., Melbourne, 2005, p6

¹³⁴ Gary Presland, *Aboriginal Melbourne- The Lost Land of the Kulin People*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1994, pp17-24, also <http://www.yarrariver.info/history.htm>, p2

Maps Room of the State Library, I looked at maps of early Melbourne. I did not know what I was looking for (knowing, I realised, very little about my home city's history at all), but I very soon found it:



(excerpt of) Robert Hoddle 1837, 'Town of Melbourne'

(with my handwritten indicators highlighting relevant features)

With the assistance of some local history sources, I deduced the following from the maps:

On Robert Hoddle's 1837 'Town of Melbourne' map a small dotted line crossed the 'Yarra Yarra' River near the base of Queen Street with a tiny handwritten 'falls' scrawled beside it. Hoddle had also marked 'salt water' in the wider area of river to the west (downstream) of the falls and 'fresh water' on the upstream side. There is certainly no waterfall in the city area of the Yarra River today, so I was intrigued. The town itself, which Hoddle planned, was the familiar linear grid pattern which is still the structure of central Melbourne's streets, comprising neat rows of streets and subdivided blocks, bordered by Spencer, Flinders, Spring and Lonsdale Streets, positioned on the northern bank of the curving line of the river. On Hoddle's map there was very little beyond these borders. An anonymous critic of Hoddle's lay-out of the town wrote in 1850

that the surveyor's credo must have been 'The site must be made to suit the plan—not the plan to suit the site.'¹³⁵

Robyn Annear describes early settlers crossing the Yarra Yarra 'at their peril on foot across the rocks of the Falls or the crumbly dam wall that was later built there.'¹³⁶ According to Proeschel's map, by 1853 there was a ferry crossing just on the upstream side of the Falls and Queen's Wharf well-established on the downstream side.¹³⁷ By 1855 Kearney's map marked a railway line crossing the river on a diagonal just upstream of a ferry 'Landing Place' on the north bank.¹³⁸ An 1866 illustration depicted many tall ships moored in the Turning Basin on the saltwater side of the Falls and two bridges on angles around the end of Queen Street. One was the Rail Bridge and the other the new 'Falls Bridge', over the rocky reef. An 1871 illustration/ etching more clearly showed a train crossing the rail bridge and horse and carriage traffic on the Falls Bridge, as well as a small jetty in between the two bridges from the northern bank going about halfway across the river.

A dotted line on a proposal for a Ship Canal and Dock in 1875 indicated a proposed bridge directly across the river from the end of Market Street, above the then-existing bridge crossing diagonally from Queen Street. It also proposed that the 'Line of River Bank' expand significantly further upstream through the swampy marshland (that is now the Botanical Gardens). Byron Moore's 1879 map showed Falls Bridge still on an angle (though not as sharp an angle as Railway Bridge), but The Coode Report of the same year clearly proposed a bridge straight out from Market Street.

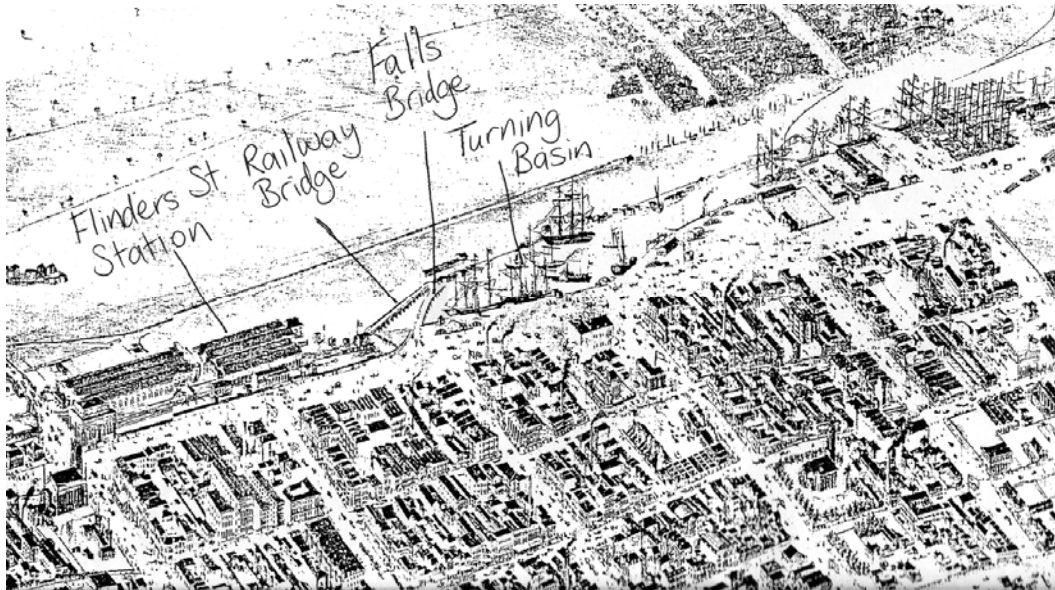
I started to get a sense that Banana Alley landing, which is today situated at the base of Market and William Streets, was the location of the once-existent Falls and was probably the point on the north bank of the Yarra River from where the first Falls Bridge started. The later 1889 Queen's Bridge that is still there today follows the more direct crossing of the Coode proposal.

¹³⁵ Robyn Annear, *Bearbrass: Imagining Early Melbourne*, Reed Books, Melbourne, 1995, p26

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p29

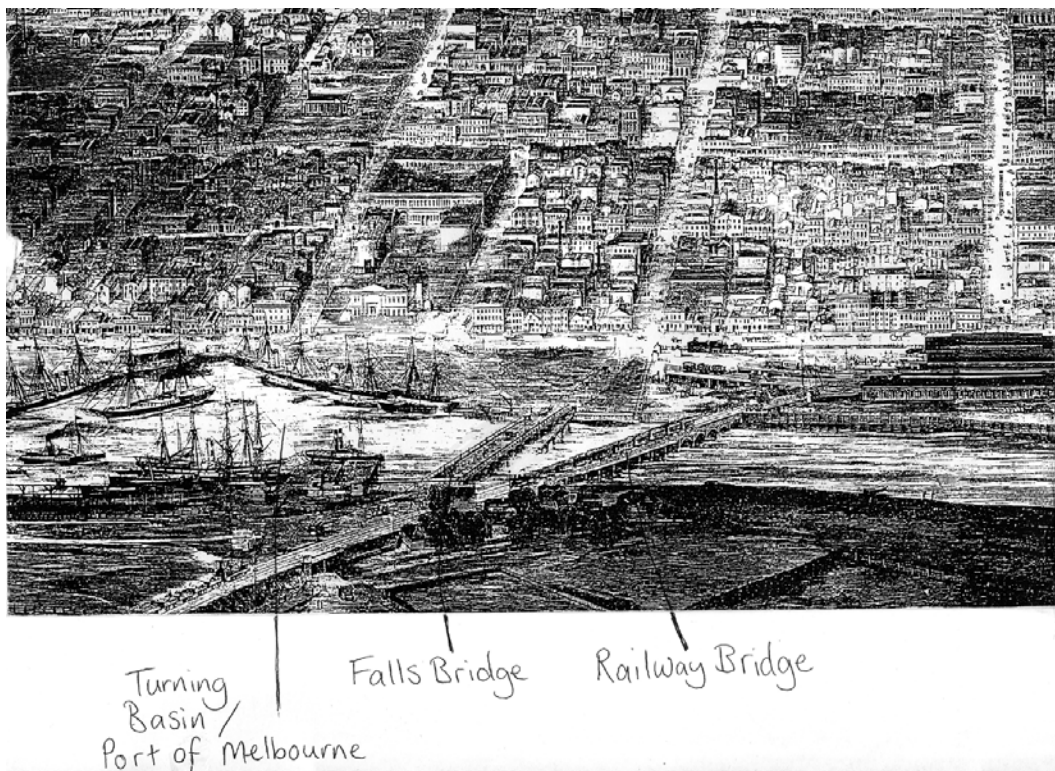
¹³⁷ See Proeschel's map in Appendix 2

¹³⁸ See Kearney's map in Appendix 2



excerpt of an 1866 illustration looking South (again with my defacements)

excerpt of 1871 etching (facing North)



A plaque memorialising the Yarra Falls on a tourist trail along the river¹³⁹ is inaccurately placed according to my study of the maps, as it is located at Enterprize Park (on the west/ saltwater side of the current Queen's Bridge) at east two hundred metres away from the site of the Falls. Meyer Eidelson's account of Aboriginal history in the Melbourne area, The Melbourne Dreaming, also refers to the 'William Street Falls',¹⁴⁰ and Gary Presland in Aboriginal Melbourne states that the 'row of basalt boulders about sixty or seventy centimeters above the level of the water' was located 'just upstream from where William Street will later be', (upstream being the other side of William Street, away from Enterprize Wharf).¹⁴¹ I now have very little doubt that the Yarra Falls existed just upstream of the current Queen's Bridge.¹⁴²

History

As a natural feature of the place that had existed before the Europeans had built the city, the site of the waterfall fit my criteria for a site to make a performance work that reminded my audience of layers of the place other than the current metropolis. Having revealed the lost waterfall's location, I sought further information about its story and significance. To do this I needed to contextualise the site amidst a brief history of the area.

The three main clans of Melbourne region, the Wurundjeri, Bunurong and Watharung people, and neighbouring clans the Taungurong and Kurung peoples, together comprise the Kulin language group. For this confederacy of nations, the rocky ledge of the falls across the Yarra was a highly important site. As well as the fresh water source it ensured, it enabled the tribes from their various directions to cross the river by foot, to meet on the South bank, which they did 'at least twice a year to settle grievances and for other matters.'¹⁴³ Melbourne had been, for thousands of years prior to European arrival, a centre for ceremonies, trading and intertribal gatherings (initiations and religious cycles), as well as dispute settlement.¹⁴⁴ The area of Melbourne consisted of swamps and lagoons teeming with waterbirds—snipes, plovers, brolgas and quails, as well as

¹³⁹ the 'Yarra Trail'

¹⁴⁰ Meyer Eidelson, The Melbourne Dreaming: a guide to the Aboriginal places of Melbourne, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1997, p6

¹⁴¹ Presland, 1994, p22

¹⁴² The precise placement of the Falls is of no great consequence now, I suppose, given that no trace of them remains, but I was struck by the inaccuracy of our history: that a novice research student like myself could expose this sort of discrepancy from easily accessible sources made me dubious about what other errors, omissions, biases and downright lies have been handed down as the popular (white) history of this continent.

¹⁴³ Eidelson, 1997, p6

¹⁴⁴ Burnum Burnum, (ed.) David Stewart, Burnum Burnum's Aboriginal Australia: a traveller's guide, Angus & Robertson, NSW, 1988, pp283-5

bush turkeys, emus, swans and lyrebirds. In the wetter months of winter when the Melbourne area was prone to flooding, people camped in the more sheltered hills of the Dandenong Ranges.¹⁴⁵

Charles Grimes, the Surveyor-General of New South Wales and his party from Sydney were the first white visitors to the Port Phillip District, exploring the Maribyrnong (saltwater) and the Yarra (freshwater) Rivers in search of a site worth settling in 1803. Upon finding ‘excellent water’ beyond the rocky ridge of the Falls, Grimes reported to the London authorities that ‘the most eligible place for a settlement that I have seen is on the Freshwater River’. However, London had already decreed Sorrento as the place to settle. This Sorrento settlement failed after barely six months, partly due to lack of fresh water.¹⁴⁶

Three decades later a flock-holder, John Batman, sailed from Van Diemen’s Land with the specific purpose of securing half a million acres of land in the Port Phillip area. Batman’s ‘treaty’ or ‘deed to Melbourne’ was the infamous exchange on a day in 1835 at an unspecified location, of twenty pairs of blankets, thirty tomahawks, one hundred knives, fifty pairs of scissors, thirty looking-glasses, two hundred handkerchiefs, one hundred pounds of flour and six shirts for about five hundred thousand acres ‘...to John Batman, his Heirs and Assigns for ever’. This ‘contract’ was allegedly ‘signed’ by some ‘native chiefs’ and sealed by their pouring of some soil into Batman’s hands (at his demand).¹⁴⁷ The colonial government in Sydney refused to recognise Batman’s treaty, declaring it illegal and the settlers to be trespassers. The invalidation of the treaty was *not* because the Aboriginal people with whom the treaty had supposedly been made did not understand English (nor was Batman or any in his company able to communicate in Woiwurrung language).¹⁴⁸ Nor was the government against the treaty on the grounds that the Wurundjeri elders who signed it would not have comprehended the concept of land ownership at all, coming from an entirely different, anti-anthropocentric worldview. The reason for the colony’s invalidating Batman’s contract was that the whole continent was now ‘the vacant lands of the Crown.’¹⁴⁹ It was the document decreed by Major General Sir Richard Bourke, which officially invalidated Batman’s treaty that set the precedent underpinning the doctrine of *terra*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p286

¹⁴⁶ Otto, 2005, pp14-15

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp12-13.

Batman had also been involved in the notorious ‘Black Line’ campaign, rounding up and murdering the last Tasmanian Aborigines. He later lost his son (and supposed heir), who slipped and fell from the Yarra Falls whilst fishing. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Melbourne)

¹⁴⁸ The Wurundjeri people belong to the Woiwurrung language group.

¹⁴⁹ Otto, 2005, pp13-14

nullius—that the entire continent had no owners until the Crown arrived. This doctrine was the legal basis for the British occupation of Australia until the High Court overturned it in the Mabo case of 1992.¹⁵⁰

While Batman was back in Tasmania, planning to return to settle Melbourne, later in 1835, John Pascoe Fawkner's party in 'The Enterprize' also landed at the Yarra Falls and fetched drinking water from a few hundred metres upstream.¹⁵¹ Boats could not be navigated further upstream because of the rocky falls, so settlement commenced then and there, primarily on the northern bank. There has been argument as to whether Batman's or Fawkner's parties were the true founders of Melbourne, but it seems definitive that the decision to settle at this site was largely due to the presence of the falls restraining the freshwater from mingling with the saltwater and inhibiting passage further up the river.

The Falls were also significant in the naming of the river. The river was called 'Birrarung' to the Aboriginal people and their words 'yarra yarra' described the running or falling water of the falls. Misinterpreted by Batman's private surveyor John Wedge in 1835, the river was named the Yarra Yarra and later of course simply the Yarra.¹⁵² 'And ever since', writes Kristin Otto, author of Yarra,

it has been the Yarra's fate to be misunderstood: maligned for its muddiness, ill-used as sewer and tip; scooped, sculpted, straightened and stressed, 'cleaned up' to the detriment of its natural inhabitants; built-over, -under and -beside; worked mercilessly and then bridged almost to maritime extinction.¹⁵³

Within twenty years of settlement, the dumping of industrial waste and sewerage along the river deemed the waters of the Yarra Yarra unfit for consumption and a new water source was exploited at Yan Yean. Several variations of bridges were attempted across the Yarra Falls, but in

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p14

On 3 June 1992, the High Court in *Mabo And Others v. Queensland (No. 2)* upheld the claims of five plaintiffs from Murray Island that Australia was occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who had an on-going connection with their traditional lands as determined by their own laws and customs, and whose 'native title' to land survived the Crown's annexation. Thus the court recognised the existence of native title as part of Australian common law. (Accessed at Parliamentary Library website, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/sp/mabo.htm>, viewed June 2008)

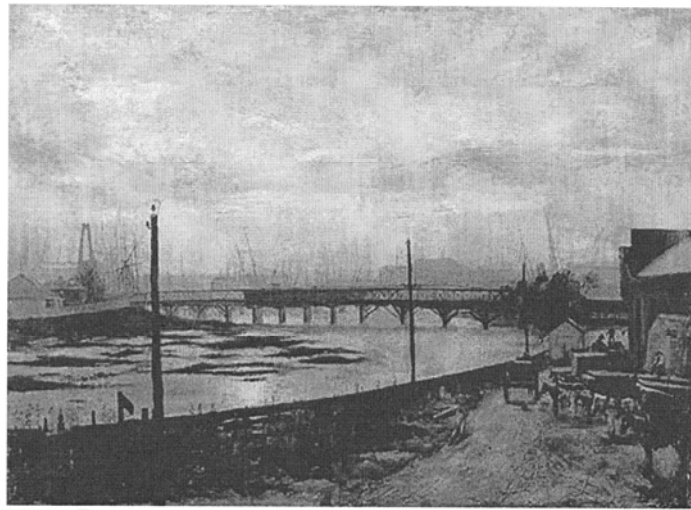
¹⁵¹ Port of Melbourne website, <http://www.portofmelbourne.com/community/maritimeheritage/porthistory.asp> viewed April 2005

¹⁵² Eidelson, 1997, p6

¹⁵³ Otto, 2005, p ii

the early 1880s the rocky ledge was ‘blasted away’ with dynamite to enable passage of ships upstream. The rock of the reef was used to line the Coode Canal and embank the river all the way to the bay.¹⁵⁴

The plaque commemorating the Falls on a tourist trail along the river¹⁵⁵ at Enterprize Park relates the history I have here recounted, concluding with ‘The Falls was a natural barrier to river transport and the reef was blasted away in 1880 as part of river widening and straightening works.’ Beneath this text on the sign is an image from an etching, entitled ‘Blasting away the Reef at the Yarra Falls’, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria. This led me to investigate representations in art of the Yarra Falls area.¹⁵⁶ Famed Heidelberg School artist Frederick McCubbin painted ‘Falls Bridge’ (see below) in 1882 from the old Princes Bridge, looking back downstream. The dark shapes in the river in the center of the work represent some rocks of the Falls¹⁵⁷ (which, according to our sign, had already been blasted away). Another image in the State Library’s collection of the blasting away event was a print of a wood engraving: ‘Improvements on the Yarra- Removing the Falls Reef’ (1883, by an unknown artist). Depicting divers planting dynamite explosives, the final caption shows the blast itself.¹⁵⁸



Frederick McCubbin ‘Falls Bridge’ 1882

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p84

Otto also mentions there was another rocky reef in the river at the end of Spencer Street, which was dynamited away at about the same time as the Falls reef, and rock from both of these was used to line the banks.

¹⁵⁵ The Yarra Trail

¹⁵⁶ Upon inspection, some artworks indicated to me that even the date on the public signage of the exploding of the reef (1880) could be inaccurate.

¹⁵⁷ Accessed via www.artistsfootsteps.com/html/McCubbin_fallsbridge.htm, viewed May 2005

¹⁵⁸ See Appendix 2

Prior to British settlement, the Birrarung itself followed quite a different course to the current day, the removal of the falls comprising only one part of the ‘improvements’ to this major waterway. Other developments included the changing and reducing of its bends, draining the surrounding marshes and swamps and the Coode Island development, which re-structured the river’s S-shaped course through the West Melbourne swamplands. The sharpest loop of the meander was cut off with the construction of the Coode Canal in 1886.¹⁵⁹ There was also an attempt to dam the Turning Basin (previously known as ‘The Pond’) in 1843, resulting in floods. With no drainage system in Melbourne until 1854, the increasingly populated streets were open sewers and sometimes, raging torrents. In 1853 both Swanston and Elizabeth Streets were described as ‘complete rivers’, Elizabeth Street particularly prone to flooding as it was built upon a stream, with a major flood in December 1934 and another flash flood as recently as 1972.¹⁶⁰ The Yarra ‘freshwater’ River was described in the 1880s ‘as offensive to the eye as to the sense of smell...’¹⁶¹ Less than twenty years after settlement, the fresh water upstream of the falls that had been a primary incentive for the position of the colony, was undrinkable, so rapidly had the settlers polluted this prized resource.

After tragic racial conflict in Van Diemen’s Land and the resulting annihilation of Aboriginal population there (the last few transported to Flinders Island and a few taken by Robinson, ‘Protector of Aborigines’, to Portland), there was some intention to ‘do better’ with settling on the mainland.¹⁶² But as early as 1836 clashes were reported: abductions of native women, shootings and excessive retributions by whites for petty crimes by Aborigines.¹⁶³ Some of the ‘most degraded heathens’ were transported to Buntingdale Mission near Geelong, a ‘convenient distance’ from Melbourne.¹⁶⁴ There was reportedly a ‘significant decline’ in Aboriginal population even by 1840, due to diseases, old age, ‘battle’ and the destruction at birth of any mixed race children.¹⁶⁵

By the time (let us just say the early 1880s, for lack of certainty) the Falls were forcibly removed, the Wurundjeri people had been shunted from reserve to reserve, as their land became increasingly valuable to the white settlers, until the Wurundjeri had only Corranderrk

¹⁵⁹ Port of Melbourne website

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Otto, 2005, p68, citing from the Picturesque Atlas of Australasia

¹⁶² Historical Records of Victoria Vol. 2A, ‘The Aborigines of Port Phillip 1835-1839’, Ch 1

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp36-7

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p37, citing Reverend Orton

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p77

Presbyterian Mission (near Healesville) as their home.¹⁶⁶ This approximately two thousand hectare allotment was the last of Wurundjeri country, although it was run by missionaries with British-style order—rations, roll-calls, prayers, work. In the 1880s however, possibly just after the ‘removal’ of the Falls, the government decided to appropriate this last vestige of Wurundjeri land also. The law was changed to define Aborigine to include only ‘... “full-bloods”, “half-castes” over the age of thirty-four, “half-caste” women with “full-blood” husbands, and infants of same’. Alfred Deakin pushed this law through parliament on the same day as his new water rights legislation, which defined ownership of the Yarra River, among other things.¹⁶⁷ Anyone who did not fit the new definition of Aborigine had to leave Corranderrk, which greatly reduced the already diminished numbers, affecting the beginning of the mission’s dissolution and completing the final stage of Wurundjeri dispossession.¹⁶⁸

The Indigenous people of Australia were identified under the Flora and Fauna Act by Australian law until 1967, when they were recognised as citizens. It is therefore not without irony that I would choose to parallel the erasure of the natural feature of the waterfall to the effacing of the Wurundjeri people. The almost-forgotten waterfall, removed entirely, as to render it without trace, was replaced with a bridge named after a British monarch. This is to me an echo of the story of the Wurundjeri people, who remain a barely visible presence in modern Melbourne. The site of the waterfall, by its very absence, carries potent metaphors about the relationship of people to place in Melbourne.

The historical material above functioned not only to inform me about the site of the Falls, but also unsettled my sense of place in this city I had always considered to be my home. I had never been so conscious of the dispossession of the Wurundjeri people as when I approached this site and this prominent awareness influenced my creation of the performance. Instead of using the historical data to create a narrative as I had done at Killeavy, I internalised this knowledge and shifted its orientation to interrogate my own identity as a white woman in relation to the site.

¹⁶⁶ Otto, 2005, pp196-8

¹⁶⁷ Otto, p199

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* (although it was not until 1923 that Corranderrk ended after much struggle, and all Aboriginal groups of Victoria were flocked into one reservation at Lake Tyers on the east coast (far from Wurundjeri country))

Locating—Audiencing

By this stage I had done a lot of the work in the ‘locating’ phase—the gathering of data, before I had even physically explored the site. I intended now to undertake my locating dances, perceptually exploring the current day site with awareness of what had been before, and then to compose a performance there. I was curious as to what I would find in 2005 at the place where, on an 1837 map, there had been a waterfall. My explorations at the site quickly transitioned from the locating phase to devising the work/ audiencing.

I poke around along the landing at Banana Alley on this first visit. I have never really been here or paid this area much attention before and indeed it is a rather forgotten corner of the city, which gives it a touch of tranquility, though also a slightly seedy edge. After the city traffic though, I am glad to have access to the openness of the sky and to be by the river, albeit filthy and unrecognisable as the same beautiful river I live beside in Eltham. The site has a liminal quality, at the border of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, the seams long-since frayed.



Queen's Bridge in 2005



Polystyrene flotsam laps at the concreted riverbank and the seagulls and other coastal birds scavenge for city scraps. The motion of the river towards Port Phillip Bay is slow compared to the multiple traveling lines of flight I am witness to from my vantage point on the jetty: tourist ferries, joggers, trains along the rails behind me, trams and traffic across the bridge and suited walkers following pathways—architecturally prescribed and otherwise. Traveling is taking place in all directions via many modes simultaneously.

On the post of the jetty between Queen's Bridge and the old unused railway bridge,¹⁶⁹ I find an empty bottle of port and chuckle at its brand: 'Tall Ships'. According to my deductions from the maps, this is the very point where the reef of rock had crossed the river up until the 1880s. The reef divided the saltwater from the fresh, and its falling cascades had widened and deepened the river creating the Turning Basin, which then became the port where the tall ships, unable to continue further upstream, would moor.

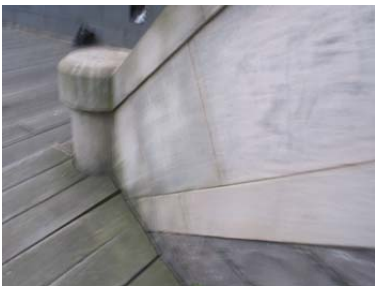
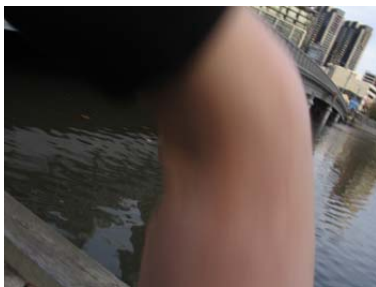
I wander upstream along the north bank and pass a film crew setting up to shoot a scene for 'Ghost Rider' under the old railway bridge. They are adding rubbish to the site, messing it up to appear more derelict than it actually is, and hopefully (for them) more like Texas, where the film is supposedly set! I ponder this temporary over-writing of place.

A few metres on, I walk across the new bridge from Flinders Street Station to South Bank. I stop to explore the strange little constructed island in the middle of the bridge, complete with a public barbecue and geometric shapes creating new spaces—an underside of a staircase providing a free roof...

I return to the Banana Alley jetty where a few ferries and a speedboat are now moored. In the hot afternoon sun, it is quite a pleasant spot, the breeze and the sea gulls carrying a sense of the coast not so far downstream. I lie on the wooden bench as I am sure many a homeless person has done (perhaps even the drinker of the port), resting my head on my bag and staring at the looming cranes and skyscrapers extending from the opposite bank to the blue sky. I find it very easy to fall into a minimal, occasional, pedestrian version of my locating dance, playing with the chains from the mooring posts and traversing the jetty, responding to the array of sounds and

¹⁶⁹ I refer here to Sandridge Rail Bridge, which was restored and reopened in 2006, bringing some attention to the significance of the falls, less than a year after my performance. In early Melbourne, Sandridge was the beach where the big ships anchored that is now the suburb of Port Melbourne, and this bridge carried Australia's first rail line. (Otto, p97)

shapes surrounding me, stopping at each of the benches and slipping back into non-dancer I'm-just-sitting-on-this-bench mode.



I would have gotten more carried away if there had not been a pair of security guards for the film shoot scrutinising me. My restraint resulting from the aspect of visibility was however, totally appropriate for this public site. On my way back to the station on the other side of the railway vaults along Flinders Street, I noted the grubby mounds beside the pornography stall, where rats the size of possums scurried under the well-established palm and pine trees.

I did improvisations at some 'real' cascades further upstream in the Yarra, at the rapids near my house in Eltham, to gather a sense of the physicality of a waterfall. I then returned to the 'phantom falls' at Queen's Bridge and did a locating dance with the quality of body-as-waterfall, responding to the real-time sounds of the city and riverfront. I also took some video footage of the

Eltham cascades, which I edited, making the footage black-and-white and using a negative contrast effect to dissolve the darkness of the water into white, as the image of the waterfall gradually disappeared. This was later projected onto Queen's Bridge during my performance.

Notes from the Studio

Parallel to the on-site research, I continued the practice of improvising in the studio, as I had done during the process of developing *Immersion/Excursion: Killeavy*. In a studio improvisation reflecting upon the Yarra Falls site, I danced alternately with images of water—the river, the falls and the fast, orderly, mechanical impetus of urban architecture and business-like physicality and found them to be strongly contradicting energies. I also found elements of emotion emerging in the movement in response to the history of (what I had presumed to be) 'my' city—anger at the cruelty of my forebears, grief for the Wurundjeri, despondency at my people's ongoing lack of respect for Aboriginal people and the country itself—an overwhelming sense of 'Sorry'.

A-racing; Erasing...

I added the idea of erasure to the movement score, compulsively scrubbing my own body and face... I tried blasting away/ exploding my body parts, manipulating them violently into different positions, attempting to re-shape my own body. Being both erasee and eraser at once...

Feign ignorance, innocence. Swiftly running, rolling away from the site of the violence to the other side of the studio, I return to blank-faced walking. If we are part of our environment, erasing or destroying it is like destroying/ blasting away/ erasing ourselves.

Are there other ways of locating our(displaced)selves than erasing the place?

Palimpsest, Over-writing—I manically scrub, rub off the maps of the past contour of the land, drawing lines all over it, dividing and claiming, bringing in heaps of stuff from elsewhere—a clock, the queen, a cross, coke bottles and building skyscrapers with them [or bridges?]

But the maps return faintly, then blazingly clear: still here!

I imagine building a bridge with skulls, bones.

I play with vastly different paces: fast walking, doggedly determined not to feel anything> fast agitated locating improvisation> stop still> frenzied scrubbing, draw chalk lines, bring in stuff, build, maps return, very slow dance of memory of place that was, some digging movements.

Where does the flow, the gush of the waterfall go, if it is 'removed'? What about that creek that often flooded down Elizabeth Street?

Forced underground.

The Missing History

On Enterprize Wharf, a few metres from Queen's Bridge (and at a site that would have been more appropriate for the memorial of the Yarra Falls) are two other plaques side by side on the wall. One commemorates the landing of The Enterprize at this site and names each of Melbourne's first white settlers, making brief mention of the falls and the fresh water in an aside. The other plaque reads:

Yarra Turning Basin (also known as The Pool or Swinging Basin)

Once favoured by the Kulin nation for interclan gatherings, this area, after European settlement, became a focus for new gatherings. As Melbourne's main original port, it was the heart of the city's commercial and human activity and was often the first place where people set foot in a new land.

The history as represented here reads as if the transition from the Kulin nation's gatherings to the 'new gatherings' was a smooth, neat continuum. The plaque is an example of what Henry Reynolds has dubbed a 'whitewashed' view of history.¹⁷⁰ It evades responsibility for the violence and injustice of invasion and *then* seeks to include 'us' in 'their' world, still enforcing European belonging here. Posing as objective and purporting to cover all aspects of what is a complex and contested story, accounts such as the above plaque and other 'historical information' signage along the Yarra, with their omission of conflict, reek of denial, perpetuating delusion. Anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner's broadcasted lecture in 1968, in which he coined the term, 'the Great Australian Silence', brought to public attention 'the culture of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale' surrounding Aboriginal dispossession and instigated intellectual debate that began to break this silence.¹⁷¹ Even since the Mabo precedent however, with some acknowledgement finally being given to the fact that this country was not *terra nullius* when the Europeans landed, there remains the blaring exclusion in much public history of the violence that ensued. Four decades on from Stanner's lecture, official histories such as this signage are still smoothing over the brutality of colonialism, perpetuating the silence.

¹⁷⁰ Henry Reynolds, in Robert Manne (ed.), Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Black Inc. Agenda, Melbourne, 2003

¹⁷¹ William Edward Hanley Stanner, 'The 1968 Boyer Lecture: After the Dreaming', ABC, 1974 also SG Foster, 'Contra Windschuttle', Quadrant Magazine, Vol. XLVII, No. 3, March 2003, accessed at http://quadrant.org.au/php/article_view.php?article_id=252 viewed 23/06/08

The process of researching the Falls and creating *Blasted Away* stirred up a lot of emotion for me. I found the subject matter of Aboriginal erasure by the White Man profoundly disturbing and by invoking the waterfall I seemed to touch upon some deeply repressed sorrow. I did this intentionally—I chose the site of the Falls for its significance to the Kulin Nation and its symbolism (to me) of White Man's pre-supposition that he can remove anything that stands in his way, with force.

Parallel to researching this specific geographic site, I had been considering the larger discursive 'site' of white Australian habitation of and the continued attempt to belong upon this land. Historian Peter Read has written extensively on the subject of non-Indigenous 'belonging' in Australia. Through researching a cross-section of non-Indigenous Australians' attachments to and feelings for specific places, he finds that non-Aboriginal Australians have strong connections to the land via memories, practices and associations (including encounters with spirits).¹⁷² Thus Read arrives at a picture of Australian relationship to place as one of shared co-habitation by non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples. Implicit in his accounts of these findings is a desire to claim an *equivalent* degree of belonging by non-Indigenous Australians to that of Aboriginal people.¹⁷³ Although Read absolutely admits and remembers Aboriginal presence and includes this presence in the sense of Australian place that he purports, he is of the belief that colonial guilt is 'unproductive'.¹⁷⁴ As Emily Potter pointedly notes, there is a tendency throughout Read's works to 'smooth out the consequences of colonisation, as well as the frictions of cultural difference, into a narrative of easeful co-habitation'.¹⁷⁵ I also cannot help feeling that Read's call for legitimisation of settler Australian presence is premature.

¹⁷² Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing* (1996), *Belonging* (2000) and *Haunted Earth* (2003)

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Emily Potter, 'The Anxiety of Place: Peter Read, *Haunted Earth*' in *Colloquy* Text Theory Critique 9, Monash University, 2005, p128

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p125



In conclusion to her review of Read's Haunted Earth, Potter suggests that Read's comparison of Indigenous and non-Indigenous presence in place is laden with the anxiety that non-Indigenous Australians 'live thinly on the land' and is itself unproductive. She suggests that,

It is perhaps by looking beyond depth as the site of affective meaning and towards the tremors and vibrations of the earth's surface that fear can be replaced by hope. For here, in the irreducible tactile, aural and visual encounters that occur between self and other, the future opens up.¹⁷⁶

In some ways, this doctoral project is (inadvertently) taking up Potter's proposition. My locating dances directly engage this zone of sensory encounter with the earth's surfaces; via locating I attend to the irreducible immediacy of a place and from this encounter of touching, listening and moving, a relationship begins to develop between my self-body and the place.

The on-site performance: *Blasted Away*¹⁷⁷

I strut down Market Street in suit and heels at 5pm with the other office-workers rushing to get home, cross at traffic lights and walk towards the audience gathered under the rail overpass beside the river. Passing through the audience without acknowledgement, I then walk in a large square several times in close proximity to audience. I walk on and the appointed guide brings the audience after me.

The performance in June 2005 at the location of the Yarra Falls took place over three sites, in three 'acts' or 'scenes'. This first scene of the performance, described above, drew upon my early phase of research—walking, stealthing and being part of the anonymous flowing mass of contemporary urban life. The audience experienced the thunderous roar of trains above their heads (an ominous sonic prelude?) and may or may not have recognised that the 'performance' had begun until I diverted from the flow of pedestrians to walk in a repetitive square, evidently not a functional route. The square shape I traversed however and the brisk even timing of my heels stepping on the pavement, suggested a mechanical, undeviating adherence to order.

Across the road and down the bluestone steps, the audience arrived at the second performance site, Queen's Wharf, which had been the saltwater side of the Falls and the actual site of first

¹⁷⁶ Potter, 2005, p128

¹⁷⁷ See Appendix 2 for the performance score and photographic documentation by Christian Alexander.

British landing in Melbourne. Aspects of my historical research, including my thoughts about time and the omissions of popular history, were represented by my actions on the wharf. The boundaries between past and present crossed and blurred, as I wore the garb of a contemporary urban worker to dredge up symbols of the past—‘gifts’ of the White Man to this ‘new’ continent, who had landed at this very point to claim it as his own (or the monarchy’s).¹⁷⁸ These ‘gifts’/ props were constructed from the modern materials of plastic and polystyrene. My grid-like drawing with chalk on the wharf referenced the colonial claiming, containing and dividing of the land. My violent, manipulating dance on the bench near the plaque that tells a ‘nice, clean’ story of British arrival in Melbourne alluded to the silenced, deleted violence of erasure and palimpsest. On one of the performance dates it was raining, which forced audiences into a heightened awareness of the weather and muddied my stockings as I rolled on the wharf. Some snide and some curious comments by passers-by brought the random elements of the present moment into focus also. That the performance took place in the public domain, accessible to be witnessed by incidental pedestrians and intentional audience members alike, felt appropriate also, because the work had an educational, historical element.

The final section of the performance at Banana Alley landing (which would have been the freshwater side of the Falls) was less literal and certainly less cerebral than my actions earlier in the performance. Once the audience was assembled on a ramp overlooking the jetty, with their backs to Queens Bridge/ the Yarra Falls, I began moving from the jetty up the boat ramp towards them. I performed a repeated wave-like movement, working with the image of a waterfall in my body, starting from a ghostly echo and gradually increasing in intensity. There was something of emotional catharsis in my waterfall movement that went to the brink of control, although the image I was conjuring was not in the moment that of a particular emotion, but instead that of water. By bringing—embodying—the past place (the waterfall) into the present place I hoped to also illuminate the pervasive nature of time. This was amplified by the sound and projection of the ghostly waterfall onto the bridge. In the final moment as I wavered from the mooring post, I was in-place yet out-of-place. The moment hinted at a sense of unease or restlessness of being-here that has not, cannot, be resolved, and perhaps imbued my body, like the boats this rope usually retained, with a temporary or just-landed liminality.

¹⁷⁸ It was King William IV who was reigning England and the colonies at the time of British settlement in Melbourne, succeeded by Queen Victoria after whom Queen’s Bridge would have been named, but I used the familiar image (to us) of Queen Elizabeth II to refer generally to the British monarchy and ‘Crown land’.

Reflection

My decision to appoint a guide to direct the audience for this work, in contrast to the intent to invite individual agency in *Immersion/ Excursion: Killeavy*, was dictated by the nature of the urban sites. Although they were located within less than fifty metres from each other, the audience had to wait for and cross at three traffic light intersections to travel between the three sites. For the sake of safety and legality,¹⁷⁹ as well as the timing of the piece, it was appropriate to engage a more orderly structure for the audience for this work. Once they arrived at each site however, audience members were free to position themselves wherever they chose in the space, so a certain amount of personal agency was still invited of them. I did not choose to take up the ideas to encourage audience members' sensory experience of the site that arose in my evaluation of *Immersion/ Excursion: Killeavy*. I felt that they would be inundated by the multiplicity of sensorial stimuli already at these sites and would be affected by this regardless of whether or not I explicitly drew their attention to it. Indeed I received comments afterwards that audience members had been drawn to notice other movements under way, *as well as* my dance/ actions, indicating that the performance had activated their observation of the environment.

I also chose not to attempt to perform a 'raw' locating dance in this work. The highly structured site seemed to demand a similarly defined performance; I felt that the subtleties of the sensory locating practice would be lost in the vast and busy spaces. Instead I sculpted findings from the locating dances, as well as material gathered via other research methods, into the choreography and structure of the performance. For instance, a task I had explored in my locating dances was to reach various parts of my body in the directions of the many peaks, outlines and shapes of the visible environment—elbow to top of skyscraper, hip to trajectory of river, head to shape of bridge, etc., allowing these gestures to initiate the dance of the rest of my body. I then developed movement material that emerged from this improvisation into some angular, erratic choreography for the scene at Queen's Wharf.

A performance in a site without walls has open borders, and the site in this case included the city's people. A man asked me directions as I crossed the road, not realising that an audience on the pavement was observing me. I gave him directions although I was 'performing'. At another

¹⁷⁹ According to the criteria for my acquisition of a permit from the City of Melbourne council, I had to demonstrate appropriate 'crowd management'. These constraints are often an aspect of works in the public domain.

moment, after I scaled the side of the bridge from the wharf, I followed the pathways and gestures of pedestrians on the bridge, visible to the (conscious) audience on the wharf below. These breaches of conventional performance boundaries were made possible by the public environment. These improvised encounters with people also retained elements of the locating dance, which in the urban site entailed relating on a social level. From discussion with audience members, I gathered that the vast majority of them had previously been ignorant, as I had been, that the significant feature of the waterfall had even existed. In that sense, apparently, the work was educational and thought-provoking.

‘By privileging progress (that is, time), the functionalist organization causes the condition of its own possibility—space itself—to be forgotten.’ Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 1984, p95



Permissions were sought and approved to carry out this performance from City of Melbourne council, Parks Victoria, Waterways Victoria, the ferry business at Banana Alley and Auntie Joy Murphy on behalf of the Wurundjeri people.

4: Empty?

Here and there, almost, at once

The striking of the town clock brings me to this world, here, in the greenness of a park in the French Pyrenees, on the edge of the small town of Itxassou. But I have been—just a moment ago—in the South Australian desert, experiencing the dry heat, my parched skin, the confronting orange beauty and the delirium induced by the incessantly beating sun. I was scooping up hot sand to bury my body like a beetle’s frenzied ritual, but here I am grasping at cool, green grass, the vast expanse of my desert is the flat meadow of this park. I let my body acknowledge the sound of the clock striking: three o’clock. I am both here and there, almost, at once. My interior imagination of being in another place is transposed on to this place and I work from the specifics of both. I witness my partner for this exercise fitting her imagined place—a peopled place, it looks to me like a café scene or party, or maybe her at-home life in her Amsterdam warehouse—into a corner of the park that has one and a half ruined stone walls. She has positioned herself in relation to the walls so that I get the sense of an interior space. While I know she is working from an imagined place that is not this place, she is also inhabiting this site, which is not a ‘neutral space’.

This chapter considers Body Weather as a major methodology of this research.¹⁸⁰ It examines insights and queries arising from two workshops I attended in Europe in 2005 led by Body Weather dancer Frank van de Ven: Body/Landscape Workshop (Pyrenees, France) and Bohemiae Rosa (Sumava Forest, Czech Republic). Through analysis of some of the activities in these workshops, this chapter discusses ideas arising from van de Ven’s workshops that have become instrumental in application to *Locating: Place and the Moving Body*. The overlaying of a memory of one place on to the actual live relating to another place (as in the above description) was a particularly significant experience. The chapter also uncovers and problematises some aspects of the Japanese-originated Body Weather training that are no longer appropriate for this project,

¹⁸⁰ As noted in Chapter 1, my main exposure to Body Weather has been through workshops with Min Tanaka, founder of the term, training/ practice and philosophy. Other practitioners, such as Tess de Quincey, may have deviated from some of the practices I interrogate in this chapter, but I am less familiar with, so cannot comment upon, their work. The Body Weather I hereby refer to is Min Tanaka’s, with observations also of van de Ven’s.

most notably the notion implicit in Butoh and Body Weather of ‘emptiness’. This discussion of the presumably ‘empty’ body is contextualised amidst feminist theory of the body and compares Butoh and Body Weather’s perspective with that of other forms of dance.

The activity in the Pyrenees park described above was part of a memorable ten days as a participant in Frank van de Ven’s ‘Body/Landscape Workshop’. Van de Ven worked from 1983 to 1991 in Japan with Min Tanaka, founder of ‘Body Weather’, as a member of Tanaka’s company Maijuku.¹⁸¹ Since 1993 van de Ven and his partner Katerina Bakatsaki (also ex-Maijuku) have led ‘Body Weather Amsterdam’, a platform for training and performance, as well as facilitating workshops and performing internationally. Van de Ven has returned to Pays Basque in the Pyrenees several times, his workshop running alongside the local Itxassou festival.

Some of the tasks van de Ven offered were similar or almost identical to exercises I had done before, in Japan with Min Tanaka. Some of this training I have continued to explore in Australia; indeed much of it informs my current practice, although I have allowed it to bend, shift and loosen over time, according to the places I have explored and my own changing interests. It was interesting to rigorously revise these Body Weather tasks (in yet another terrain than Japan and Australia: France) and reflect upon how I have deviated from them and why. Though he has adhered to some fundamental aspects of the work, van de Ven, back in his native Europe, has also developed and departed from Tanaka’s teachings, with innovative and diligent commitment to continual change and evolution of the form, particularly in application to what he identifies as ‘the landscape’. I queried van de Ven about his use of the word ‘landscape’, which to me is a term that is defined purely in visual terms. To me the term ‘landscape’ is misleading and fails to account for the multi-sensorial experientialism that his work entails.¹⁸² His response was that he needs ‘to call it something’ and wanted to differentiate ‘natural’ environments from urban spaces. Working mainly in European environments, as he does, has surely influenced changes in van de Ven’s practice and its outcomes since his work in Japan.

¹⁸¹ This was Tanaka’s company from 1979 to 1998; his current company is called Tokasan.

¹⁸² I discuss my avoidance of ‘landscape’ in Chapter 1: ‘Locating’. Frank’s use of the term may not indicate a major distinction between his work and my own—we both employ methods that encompass multiple senses, often favouring senses *other* than the visual. I still believe his use of ‘landscape’ with its connotations of a visual, striated tradition, does not accurately describe his work. (His first language is Dutch, so it may be a translation discrepancy.)

My experience of the Australian Desert ‘in’ the French Pyrenees, as recounted above, was a process of overlaying an imagined place onto the ‘real’, present-time place. Frank van de Ven introduced the process in the stages I describe as follows:

We had spent the first few days of the workshop opening our senses to the present, (actual) places we inhabited—the outdoor environments local to our accommodation in the Basque countryside, via various perceptual tasks drawn from Body Weather. These tasks included moving very slowly—at “one millimetre per second”. This activity attunes one’s focus to a careful interior listening in order to control the body’s movement at this very slow pace over the course of ten or fifteen minutes (at a time). We also observed the movement of specific features of our surroundings then tried to ‘take on’ or ‘acquire’ qualities of these movements in our bodies, in a similar way to the becoming or acquiring of ‘images’ for the body, as taught by Min Tanaka.¹⁸³ The workshop group also explored the environment via senses other than the visual by being blindfolded and bringing attention to haptic sensation.

Frank then instructed each of us to draw on paper *another* landscape, different from the one we currently inhabited—one that we either remembered or imagined, that we felt was powerful for us. We then explored that (drawn) place in the studio, with a literal (Deleuze would say, ‘striated’)¹⁸⁴ sense of mapping: the mountain is in that corner, the river flows through the center of the space, west of the mountain, etc. This was difficult or different for me, because my chosen remembered place was the desert near Lyndhurst, in South Australia. This desert place, at least in my memory, was more like a ‘smooth’ space, in that it had very few delineating features by which to orientate oneself—I recalled instead the colour of the land, its over-exposed brightness, the horizon line, the prickly surface of the cracked earth and the sand just beneath the surface crust. We created the memory/ image as vividly as possible and developed the physical experience of this imagined terrain via inhabiting it, walking and moving around the studio, but attempting to experience the sensations of the imagined/ remembered place, using similar processes to those we would employ to perceive an ‘actual’ place. I imagined the soles of my feet sensitive upon the hot and spiky desert earth, the hot drying wind against my skin, the sense of flat sameness stretching out into the distance in all directions. Once I had established a physical memory of these aspects of the place, I found that I recalled more of its details: that millipede,

¹⁸³ as described in Chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, *op. cit.*, pp492-500

See also Chapter 2: ‘Immersion’ for my exploration of these ideas.

those emu tracks, the bits of corroded farm machinery encrusted in the orange earth, the whirly-whirly... Like when one hears a song and a series of memories comes flooding back, embodying my memory of the South Australian desert was literally (almost) transporting me to that time and place.

Later in the Itxassou park near the old church, Frank invited us to re-find this collection of embodied memories of the place from our drawings. As in the studio, for me this process at first involved mentally orientating myself in the imagined/ remembered place, re-collecting the sensations of the place's effect upon my body, until I had gathered enough of the atmosphere of the desert such that I no longer needed to search for it. I was there (almost), inhabiting my memory of the place. This time however, I was experiencing that desert place alongside or on top of the visceral stimuli that existed already in the park—the cool grass, twittering of birds in the European trees, fluttery flight of butterflies, the striking of the town clock.

Another day we transposed the remembered place from the drawing onto an area of forest, more consciously attempting to cross between this actual site and the imagined/ drawn one, allowing the two to finally merge. This task seeks a synthesis of two aspects of Body Weather—its sensory hyper-awareness of the present reality combined with its study of how imagination affects the body, in the practice of imagery. I was conscious of the texture of the sticks and leaves of the forest floor *at the same time* as the coarse hot sand of the desert, the experience of being amongst dense vegetation *simultaneous to* the breadth of open space of my imagined desert. I was not simply oscillating between dancing this place or that place, but felt the two places present simultaneously in my sensory-kinaesthetic reality.

This was a wild, tingly, on-the-edge feeling that I only glimpsed for fleeting moments before my mind stepped in to put things into striated order, dividing my imagination of the desert into one moment and the perceiving of the forest into another. I later thought of this on-the-edge feeling as the 'kinaesthetic uncanny'. A certain type of focus was required to find this complex state, not a 'striated' focus, but more like the 'smooth space' state of observation.¹⁸⁵ Something about this process/ experience that I could not yet fully articulate was very exciting to me. I suspected it could be symbolically or conceptually potent, as well as kinaesthetically complex. I decided then to try to dance-recall the Pyrenees at a later date, from (and *with*) the Australian desert, in a sort

¹⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp492-500

of inverse experiment. I will expand upon these ideas and further discuss this experience of the kinaesthetic uncanny in Chapter 6: 'Still Landing'.

Bodies and Weather

Melbourne-based academic/ theatre practitioner Peter Snow, also attending van de Ven's workshop, presented a lecture to the Pyrenees workshop group introducing some of his observations about Body Weather. A primary proposition of Snow's talk (and his PhD thesis on the subject of Body Weather) was that weather and bodies are characterised by change. He postulated that weather could be interpreted as climate: incorporating temperature, atmospheric pressure, sudden changes, seasonal ebbs and flows, etc. It could also entail our 'milieu, the prevailing surroundings, the changing and evolving situations in which we find ourselves.' He then extended this conceptualisation of weather to 'the possibility of social contexts being a kind of weather. When atmosphere is also taken into account [he was] led to include the tone or texture of the prevalent cultural concerns',¹⁸⁶ adding in his lecture: 'patterns of our culture'.¹⁸⁷ Given that he had interpreted weather to include surroundings, Snow suggested that this could also extend to 'environment', which would implicate all elements of the physical world. It could refer also to 'ecosystem'—all the processes and interactions of the natural world, or could expand still further to be seen as 'the cosmic world order in all its magnitude and microscopic concentration'. These expansive interpretations, according to Snow, render weather as 'all pervading and omnipresent' and tending 'toward the sacred, that which is beyond and yet which concerns us all.'¹⁸⁸

Weather, Peter Snow proposes, includes the 'processes of bodies themselves, the multiple environments that bodies and parts of bodies are made up of, from the "cellular to the organic", from the anatomical to the biochemical to the physiological.'¹⁸⁹ At Itxassou Snow talked about weather as a system of unpredictable yet cyclic forces that course through the world and through bodies. Relating these notions of weather to the active training of Body Weather, Snow quotes a characteristically ambiguous statement by Min Tanaka: 'Body Weather diagram does not have solid lines but dotted lines with continuous lines in and out.'¹⁹⁰ Tanaka may be suggesting a fluidity between interiority and exteriority—that the borders of the body are not fixed, but

¹⁸⁶ Peter Snow, Imaging the In-between: training becomes performance in Body Weather practice in Australia, University of Sydney, 2002, p109

¹⁸⁷ Snow, lecture, Itxassou 2005

¹⁸⁸ Snow, 2002, p109-110

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p110

¹⁹⁰ Min Tanaka 1981, p14, in Snow, 2002, p110

permeable or mutable. He could also be referring to the changeability of Body Weather training itself—that its tasks and exercises, like the weather, are not rigid but ever adapting, evolving.

I see some similarities between Snow's approach to weather and my own thoughts about site or place. His expanded use of the term 'weather' to include prevalent cultural concerns or patterns parallels my expansion of the term 'site'. In my development of performance works I often use the specific geographical site as a microcosm of, or metaphor for, a political/ discursive site: for example, my personal physical interaction with a particular wilderness place in Australia can be framed/ read to represent non-Indigenous relationship to country. My locating dances seek to move with the place, that is itself (like the weather) always and already in continual motion and change. The propositions put forward by Peter Snow of weather in constant flux are pertinent also to place, superseding the common perception of place or environment as fixed and static and 'nature' as possessing a sort of a-historic stability. In its rendering of similarity between bodies, weather and place, Snow's propositions about weather align with anti-anthropocentric philosophies—that the human is not the center of the world, nor is she separate from the world, but that her body, the physical features of place and the cosmos are all somehow inter-related and of similar substance. The practice of Body Weather explores the interstices between these elements and attempts to dissolve our rigidly construed bodily boundaries.

The Emptiness Divide

Min Tanaka once famously stated: 'I do not dance in the place; but I am the place.'¹⁹¹ At other times he has been known to speak of 'dancing the place, not dancing *in* the place.' High in the spectacular beauty of the mountains, with vultures circling overhead, Frank van de Ven invited the workshop group to attempt 'dancing the place, instead of merely dancing in it'.

Following a discussion about the possible meanings of *dancing the-* instead of *dancing in the-*, Frank gave us the following task: Choose a place and lie down. From lying down, spend two or three minutes 'emptying', then two or three minutes 'perceiving', then 'dance the place!'¹⁹²

Min Tanaka's 'dancing the place' corporeally addresses the fallacy of separation between self and world that Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'flesh' also seeks to bring to our awareness. However, this

¹⁹¹ Min Tanaka, in Jean Viala and Nourit Masson-Sekine, Butoh: Shades of Darkness, Shufutomo, 1988, p158

¹⁹² This task/ practice was borrowed from or inspired by Min Tanaka's improvisations in hundreds of locations in Japan over a three month period, entitled 'Eighteen hundred twenty four hours'.

semiotic distinction ('dancing the place' as opposed to 'dancing in the place'), though ambiguously open to interpretation, also bears a trace of the assumed neutrality or 'emptiness' that Butoh and Body Weather practitioners hold as a psycho-physical possibility: if I am dancing 'in the place', I am my self there, but if I am 'dancing the place', my self is subsumed into the place. Frank's addition of 'merely dancing in the place' presumes other modes of relating to place that may involve a subjective individual inhabitation to be inferior to his (and Tanaka's) apparently 'objective', pre-ego mode. I question this axiom.

Van de Ven offered a hint to 'start small', just letting one part of the body be affected by one aspect of the place. If it is not 'working', move to another place. Repeat this process three times in different locations around the area. We were on the side of a mountain among large trees with sprawling roots, a dry creek bed and many ferns and bracken.

Frank then added a 'joke' that if we were good, well-trained Body Weather dancers, we could 'empty ourselves', perceive all aspects of the place and 'dance the place', and each of us would therefore do exactly the same dance in each place! Frank revealed his own cynicism and interrogation of his own process by this joking statement. Although he is a proponent of the enabling possibilities of 'emptiness', he is evidently aware of its fictitious avoidance of the specificities of individual selves-bodies.

Not surprisingly, our attempts to undertake the task after this introduction were plagued with inertia. We were daunted by the task of moving with authenticity and dubious of the arrogance or anthropocentrism of even trying to perceive and dance the place, when we had only spent a few minutes there. Disbelief or doubt in our ability to drop our personalities, backgrounds, gender, age, beliefs, knowledge, etc, within two or three minutes, in order to become transparent, open vessels for perceiving and expressing this place with some sort of neutral objectivity, was so disabling as to render most of us immobile.

In Susan Blakely Klein's article 'Ankoko Buto', Butoh critic Nario Goda explains that Butoh founder Tatsumi Hijikata's company Hangi Daito-Kan was based on the idea that 'Buto begins with the abandonment of self.'¹⁹³ In those formative years of Butoh (the 1960s and 1970s), a major objective was to break through the Western ideal of individualism 'to a collective (or communal) unconscious in order to find a more authentic autonomy of self.' Klein attributes this

¹⁹³ Nario Goda, cited in Susan Blakely Klein, Ankoko Buto: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness, Cornell University East Asia Papers, Ithaca, New York, 1988, p34

to the influence of Japanese ethnographer Kunio Yanagita's thoughts on the transcendence of the modern.¹⁹⁴ Dispensing of the individual subject has been performed in various ways by Butoh dancers—shaved heads, nakedness and white-painted bodies, as well as the use of a strategy of 'continual metamorphosis to confront the audience with the disappearance of the individual subject by refusing to let any dancer remain a single identifiable character.'¹⁹⁵ Yukio Mishima's controversial writing with his engagement with taboos in post-war Japan was also influential on Hijikata.¹⁹⁶ There was a desire to break through the mask of conservative respectability to reveal the 'submerged depths of violence and sexuality'¹⁹⁷ within Japanese society. The legacy of German expressionist dance of the 1930s, with its ideal of the dancer as a 'pure' or 'purified' 'instrument', was a western influence upon Butoh.¹⁹⁸ Mark Holborn elucidates that the liberation of dancers' 'belief in themselves as a unified subject' was also striven for via methods such as ritualised violence, to 'explore the possibility of our inner fragmentation.'¹⁹⁹ Kazuo Ohno, Butoh's other founder, working towards a similar essentialist ideal, but far less aggressively, encouraged a 'gentle amelioration of the cultural body', a 'clearing of the body's habits, to stimulate new freedoms.'²⁰⁰ It should be noted that other forms of dance training also reduce the dancer's individuality, including ballet, which disciplines its 'corps de ballet' to clone-like homogeneity. While Butoh attempts to transcend the individual to purportedly arrive at a raw, liberated state however, ballet strives towards conformity and cultivated control.

Although Min Tanaka claims he does not teach Butoh dance, he did intensively train with and later collaborate with Tatsumi Hijikata, founder of Ankoko Butoh. Tanaka's Body Weather was developed from this very strong influence, though it involves a more ordered, disciplined training

¹⁹⁴ Susan Blakely Klein, 1988, p32

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p32

The metamorphosis Klein refers to is similar to what I elsewhere (Chapters 1 and 2) have called the use of imagery: a transformational becoming or embodiment of forms from the imagination. Hijikata invented around a thousand of these 'images', which he taught to his lead female dancer Ashikawa, and many of which he also taught to Min Tanaka, who in turn passed some of them on to his students.

¹⁹⁶ *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colours), Hijikata's first 'Butoh' work in 1959 was based on a novel by Mishima. (Vicki Sanders, 'Dancing and the Dark Soul of Japan: An Aesthetic Analysis of Butoh', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 5, 2, 1988, p149)

¹⁹⁷ Klein, 1988, p25

¹⁹⁸ Takeya Eguchi had been a student of Mary Wigman, and was instrumental in introducing die Neue Tanz to Japan, Kazuo Ohno among his pupils. (Mark Holborn, 'Tatsumi Hijikata and the Origins of Butoh', in *Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul*, Sadev/ Aperture, New York, 1987, p10)

¹⁹⁹ Klein, 1988, p33

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

that Hijikata, at least in his original intentions, was rebelling against.²⁰¹ While Hijikata spoke of ‘the body that has been robbed’ and favoured the violent ‘overthrow’ or ‘gestalt transplant’ of ‘the missing body’,²⁰² Tanaka breaks down the concept of a unified body and rational self via the rigorous (often militaristic) training of Body Weather, still aiming for a state prior to individual conditioning. ‘Let go of Society!’ Min would yell at us (workshop participants), in the open-air studio in the forest in Hakushu, Japan, as we tried to strip our selves bare of everything we had ever learned, in order to be open to becoming a chicken, or whatever else he demanded.²⁰³ In a calmer moment, reflecting upon his own performances nude in natural environments, Min Tanaka commented ‘It is nature’s body and our own nature that Butoh seeks to restore.’²⁰⁴

The ideal of emptiness in Butoh and Body Weather includes an implied aspiration to a non-gender-specific body—a kind of blueprint or universal body that exists beneath or before sexual, ethnic, racial, class difference, etc.²⁰⁵ Classical ballet and many traditional folk/ cultural dance forms have prescribed roles for men and women, which support and perpetuate patriarchal gender positions. By contrast, dance theorist Sally Gardner points out, there are several (western) postmodern dance and bodywork practices that aspire to a ‘neutrality’. One would be hard-pressed to find more divergent forms sprung from more different cultural contexts, however, these western practices, similarly to Butoh in its goal of emptiness, employ processes of deconstruction as strategies to facilitate ‘a body available for re-inscription in “other” ways.’²⁰⁶ As Gardner suggests, part of this on-going process of de-inscribing in order to re-inscribe, involves gender. While in postmodern dance practices this is implemented via a discourse of ‘neutral’ anatomical and spatial information, Min Tanaka’s training demands the de-programming of socialised behaviour, which includes gendered behaviour or mannerisms—unconsciously or consciously acquired.

²⁰¹ ‘It’s a blood relation with my butoh... This can’t be accomplished by training. My body trains itself as a matter of course...my butoh is absolutely not a butoh dancer of experience, much less a mastery of butoh.’ (Tatsumi Hijikata, ‘Wind Daruma’, in *Theatre Drama Review* Vol. 44, Issue 1, 2000, pp75-6)

²⁰² Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dancing into Darkness: Butoh, Zen and Japan*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, USA, 2003, pp63-64

²⁰³ Min Tanaka, Hakushu Workshop 1999

This formidable military-like style was typical of Min’s teaching in 1999, but in the 2000 workshop he was quieter, and by 2002 almost compassionate!

²⁰⁴ Fraleigh, 2003, p64

²⁰⁵ Gender is often constructed in deliberate and stylised ways in Butoh performance—gender and sexuality are popular subject matter and often subverted from conventional/ socially acceptable models, but I would argue that this is an overlay or re-inscription after the self has been deconstructed, ameliorated by the training.

²⁰⁶ Sally Gardner, ‘Spirit of Gravity and Maidens’ Feet’, *Writings on Dance* 15, Melbourne, 1996, p51

In the years since I trained at Min Tanaka's Body Weather Farm, my exposure to (western) poststructuralist theory has led me to question this underlying and pervasive aim of the work. Feminists argue that the assumption of 'neutrality' or universality in bodywork practices is implicitly (if unconsciously) attempting to revert to a blueprint of a male body. Gardner for example, asks 'Is there really an imagined masculine body behind the supposedly 'deconstructed' one?'²⁰⁷ I similarly inquire: is the 'emptied' body of Body Weather and Butoh actually aspiring to a prototype of a male body? In direct contrast to this view, Sondra Horton Fraleigh argues that 'Butoh, like the original modern dance, takes its essence from our feminine (yin) body, the dark symbol of myth, our earth body or the Great Goddess archetype.'²⁰⁸ The emptiness of Butoh, Fraleigh implies, derives from the transparent, nonjudgmental, yielding qualities attributed to the universal feminine.²⁰⁹ This may have been so for Kazuo Ohno's Butoh, in which he has often danced female or effeminate characters (for example 'My Mother' and 'La Argentina'), but I do not believe this 'feminine body' carries over as the 'essence' of Min Tanaka's Body Weather. In any case the 'feminine body' Fraleigh introduces is not the same as the 'female body' and could, in the case of Ohno, even suggest that Butoh's empty body aspires, almost unconsciously, to a prototype of a (feminine) *male* body. Furthermore, the body cannot be devoid of sex, any more than it can be devoid of skin colour, and aspiring to neutrality or emptiness is fictitious, at best, and problematic.

Elizabeth Grosz in her seminal work Volatile Bodies interrogates 'three lines of investigation in contemporary thought' that she suggests 'may be regarded as the heirs of Cartesianism'²¹⁰—a legacy which Grosz proposes feminist theory 'needs to move beyond in order to challenge its own investments in the history of philosophy.'²¹¹ Firstly, the body is 'regarded as an object for the natural sciences', secondly it is construed 'as an instrument, a tool, or a machine at the disposal of consciousness' and thirdly the body is considered 'a signifying medium, a vehicle of expression.'²¹² The second line of investigation, that construes the body as an instrument/ tool requiring 'careful discipline and training'²¹³ is relevant to Body Weather, which certainly disciplines and trains the body as an instrument that requires tuning (in contrast to some

²⁰⁷ Gardner, 1996, p50

²⁰⁸ Fraleigh, 2003, p52

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1994, p8

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., pp8-9

²¹³ Ibid., p9

contemporary [western] approaches to movement, that work with the everyday, pedestrian body.) It is the third line of investigation however, that encompasses common thinking about the dancer's body and which is most pertinent to this discussion. Grosz explicates the body-as-expressive-vehicle assumption:

It is through the body that the subject can express his or her interiority, and it is through the body that he or she can receive, code and translate the inputs of the "external" world. Underlying this view too is a belief in the fundamental passivity and transparency of the body. Insofar as it can be seen as a medium, carrier or bearer of information that comes from elsewhere (either "deep" in the subject's incorporeal interior or from the "exterior" world), the specificity and concreteness of the body must be neutralized, tamed, made to serve other purposes. If the subject is to gain knowledge about the external world, have any chance of making itself understood by others, or be effective in the world on such a model, the body must be seen as an unresistant pliability which minimally distorts information, or at least distorts it in a systematic and comprehensible fashion, so that its effects can be taken into account and information can be correctly retrieved. Its corporeality must be reduced to a predictable, knowable transparency; its constitutive role in forming thoughts, feelings, emotions and psychic representations must be ignored, as must its role as a threshold between the social and the natural.²¹⁴

These assumptions, Grosz argues, participate in the 'social devaluing of the body that goes hand in hand with the oppression of women.'²¹⁵ The above passage could almost have been written to describe a primary aspect of the philosophy of the body inherent in Body Weather. Indeed, Min Tanaka used to call his farm in Hakushu the Body Weather Laboratory, which strongly suggests a scientific experiment whereby the body's receptors are believed to elicit retrievable and consistent information from the surrounding world.²¹⁶

Feminist theory also insists that the body is always, already, irrevocably marked by sex, gender, ethnicity, race, age, class, etc., as well as inscribed constantly by the changing conditions of our individual worlds. I know that to temporarily suspend these identifying markers via a Butoh/Body Weather process of 'emptying', can enable my focus to be totally upon an image

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp9-10

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p10

²¹⁶ such as Frank's joke also, whereby we would all do the same dance in any given place.

(designated by the director/ choreographer—often by myself), which can be a transformative experience and effective performance tool. However, I also consider those very aspects I am attempting to transcend to be valuable tools for performance. If I am affected by ‘Society’, as Min Tanaka infers by his demand that we let go of it, then I do not want to deny the fact. I believe it important to acknowledge these effects, in accord with my resistant politics, influenced by feminist theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz and Adrienne Rich, who proclaimed the need ‘not to transcend this body, but to reclaim it...’²¹⁷ If my body is inscribed, before I am even born, by such determining markings as skin colour, ethnicity, class, religion, etc., I do not wish to attempt to ignore these influences upon my relationship to place. This is not to presume that my self is entirely knowable or controllable, but to propose that choices can be made in performance to (re)present certain aspects of identity and that (attempted) abandonment of the self in relation to place is not necessary for a dance with place. It is for these reasons that I have chosen to shift my emphasis away from the ‘empty body’—and therefore away from the notion of ‘dancing the place’—and towards my self-body dancing *in relation* to, or in awareness of, place.

Back upon the French mountain slope, we workshop members were frustrated at our (failed) attempt to ‘empty, perceive and dance the place’, but the frustration sparked what became a lively and ongoing debate about the place of identity in this sort of work. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this workshop was the opportunity to engage in dialogue (verbal and otherwise) with international practitioners, many of whom had evolved both theoretical and physical knowledge of the relationship between body and place. I presented a paper at the workshop, which further fuelled the fire begun on the mountain slope. I discussed my philosophy of moving in anti-anthropocentric relation to a place and my proposition of acquainting with a place as opposed to dominating it, *or* submitting to/ being consumed by it. Moving in relation to a place, the dance is a reciprocal conversation between my body and the place. Luce Irigaray in The Way of Love proposes that we have not yet developed a culture of relation to the other (referring to interpersonal relationships) and suggests ‘ways to approach the other, to prepare a space of proximity’, via gestures, ‘including gestures in language’ towards the cultivation of nearness.²¹⁸ My proposal of relation to place aligns more closely with Irigaray’s ‘interweaving of exchanges’ and dialogue of ‘listening-to’²¹⁹ than with Butoh/ Body Weather’s empty-then-absorb approach of *dancing the place*.

²¹⁷ Adrienne Rich, 2003, *op. cit.*, p30 (as cited in Chapter 1: ‘Locating’)

²¹⁸ Luce Irigaray, The Way of Love, Continuum, New York and London, 2002, p ix of Preface

²¹⁹ Ibid., p x

In my paper I described performances I have made that utilised Body Weather-inspired techniques, such as imagery practice. I do not claim to be a Butoh dancer, nor a Body Weather practitioner, but reference these as influences on a synthesised form of my own. However I used these techniques in order to explore themes of identity (self) in relation to place. I referred specifically to my experience of being a European-descended woman in Australia and briefly outlined the dilemma of finding a sense of location in the wake of the history of invasion. I fluctuated in these examples between ‘dancing *in* the place’, ‘*dancing* the place’ and most often ‘dancing *in relation to* the place’, attempting to make these shifts clear and conscious. Sometimes, in the performances I described—*Killeavy* and *Blasted Away*, I was deliberately *in* the place, choosing to represent aspects of my identity—ethnicity, gender, class, etc—in an actively stylised, performative relation to the place. But then I would soften the focus on myself as I allowed the quality of the wind or the waterfall into my body (and these actions were more like Min Tanaka’s notion of ‘dancing the place’). When I perform my locating process, I am dancing in relation to the place—sensing, perceiving, responding. By the intermingling of these various approaches, I feel I demonstrate my agency in the moments of ‘dancing the place’ (temporarily *choosing* to surrender my self-body to the place), deflecting the problematic passivity of which Grosz warns.

I appreciate the notion of the permeable borders of the body, which van de Ven and Snow both promote. Permeability suggests seepage between my body and the world that surrounds it, a softening of the margins—acknowledging the body’s role as a ‘threshold between the social and the natural’, as Grosz advocates. The notion of permeability does not demand that *I* am in any way erased or made transparent or indeed, that the place is in any way erased by my presence. The fluid inter-relation between body and its surrounds that this permeability encourages is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of ‘flesh’: that similarity of substance that softens our perceived separateness from the ‘things’ of the world,²²⁰ as discussed in Chapter 2. It is a fully embodied, deeply perceiving self that results from the awareness of ‘flesh’, not an identity that is transcended. I do not believe the body must first be ‘emptied’ to find this sort of fluid immersion whilst dancing in or with a place—and it is questionable whether this ‘emptiness’ is truly achievable in any case. The notion of a permeable body in a process of acquainting with place is perhaps a functional middle ground between the human that presumes she is the dominant (and

²²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Intertwining: The Chiasm’, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, *op. cit.*

separate) feature in a place and the empty body that believes she has overthrown or abandoned the self in order to be inscribed ‘purely’ by the place.

I suggested to the workshop members, that as well as listening to the place and inviting its effects upon our bodies, we each ask: ‘What do *I* bring to this place?’

One memorable comment from the argument that ensued was: ‘I was struggling to clean out my whole house [in order to let the place in], but maybe I just need to rearrange the furniture!’ Frank responded to my interrogation of emptiness with: ‘The more you empty of Gretel, the more Gretel will be able to be seen’. I found this interesting, and from experience, I do understand that he meant my spontaneity, intuition and immediacy of expression can more freely emerge when the topsoil of social/ constructed ‘personality’ is pared away, but I am attempting to do something different at the moment and believe this spontaneity can be accessed without emptying anything. In my experience—from my practice and from observing others in my workshops or classes, the superficial, social layers of self / personality tend to drop away *anyway*, when one is engaged in embodied listening to a place. By becoming grounded, open to perceiving one’s surrounds and attentive to one’s body’s perceptual processes, one is present in the moment, operating from what may be considered intuition or the instinctual aspect of self, without the need for any violent (or otherwise) abandonment of identity.

Back in Australia, I later realised, with a gasp, why this issue has been so persistent for me. In a country where ‘emptiness’ has been the false premise underscoring genocide and dispossession—according to the myth of *terra nullius*: an ‘empty land’, the application of Butoh’s empty body as a starting point for perceiving place is problematic, to say the least. While to Frank van de Ven, ‘emptying’ his body is partially a gesture of humility to place, concerned as he is to ‘transcend the colonial gaze’ (he asks: are you trying to chase, catch, capture aspects of the landscape, or are you open to inviting it to come to you?), as a white Australian dancer of Australian places, this starting point is wholly inappropriate. I must bring my omni-present, permeable self-body to meet with the Australian site, aware of the lineage my pale skin bears. To start from a state of fictitious emptiness would be to re-enact the colonial erasure my work is seeking to re-dress. By bringing this history into my own and my audience’s conscious awareness and approaching place with an openness and desire to connect *anyway*, I hope that the rift starts to heal.

The Sense of Language

Six weeks after the social space of the Pyrenees workshop, with its vigorous, animated discussion of ideas, I traveled to the Czech Republic for 'Bohemiae Rosa' project. This project offered a week-long exploration of a new environment as well as a very different quality of group experience. Co-facilitated by Frank van de Ven and his long-time collaborator, artist Miloš Šejn, a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, the emphasis of Bohemiae Rosa was as much upon walking and corporeal drawing in relation to 'the landscape'²²¹ as on dance. We met at a monastery in Bechyne, in South Bohemia, having agreed via email not to speak for the first four days of the week.

Nobody seemed able to sleep in the dormitory-style rows of sleeping bags on the medieval parquet floor of the monastery hall that first night. It was as if our unspoken thoughts and questions had become loud and restless—booming, nervous energy disallowed its release of gushing chatter and our listening capacity expanded to perceive every rustle of each other's sleeping bags, every wheezy breath magnified. I was sure I could hear other people hearing. Eventually I got up, helped myself to a chamomile tea in the kitchen and danced to the strange melancholy soundscape in the stone cloisters and misty courtyard. I felt the seriousness of this place, its solidity, but did not find it intimidating. After weeks of traveling across several countries, I felt some affinity with the monks who had until recently inhabited this place, for seeking a quiet, soul space and this environment did seem conducive to these sorts of depths or heights. I was aware however that I was not peaceful enough to be still here and therefore I kept dancing. I was accepting of my own restlessness, knowing I was in the early stages of locating, which was characterised by my loud, out-of-place curiosity and tension. This dance was my necessary means of arriving. By bypassing the social with lack of speech, I had gone directly into the process of body-place relating. When I finally returned to my sleeping-bag in the row of bodies, I managed to get a few hours of sleep.

Over the next few days we were mute, as we traveled further, deeper south into the Sumava forest, the largest area of 'wilderness' left relatively intact in Europe. Living in close proximity, doing physical workshop activities, manipulating each other's bodies, walking for hours in a group, sharing household tasks and negotiating each other without language, we became comfortably quiet together, knowing each other's company without knowing each other's names.

²²¹ Again, I am using the term landscape because van de Ven and Šejn used it, but again, place was explored in multi-sensorial contexts beyond the distanced view connoted by 'landscape'.

My head was overflowing with words to begin with, but by the third day had settled down to a less language-orientated state.

From this rare opportunity to live in relation to others without verbal communication, other modes of relatedness were able to be experienced. Perhaps language diffuses the immediacy of experience and ‘social’ relating detracts or distracts from other ways of being with people. A diverse international group, we would almost certainly have gravitated towards our own language groups had we had the option of conversing, but without words we became familiar with everyone in the workshop, equally. A forest of bodies—we had forfeited our cultural differences with our speech to stand as a group of different yet related ‘trees’: mutually familiar, comfortably separate, together alone. Some commonality of purpose linked these bodies gathered in this place from far corners of the globe. We focused upon verticality.

When the speech ban was lifted, for a couple of days we were presented (alternately by Šejn and van de Ven) with exercises that enquired about the relationship of language to perception. We experimented with words sprung from a state of intense corporeal listening to place, which provoked questions for me about how language is linked to experience, whether they can come into direct correlation, or if there is always a gap.



Standing in a forest, a workshop member stood behind me as, once again, following van de Ven’s instruction, I attempted to ‘empty’ my body and particularly my head or face. Preparing by trying not to prepare, breathing into my feet, I sensed my cool, damp surrounds. My partner poked my back intermittently with her finger and I let a word emerge from my mouth with as little editing or mental interference as possible. ‘Tap’: I struggled to find any word; it was more like a sound or echo from the bodily experience of being tapped.

Language is such a dominant feature of the urban landscape—everything is titled, inscribed—that my eyes are drawn to the symbols of written words, almost against my will and beyond my consciousness (in the case of advertising). Not understanding the language, in countries I had recently visited, my awareness of the words that were everywhere was intensified, perceived as merely part of the audio-visual décor. But language as expression was a long way from my physical being-in the place when I was immersed deeply in multi-sensory listening. In the Sumava forest, struggling to find language, I recalled the difficulty I had experienced in the shift between the spoken and danced sections of my Killeavy performance.

By a stream, Miloš Šejn instructed us to visually explore one square metre of space for ten minutes and after this close-up examination to close our eyes for a minute, then to expel a word, spoken aloud. My metre included rocks, moss, grass, raindrops, bird droppings, a glimpse of the flowing stream and myself, sitting amongst it all. The word that eventually surfaced, with less of a mental battle than my last attempt, was ‘dense’. Later, several aspects of the work Miloš had introduced to us were brought together as we sat atop a rocky peak overlooking the forest, near a little Hansel-and-Gretel-style chapel that had an apparently magic, healing spring beside it. My eyes were closed while my partner drew on my head with her finger what she saw/felt in front of her and I drew with charcoal on a piece of paper on my chest, what I was receiving through the sensation on my head. I found the word ‘bronze’ emerging from my lips and opened my eyes to find that the orangey colours of sunset were filling the horizon. In my exhaustion at the end of the day, perhaps the division between physical sensation, expression (drawing) and language had narrowed, drawing them into closer, more intuitive relation.

Emotional vistas: feeling, sensation and imagination

Boughs of spruce trees droop with their heavy load of wet bushy foliage in contrast to the light bright leaves of beech trees that seemed to hover unsupported in the air. The forest is dense and breathing. Perpetual mist and drizzle. Many experiences of damp—the cool air, multiple species of moss, slippery rotting undergrowth, endless varieties of fungi, dribbly noses...

We walk by a ‘primeval’ area of forest—how old is that, I wonder?

I remember a dream I had the previous night of seeing a wolf. So vivid was the dream, it felt like I was recalling a memory of being here in the forest, yesterday maybe, in waking life. Vladimir the ranger confirmed that there had been wolves in this forest (and bears), but the last of them had been hunted in the 1950s.

We came to a lake that for a moment I could not comprehend –I thought I was looking at air that was shimmering a little, like a mirage in the desert. Following Miloš Šejn's instructions, I walked with care around the fragile bank surrounding the perfectly reflective surface, holding a piece of paper to my chest, drawing a 'circle' with charcoal as I circumnavigated the circular lake, trying also to express my 'feelings of walking' in the line. Body, place, emotion, perception and expression are brought together.

The experiences of feeling, sensing and imagining were happening almost in a single movement for me over these days: a sweeping mini-sequence that flowed in a single breath and was hard to distinguish by its individual steps. Waking and dreaming life were also becoming a continuum—sleeping in the place seemed to allow the place to seep into one's consciousness on other levels. It was a relief, as well as surprising to me, that Miloš Šejn included feeling in the experience of seeing the 'landscape' (and simultaneously drawing it in a line on one's own or someone else's body). Miloš' inclusion of the feeling realm was a precedent for any Body Weather workshop I have ever been to (Min Tanaka's, Tess de Quincey's, Frank van de Ven's) and indeed this Bohemiae Rosa project was not officially a 'Body Weather workshop', although van de Ven's offerings were predominantly Body Weather-based.





Earlier, back at the house, under Miloš' instruction, we had drawn three vertical lines on a piece of paper, with eyes closed, whilst standing with the paper against the wall: the first at 'your natural speed', the second 'slowly' and the third taking fifteen minutes. We were instructed to be aware of our own verticality whilst drawing the lines. Be aware also of how you feel as you draw/stand. I gathered that Šejn included sensation *and* emotion in 'feel'. The line makes visible, creates a trace, a mark, of our physical and emotional experience of standing, of verticality.

Often emotions are omitted from perceptual and performance practices, for their messiness I guess, their personal, blurry, unquantifiable distortion of the facts. I acknowledge that there is a world of complexity to explore in sensation alone. But if everyone experiences the world through their own different bodies, experience is subjective, so perhaps the inclusion of these subjective, personal grey areas is more accurate, more factual even, than the exclusively quantifiable. Why leave out the emotionality that we inevitably imbue in our perceptions? What a reprieve from Body Weather's usual repression of emotion that Miloš Šejn recognised that a place—any place—would elicit some emotional response. If Body Weather is built on a philosophy of abandonment, violent transcendence or emptying of the self, the individual, it follows that personal expression of emotion is to be avoided. Here it is pertinent to recall Elizabeth Grosz's pointed observations regarding the legacy of Cartesianism. She notes that the line of investigation that assumes the body to be a signifying medium presumes also the 'fundamental passivity and

transparency of the body', whereby the specificity of the body must be neutralised and predicates that its 'role in forming thoughts, feelings, emotions...must be ignored'.²²² American dance educator Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen describes sensing as being a 'haven' from the emotions—a way to get insights but 'not such an emotional space'. She concludes 'A lot of sensing work is an escape from the emotions, it actually represses emotional integration if it's not balanced.'²²³

Unlike Bainbridge Cohen's work that 'balances' the impartiality of sensing with its improvisational exploration of the 'fluid' system of the body—that corresponds to the emotions, in Body Weather exercises we attempt to reside exclusively in the detailed realm of the senses, experiencing sensation without affectation or partiality. This is another aspect of Body Weather practice that I have deviated from in my body-place research and performance. I find an odd deficiency in Body Weather work in that it assumes and develops a permeable, absorbent body, open to its surrounds, yet does not acknowledge or allow the mutable emotional area of the self to be seen, heard or witnessed. In my experience of Min Tanaka's methods with his company and workshop groups, Body Weather dancers must deal with the emotionality that (I believe) inevitably arises from the work, outside of practice time. Japanese Butoh and Body Weather performances (as opposed to their training) often include an emotional element, in expressing an epic theme of humanity, but this is usually a representation via the use of imagery, not the dancer's own personal emotion, and even this emotionality is often seen only in its restraint or absence.

My recent work, on the contrary, in its attempt to re-dress the repression of white Australian colonial guilt and grief, does not subscribe to the Japanese mode of restraint, because I believe emotional honesty is a key to non-Indigenous Australians' locating of ourselves in our places. In *Blasted Away*, for example, I allowed my personal experience of what I perceive to be the repressed emotions of colonial debt to be present in my embodiment of the forgotten waterfall. The locating dance is a dance of fullness, inclusiveness, not of emptiness.

Walking

A primary focus of Bohemiae Rosa was walking. Different to my practice of 'stealth' in Eltham and my *dérive*-like urban explorations in Melbourne, these walks spanned whole days and substantial distances across country. Often we were not given instruction as to what we might

²²² Grosz, 1994, pp9-10

²²³ Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, 1993, *op. cit.*, p65

observe from this fundamental practice. The silence of the first few days meant that we were very present to the activity however, and I started to think about the archetypal human-ness of walking, as means of transport, of pilgrimage, of passage across land. We walked loosely as a group, at a reasonable pace, but without haste, mostly in silence and rarely through places where we would encounter people outside of our group. I observed my own body in this simple form of movement: its idiosyncrasies, its weaknesses, energy levels and rhythms, in relation to the ground, the sky, the variation of gradient and terrain and the other bodies walking. The regularity of the movement and the slowness of its pace (relative to other forms of transport) also gave opportunity to observe the environments we were passing through (although sometimes I longed to stop and observe the place from a stationary stance, or up close in contact with it, entering into a dance in relation to it, which for me is more deeply immersed).

One evening later in the workshop (when the speech ban had been lifted), our walking took on the qualities of a journey or adventure. In dimming light we headed down the side of a mountain on an ill-defined path that then disappeared. There was much joking about Miloš' and Frank's ability to read maps as we clambered through waist-high stinging nettles on unstable holey ground, until after another hour or two we still had not clarified our orientation and it was totally dark. This walk had not been intended as a long hike (a mere twelve kilometers, as compared to other days when we walked twenty to thirty kilometers), so we had not brought supplies of food. Morale in the group was slipping away rapidly in the pitch black and glimmers of panic were audible in the voices of some who were falling behind the procession. I remembered that moonlight would illuminate our path sometime soon. For we were on a path again now, but it was obvious that our leaders had not a great deal of certainty about what path this was, or where it was leading us. Miloš, the green-clad, softly spoken Czech artist, tramped steadily ahead, intently listening to his instinctual sense of direction. The moon did rise, a welcome round glow, spilling her silvery rays over the lofty Mountain Ash forest and those of us with a nut or two in the bottom of our packs distributed them loyally among the group.

As we forced our tired legs to keep walking, I chatted to two Czech women in the group about the local mythology of fairies and elves, the spirits of specific places. For them, it seemed, these spirits were as much and as 'real' a part of the landscape as the trees and rivers. As we spotted glow-worms amongst the undergrowth, these women told me that some Czech fairies are keepers of a small domain, such as a spring, while others watch over larger areas like whole forests or mountains. There are many different types of spirits to protect and work with the landscape.

These women's perspective of their country also included the punctuation of the land with prehistoric sites linked to 'ley-lines' and other lines forming complex energetic systems. The women referred to two leading figures in Czech esoteric conceptualising of place: Vaclav Cilek, a geologist who has conducted 'testing' of the energy and spirits of place and artist Marko Pogacnik, who talks about 'Lithopuncture', a sort of acupuncture for the earth, 'lithos' meaning stone. My imagination was quite excited as we traipsed through moonlit forest, surrendering to the possibility that we may not find our bearings until daylight. But just when we were sure that we were walking futilely in a random direction, a house appeared in front of us and we thought we could at least ask its occupants for directions. But to our disbelief, it was the house we were staying in. Somehow Miloš had brought us home.



Butoh and certain forms of postmodern dance explore walking as a 'neutral' or neutralising activity, a fundamental locomotion of the body in kinaesthetic relation to the ground and its surrounding space—experienced differently yet similarly by both sexes.²²⁴ Sally Gardner observes that in verticality and the two-legged walking gait, all humans share 'with each other but with no other species' a similar relationship to gravity.²²⁵ Fraleigh claims 'Hokohtai, the

²²⁴ Gardner, 1996, p59

²²⁵ Ibid, p49

impersonal (universalised) “walking body”, is at the root of Butoh. Its grace arises through method in purifying motion of intention, getting rid of or emptying the self.’²²⁶ These walking practices would usually be in a studio situation, but I infer that Frank van de Ven’s walking through the Sumava forest was informed by similar underpinning philosophies. Like the common ground of language-less-ness, the act of walking across the land together had an equalising effect on the group. The commonality or becoming a forest-like group that was strongly encouraged by these aspects of the Bohemiae Rosa workshop produced some discoveries or new experiences for us, as I have recounted. However this universalising, like the Hokohtai walk, aligns with the philosophy of emptiness, with its associated reductionism and devaluing of the body in its totality and its particularity.

Walking as an artistic practice has been extensively explored and documented, most famously by British artist Richard Long, who I introduced in Chapter 2. Long has been ‘credited as the artist who demonstrated that a walk could be a sculpture.’²²⁷ Although he uses universal symbols (of circles and lines/ paths) in his walking-as-art, Long claims his work is ‘really a self-portrait’ about his own physical engagement with the world.²²⁸ Long’s walks across landscapes, countries and, sometimes, entire continents, are measures, he states ‘of the country itself (size, shape and terrain) and also of myself (how long it takes me and not somebody else).’²²⁹ His walking body is thereby a system of measurement, which is never directly present in the artwork, but is always implied by its traces or gestures—handprints, arranged found objects, the line of his path across a field. Alongside the particularity of Long’s own body in the creation of the work, he also commented that his work ‘has become a simple metaphor of life. A figure walking down his road.’²³⁰

Closer to home, Mark Minchinton conducted a walk as performance in 2003, *Void: Kellerberrin Walking*, performing a route from Busselton, to Perth, to Wyalkatchem to Kellerberrin. Daily emails were posted to his audience as Minchinton geographically tracked his recently-awakened

²²⁶ Sondra Horton Fraleigh, 2003, p177

²²⁷ Alison Sleeman, Introduction, in Richard Long, *Mirage*, Phaidon Press, London, 1998, (unpaginated)

²²⁸ Georgia Lobacheff, Interview with Richard Long, 1994, in Long, 1998, (unpaginated)

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Sleeman, Introduction, in Long, 1998

This suggests a universalised (male) body and the path of a (man’s) life.

Indigenous identity back to his people's country.²³¹ This was thus a walk not to neutralise, but on the contrary to emphasise, the role of personal identity (and to engage with this country that was inextricably interwoven with his new-found identity). Minchinton's choice was to go by foot, in reference to and commonality with Aboriginal nomadic tradition. Domenico de Clario conducted a 'related but different' walk from Minchinton's, entitled *Breathing for Biagio Walking (A Walk from Perth to Kellerberrin)*. This work was in remembrance of de Clario's first contact with Australia, arriving on a boat from Italy, and of Biagio, a man from that boat, who attempted to walk overland to Melbourne and died in Kalgoorlie. Thus de Clario's walk also performed identity in relation to place, speaking of the experience of being overwhelmed in the face of a new world and expressing empathy for the bewilderment of the immigrant.²³²

To Miloš Šejn, walking is a philosophical activity that he includes in his artwork. He seeks to combine the physical, the visual and language, in an over-writing (or over-drawing) of the 'landscape' tradition of Romanticism. Šejn offered the example of a walk he conducted all night around a small hill, drawing on top of a book containing the text 'Hymn of the Night' by German Romantic poet Novalis as he walked. His line marking expressed his 'feeling' of walking in the place, hence creating a 'landscape' work, but the material of the Novalis text beneath Šejn's drawing acknowledged that the genre of 'landscape' is 'not an empty book'.²³³ Šejn's work is evidently subjective, personal in the expression of his 'feeling' during its process, and, like Richard Long's, it is specific to the measure of his body, in the time taken, for example, to walk around the hill.

Frank van de Ven talked about the borders between our bodies and the landscape and how they may be mediated and researched via walking. He suggested a certain openness to change in this liminal zone, a transparency. He asked 'How does the landscape walk through you?' and proposed that we 'invite' the place into us. Van de Ven is interested in 'how to be in a state that the landscape can speak to you'. Van de Ven's approach is not from the specificities of his own body and identity, but from the notion of a transparent or empty body that he believes is the

²³¹ Mark Minchinton, *Void: Kellerberrin Walking*, accessed at <http://www.soca.ecu.edu.au/mailman/listinfo/void> on 22/09/2003

²³² Mark Minchinton and Domenico de Clario, 'Kellerberrin on our Minds', in Gay McAuley, (ed.), *About Performance*, No.7, 2007, 'Local Acts: Site-based Performance Practice', University of Sydney, Sydney, p54-5

²³³ Milôš added that walking is many, many other things too, just in case I thought his interpretation simplistic.

optimum state through which ‘the landscape can speak to you’. Walking, he implies, is a mode of attaining or aspiring to this transparency.

The divergent social spaces facilitated by the two workshops conjured very different experiences via their use of language: the first generated more tangible theoretical developments, the physical work always being followed by highly-engaged discussion and debate, but the second—the Bohemiae Rosa project, by its suppression of this most common means of expression, enabled our bodies to enter the site of the forest less cerebrally, giving way to a strong sensory experience of place that resonated long after the workshop. Frank van de Ven’s notion (from the Pyrenees workshop) of overlaying a remembered or imagined place onto the actual site and dancing in relation to both, was a new and exciting offer that inspired my later processes. The practice of ‘emptying’ one’s self-body in order to ‘dance the place’ became even more clearly problematic for me during the course of these workshops. The amelioration of specificities of one’s body-self identity that is encouraged by Body Weather practitioners (overtly or by implication) via physical training, imaging and walking with particular attention/ intention, could be seen, at least in Australia, as reiterating the colonial paradigm of erasure. I have since clarified my adoption of the idea of the body’s permeable borders, which enables the transformative possibilities of Butoh’s ‘empty body’, without attempting to overthrow personal identity. Milôš Šejn’s inclusion of the feeling self in his workshop tasks raised my consciousness of the denial of emotion that is usual for Body Weather practice, following logically from a body that is supposedly ‘empty’. This realisation confirmed my own decision to include the emotional realm in my performance and practice because I do not wish to suppress aspects of the self and because I believe that part of Australia’s work—with colonialism, towards reconciliation—is about feeling and expressing emotion.²³⁴

²³⁴ I use the term ‘reconciliation’ here to contextualise these thoughts amidst current Australian political discussions, not to necessarily endorse it as a term, concept or movement.

5. In Flux

As well as conferring and practicing with other body-place investigators in Frank van de Ven's and Miloš Šejn's workshops, my research in Europe entailed another kind of locating: becoming familiar with my British-European background. By this stage in the process of my research, my sense of identity as an Australian had become less resolved than I had previously assumed it to be. I had begun, via my movement practice of locating and the presentation of *Blasted Away*, to interrogate, problematise and re-articulate my embodied identity in relation to (Australian) place as complex, complicated, indeed always already highly inscribed or 'full', in stark opposition to the 'empty body' I had formerly strived for, influenced by *Body Weather*. Sensing disjuncture between my body-self and Australian places, I was curious as to how I would perceive British and European places my ancestors had inhabited: would I find an easier sense of belonging there than in the Australian places in which I had grown up? The desire to experience directly some of these personal ancestral places was strong, but I also felt that my experience of Europe might give me a sense of where white Australians as a collective had hailed from and perhaps what the colonisers had brought with them in their invasion of the Great South Land. The issue of embodied identity in relation to place had emerged from my work to date (particularly in *Blasted Away*, when I questioned my corporeal experience of my 'home' city of Melbourne with a consciousness of the country's Aboriginal presence/ absence). I had been to Europe before, but not with these issues so prominently in my awareness. Journeying to Europe at this point constituted a further experiment with the relationships between body, place and identity by displacing my self-body from its usual context.

The experience of traveling, tourism and my body 'in flux' came under my investigation as I attempted to locate myself in relation to places that were entirely foreign to me, experiencing places from the perspective of a traveler, an outsider. My aversion to tourism led to some interventions using the tourist's medium of the camera. My own experiences of alienation and sensory disorientation arising from being a foreigner (though a privileged traveler) stimulated reflection upon the immigrant experience.

This chapter deals with the experience of bodily states induced by travel—the body-in-flux—from the uplifting, literally unbounded, spirit of an adventure without roots, to the disempowerment and sensory confusion of dislocation, alienation and to the uncanny experience

of familiarity in places that could not be familiar. The relationship between movement and agency is called into question: threat to the integrity of the body-self arises when agency is compromised. When I am constituted as the foreigner, for example, I am out of place, in contrast to the exuberance of the new experienced by the traveler moving through her chosen destinations at will. The journal-like form adopted in this chapter reflects the diverse and disparate nature of the experience of traversing multiple European countries and cultures: observations are fragmented, non-chronological, yet hopefully bear a patchwork-like relation to one another, which generates cumulative meanings.

Resilience

Deliriously tired after the flight, yet excited to be traveling, I chatted to a young Australian man I met on the plane as we negotiated the London underground ‘tube’. It happened to be my birthday and I was bursting with an immensely positive feeling, invincible and giggly, amused by everything: it was all so English! I followed my friend’s instructions to her place, trudging from the station carrying my backpack. A pirate-like character with a glass helmet on his head guffawed, grinning at me through the helmet’s window, as I crossed the road. A scruffy crow on a lamppost squawked as if trying to communicate something to me. I felt alive to my new surrounds in a similar way to the hyper-perceptual state I am in when I do a locating dance, when the everyday seems to slide lucidly into the multi-dimensional. I admired the beautiful elms and oaks in the park (correction, ‘Common’), realising that these species I knew from suburban Melbourne gardens actually *belonged* here. The trees seemed to beckon me: ‘welcome back to your ancestral lands...’ I felt drawn into the yearning greenness of fluttering leaves. A teasing wind tickled my skin in waves of familiar engulfment: the sort of familiar that is unexpected and tingly.

After dropping my belongings at my friend’s apartment, I took off again into town, eager for more sensations. Stench of pollution in the tube again accompanied me to London Bridge, where I found some steps down to the river Thames. I danced on its banks, comprising river-filthed and tumbled stones plus centuries of Londoners’ broken crockery.

There were many pedestrians and café-dwellers within view alongside the river, but as an outsider—liberated by my foreignness, I felt less self-conscious to be seen dancing alone in the midst of this international city. Oddly I found myself in a very similar position in relation to the city as I had just been in back in Melbourne, rehearsing and performing *Blasted Away*: river,

bridge, chains for boat-mooring and steps down to the water. I would find myself in a similar orientation to other cities of Europe later also—Paris, Prague. A semi-conscious attempt to acquaint myself with the natural physical features of the place: where is the water? To get a sense of the lay of the land, to get perspective on the city that had been built on top of and around the land. As I loosened my flight-stiffened muscles I breathed in the grimy air and brought myself here: arrival. I played with the sound and texture of the stones and tumbled crockery beneath my booted feet, let the cool wind and the flow of the grey river move me. I realised later that if I did not do some version of this locating dance everywhere I went, I would feel disorientated, ‘ungrounded’ or even excluded from the place.



I awoke late on the seventh July 2006 intending to hop on the tube and meet an old friend for lunch, but alas, the tube had been bombed in several places and London was in tragic terrorist-induced chaos. I stayed inside the flat all day, listening to the constant sirens outside.

I thought I could feel the earth shuddering. London was walking out of the city. I stayed in the flat with the TV blaring live updates on the underground excavations. The escalating numbers of people announced dead by the reportage transfixed me. Images of bodies splattered on the walls of tube tunnels haunted my imagination. The sirens in the street outside continued and I felt like making high-pitched wails also. The flat was shrinking, closing in. Unsteady legs, churning gut, dizzy head. I felt the fear of humanity, the reality of this new world (dis)order.

The next day I heard the news readers reporting proudly how Londoners were ‘back to normal’, so ‘resilient’, walking ‘bravely’ over the King’s Cross pavement, as if the skin and bones of their

fellow residents were not being scraped from the walls of the underground, only metres beneath their methodical feet.

Bones and winds

I escaped to Shropshire, on a quest common to antipodeans, to visit my ancestral country. Before I knew it I was eating lunch at the Hand and Diamond Inn, a few metres from the border of Wales. My relatives John Broughall and William Ellis had been successive innkeepers of this pub around the time the first fleets of convicts were being shipped off to the colony of New South Wales. I checked the dilapidated gravestones in the cemetery of the St Michael and All Angels Church against the names on my mother's side of my family tree, finding several of my relatives' final resting places. I then headed to the nearest bit of forest. More than the relics of my relatives, I found I was interested in the feeling of their country.

I climb up the hill and dance, moved by the brisk winds my great, great, great, great, great grandmother Appoline Lightfoot may have felt against her skin, nearly three hundred years ago. I begin with a sensory checklist: responding to sounds of crows cawing, little birds cheery twitter, an occasional vehicle on the plains below; the textures and scent of damp moss and bark; movements of foliage by the wind... These particular focuses soon combine and entwine as I whirl into an invigorated dance, oscillating between close-range immersion in bracken and moss and stretching my perception out to the distant countryside in all directions from my stance upon the hill.

I did feel some familiarity here, perhaps even a long-forgotten sense of belonging, but I was also just glad to be out of London, away from people and free to dance upon this hilltop...





Places performing themselves

Later, in continental Europe, as a reluctant tourist in the height of the popular summer season, I started to go to great lengths to avoid what I saw as the clichés of tourism. I desired so much to know the place before and beneath the tourism that I realised I was attempting (and almost succeeding) to block the (other) tourists out of my vision and experience of the place. In a perpetual state of sensorial selectivity, I expended a great deal of energy trying to exclude the tourists from my experience of the place. In Prague I got up at five a.m. in order to avoid them for a couple of hours, to have the city to myself, almost. I felt I needed this space to allow myself to dream of how it had been before tourism landed—perhaps to imagine the city peopled with medieval folk who would (in my opinion) better befit the place. I also photographed the city at dawn without the hordes of sweaty drunken souvenir-consuming tourists, to record it in the pretence that they were not there. And yet I was one of them. (Well, not as drunken or sweaty as some and I barely bought a single souvenir.) I vehemently resisted tourism's interference with, and streamlining of, my experience of the place and I also resisted (in vain) my own inclusion in the paradigm. My desire for an 'authentic' or 'pure' experience of place was, of course, both unrealisable and, ironically, a desire foundational of tourism itself. My nostalgic attempts to connect with a place *before* tourism—according to a myth of authenticity, of origin—were in fact, infuriatingly, a part of the apparatus of tourism.

Sociologist John Urry notes that the tourist gaze is 'constructed through signs and tourism involves the collection of such signs.' He offers the example of the tourist seeing two people kissing in Paris, who interprets this as 'timeless, romantic Paris.'¹ Urry cites Culler: 'the tourist is interested in everything as a sign of itself...' as she seeks typical scenes and behaviour in each place visited, such as the 'Englishness' I was excited to encounter on arrival in London, based on images of places constructed and sustained by tourism, as well as by 'non-tourist practices' such as film, literature and television.² (Urry terms media such as film and television 'non-tourist practices' because the primary intention of their existence is not to sell the place as a destination, but to situate a narrative within a place's picturesque/ exotic, etc. ambiance and aesthetic. Perpetuating and proliferating popular images of places is a side-affect or tangential outcome of these media.) Tourist industries try hard to live up to these expectations, developing 'new

¹ John Urry, Consuming Places, Routledge, Abingdon, 1995, p133

² Ibid., p132

socialized forms of provision' in order to cater for, and further propagate, the mass character of the tourist gaze and reproducing ever-new focuses for this gaze.³

Just as I, the anti-tourist, exercised selectivity in my attempt to imaginatively remove the tourists and all their gimmicks from the scene, tourism itself is selective in its representation of a place. The aspects of landscape or townscape that become the objects of the tourist gaze are those which are distinctive from the tourist's everyday experience, presenting (in the leisure activity of tourism) a contrast to their at-home (working) lives.⁴ Particular scenic features and cultural practices are selected as typical or representative of the place, singled out from their contexts, made distinct from their environment and the other sites, activities and (importantly) the whole atmosphere or ambience of their place, and rapidly become *all* that visitors know of the place. Not only does this profoundly simplify or 'dumb down' the visitor's experience, it also segments and fragments cultures, perception and places.⁵

Places are performing themselves. Performing, that is, representing themselves selectively. In Judith Butler's theorisation of performativity, it is gender that is shown to be performed—to lack an existence prior to its representation. Szerszynski, Heim and Waterton extend this possibility to 'nature'.⁶ Following Butler's trajectory, I propose that (contrary to my desire for a pure or essential experience of place) there is no being or identity beneath or before the 'performance' of place. This proposition leads to a dynamic conceptualisation of place that remakes, reforms itself.⁷ Whether I like it or not, tourists are increasingly a part of many places and a part of the place's contemporary, ever-evolving dynamism. There is no 'authentic', 'original' or 'pure' place beneath the tourism: this *is* as 'real' as it gets.

Sites become sights

Perhaps what I object to is that this 'performance' (of place to tourists) is directed by profiteering businesses, aiming primarily for 'bums on seats' (to continue the metaphor), which, like art that is marketed for mass appeal, risks losing its subtlety and becoming simplistic and/ or mere

³ *Ibid.*, pp132-3,

⁴ *Ibid.*, p132

⁵ I am aware, however, that the commodification and parceling of experience can of course be beneficial economically to the local people, and are sometimes well managed.

⁶ Szerszynski, Heim and Waterton, 2003, *op. cit.*, p3

See Chapter 1: 'Locating' for my introduction of this idea.

⁷ *Ibid.*

spectacle. Whether chosen by the collectivity of tourists or by the ‘array of tourist professionals’⁸ appointed to generate tourism in a place, the sites selected to represent a place inevitably become ‘sights’, for ‘sight-seeing’ by ‘sight-seers.’ While Urry suggests that, ‘It is that gaze which gives a particular heightening to other elements of that experience, particularly to the sensual’, as if the gaze were a gateway to broader sensorial experience, I would argue otherwise. The very wording of the activity (‘sight-seeing’) directs the tourist’s experience of place to be primarily (even exclusively) a visual activity, necessitating a limited experience of the other senses. The act of looking (often from a designated ‘look-out’ and often almost superseded by the act of photographing) is in many instances the *only* activity that is undertaken in relation to the place. Indeed Urry defines tourists in terms of their gaze:

...what is the minimal characteristic of tourist activity is the fact that we look at, or gaze upon, particular objects, such as piers, towers, old buildings, artistic objects, food, countryside and so on.⁹

The emphasis on vision is exacerbated further by modern tourism’s obsession with photography. The ‘sights’ are viewed because they are presented as special or in some sense out-of-the-ordinary.¹⁰ Tourists ‘linger over such a gaze’ with a ‘much greater sensitivity to visual elements of landscape or townscape’ than they normally would in everyday life, according to Urry, then capture it visually with personal cameras or purchased postcards, etc., enabling the gaze or sight/site to be ‘endlessly reproduced and recaptured.’¹¹ In my observations of tourists, particularly those I observed in the context of highly scheduled package tours, few could be said to ‘linger’ long with a place; more often the camera immediately intercepts the gaze and the place, then the tourist is back on the bus...

According to Urry’s definition outlined above—that ‘tourist activity’ requires that one gaze upon objects or scenes, I have, at least for sections of time on my travels, evaded the stigma of ‘tourist’, via my explorations of places through senses other than the visual. Instead of engaging primarily via the gaze, I would instead turn my attention to appreciate places through sound, texture, kinaesthesia. Sometimes I closed my eyes in order to experience the place with the absolute omission of the visual. Often I have resisted the temptation to visually record places because I can

⁸ Urry, 1995, p133

⁹ *Ibid.*, p131

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p132

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp132-3

be more present to the experience if I meet a place without a camera between my body and the site. If I am not preoccupied with photographing images of the place for their aesthetic value later, I can be more available for perceiving the place in other sensory ways and inhabiting the place—and my body—in the moment. The act of looking through a lens tends also to detach me from my corporeal awareness—as if my sense of self-embodiment gets left behind, behind the camera, while my consciousness focuses outwards, away from my body, on the scene in front of the lens.

So when I *did* use a camera in my meetings with places, I attempted to do it differently, with these concerns in mind. I thought about photography as an interstice between body and place. Contrary to Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that the act of seeing 'coils over' into that which is seen, just as the tangible coils over upon the touching body,¹² the apparatus of the camera seems to crisply divide the seer behind the camera from that which is seen and simultaneously captured. I wondered if I could emphasise the processual aspects of taking a photo, for example, to reveal something in the photograph of the reciprocal relation, inter-subjectivity or permeability between the body of the photographer and that which is being photographed... to disclose more of the effect the place had upon the viewer, the experience of the subject, or reveal the impact of the tourist's presence upon the place. I wondered:

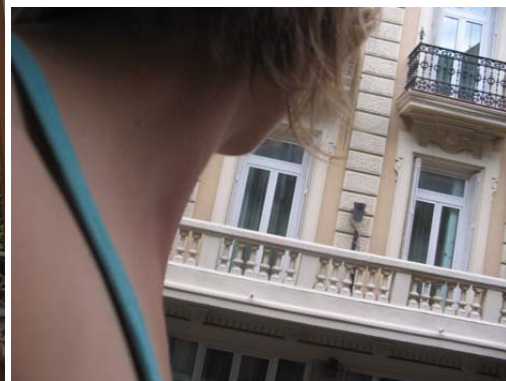
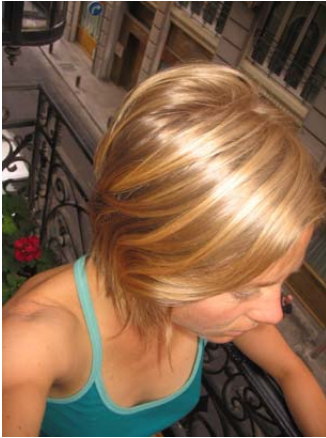
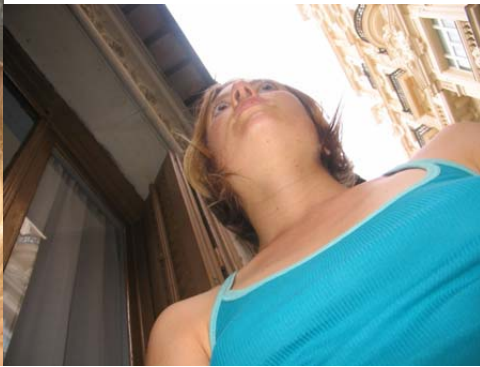
Who am I to be capturing this place via images on my camera? What if the place were seeing me, here? What does the place perceive or see of me? A body in flux? What if the place could take photos from any angle of me, as if I were an object in this place—a monument perhaps, or an insignificant building, part of the place but barely noticed because I am not the 'famous' one? But I am not even as substantial as that. Like a butterfly to a centuries-old tree, I am a momentary blurry blot on the landscape, a generic body-in-flux in the ongoing time-space of the place, just another tourist temporarily taking up space.

Using the tourist's tool, I took a series of snaps of 'Gretel in Madrid', on the third floor balcony of a pension in the street with the prostitutes on the corner, near Gran Via Metro station. The photos had a cold, detached, unaffected quality to them similar to the generic tourist snaps of features such as buildings. An odd performativity of these pictures however, is that I was both the subject and object in their creation—the photographer and photographed.

¹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1968, op. cit., Ch. 4

In other tactical responses/ resistances to the tourist gaze, I refused to 'frame' photographs squarely, neatly, with satisfying focus upon a popular landmark or 'landscape'. In a sort of 'anti-picturesque' frenzy, I took 'bad' photographs, thrusting the camera randomly to record that which was not 'special' or distinct from its surrounds, but was 'everyday', in Urry's terms and nonetheless a part of my experience. Furthermore, I photographed aspects of places that governments and tourism boards would customarily attempt to steer the tourist gaze *away* from, such as massive accumulations of litter on popular beaches, beggars and homeless people in 'glamorous' cities, nuclear power stations and Robo-cop security guards in 'quaint' country towns.

Other times I forced the kinaesthetic and haptic into this visual medium, attempting to bring lived phenomenological experience into a flat photograph, or to bring the behind- and in-front-of- the camera worlds into closer relation. I desired to rupture the clean, divisive intermediary of the photo by bleeding, seeping the viewer into the viewed.





James Geurts' artwork comes to mind in this context. Geurts is an artist and filmmaker who intervenes with cameras by removing their protective covers and tweaking their exposed circuitry. As Andrew Best describes, Geurts often 'destroys "perfect" potential images, and irreparably damages hi-tech gear, making sacrificial, shamanic devices to bring a much-needed "anti-truth" into existence.'¹³ Environmental elements are allowed to 'infect undeveloped celluloid film, giving a Robert Capa, D-Day effect to otherwise Kodak-perfect, sunlit Australian photographic scenes.'¹⁴ My interventions were more kinaesthetically concerned and did not intrude upon the camera device itself: I tried to include my subjective experiencing of the place in

¹³ Andrew Best, catalogue for James Geurts, Bastards of Paradise exhibition, Greenaway Art Gallery, South Australia 2006

¹⁴ Ibid.

the moment—by the blur of movement, point-of-view angles, or flicker of my clothing in the way of the shot.

I also used the (very unsophisticated) ‘movie’ tool on my digital stills camera to record the places I met and with which I danced, from my point of view—from dancing or moving. One of these mini-videos was taken whilst swinging from a tyre on a rope from a tree in the courtyard of Bechyne monastery, Czech. The swinging action, my occasional squeals and feet flying through the air offered a strong sense of my embodied presence in the scene. Another mini-movie was created when I dropped and fumbled with the camera at Porto railway station with it accidentally recording. The view of the traditional Porto blue and white painted tile wall and recorded voices speaking Portuguese were completely unframed, incidental, yet insightful of the place’s atmosphere. The awkward movement of the camera reflected my own clumsiness in relation to this foreign scene. I included some of these video snippets in my performance *Foreign/Familiar* at Dancehouse in Melbourne several months later, interwoven with live movement derived from memories of encounters with places in Europe.¹⁵

Lost in Place

Yesterday I had thought they were all staring at my hiking boots, as if they had never seen a woman wearing boots before. Probably they haven’t. But today in my thongs they are still gaping at me like I am an alien. And, of course, I am.

Even the sky is different here—the blue a deeper blue, the stars of another hemisphere—or is it another planet?

Seeking familiarity, I thrash in the Portuguese waves, hoping for that reinvigoration of power, that sensorial joy of skin and cold water in rough, wild combination. Usually my favourite element, the sea, today I am uncertain, untrusting of my ability to negotiate the undertow. I stay in the shallows.

It is with relief that I let place fall edgeways, into the darkness of the night, as I am swallowed by the site of my lover’s embrace. Place and all its awkward particularities evaporate outwards into

¹⁵ I expand upon this description of *Foreign/Familiar* in Appendix 3.

space, yet dependency looms: all I have here of my 'identity' is this companion and my own self-body. When my self-body is blurry, unreliable, even inaccessible, I cling to him.

Place is over-exposed. Blaring, glaring, over-bearing to my senses, impossible to perceive. Resisting absorption, refusing to meet me, or is it my resistance? A double resistance. My body—a foreign object. Self is wavering.

Europe being characterised by the close proximity of diverse countries and cultures, the temptation is often (for an Australian having traveled so far) to country-hop, exploring the vast variety of worlds in a relatively short period of time. I struggled to enjoy this shallow experience of place, however, quickly becoming disoriented. In Portugal I kept persevering in my attempt to allow the place in, to meet with it a little more comfortably, but I felt like it kept throwing up walls, snubbing me. Out of context and largely ignored by the world around me, my sense of 'I' became flimsy, my borders unstable. My skin, that interstice between interior and exterior, was irritated, itchy and expelling toxins, my body struggled to digest the food and my coordination went out the window—dropping a glass bottle in the public shower, tripping over my own feet crossing the road. My ability to distinguish peripheries degenerated, my orientation impaired, senses dulled—I felt lost and disempowered, sometimes sticking out like a sore thumb, other times seemingly invisible.

I was of course a privileged tourist, reassured by the knowledge of having a relatively comfortable, safe home to return to back in Australia and that these disconcerting bodily responses and the alienation I felt were temporary. These symptoms however caused me to think about and gave me some modest insight into or empathy with aspects of the experience of migration. Mandy Thomas in her paper presented at “The Poetics of Australian Space” conference in 2005 gave many example case studies of the depreciation of asylum seekers’ and immigrants’ sensory perception on arrival in Australia.¹⁶ The loss of family, community and home coupled with the shock of foreign terrain where the world of everyday life is incomprehensible on multiple levels, paralyses some people to literal de-sensitisation. Thomas spoke of the ‘hardening’ necessary to face a new country and culture, which, in some instances, made migrants’ bodies ‘like stone.’ This hardening was a protective response, a literal bodily

¹⁶ Mandy Thomas, ‘Sensory Displacements: Migration and Australian Space’, Poetics of Australian Space, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2005

reaction to the geographical and cultural dislocation: a numbing of the senses.¹⁷ The instances Thomas described were in response to the loss of familiarity and inundation of unfamiliar elements, even before the additional cruelties of racism, detention and implied or actual criminal/terrorist suspicion. She referred to some Cambodian women's loss of vision, smell and taste when they moved to Australia, which she explained as a psychological evasion of experiencing their new unfamiliar world. Some Chilean refugees reported that their skin felt numb and they suffered an inability to taste food, while other studies of various refugee groups revealed muteness, anxiety, vertigo, agoraphobia and reduced capacity or loss of bodily orientation, location, haptic and proprioceptive senses. These immigrants' early impressions of Australia were of a scentless, soundless, textureless, tasteless place. Thomas emphasised that the body is often the site of 'disjuncture between the known and the unknown': 'Living in another country may be an uncanny experience, which can shatter one's spatial world.'¹⁸

My own experience of some of these symptoms, just from being (by choice, with agency) in a place where I felt I was very much an outsider, made me acutely aware of how fortunate I am to usually be in the familiar position. It also affirmed to me how necessary it is to experience this foreign-ness in order to have empathy for the millions of dislocated people worldwide.

Feminist geographer Joyce Davidson in her exposition of agoraphobia, describes panic as:

a horrendous sense of dissolution of self into one's environs, and a simultaneous feeling of invasion by one's surrounds. Panic severely disrupts our unconscious sense of ourselves, throwing the relation we have with our bodies, our selves, into profound question.¹⁹

According to Davidson, who refers to Elizabeth Grosz's notion of 'volatile bodies',²⁰ this 'loss of trust in the integrity of the body' is intrinsically linked (in phobic conditions) to the permeability of bodily borders to the world that surrounds them.²¹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Joyce Davidson, Phobic Geographies: The phenomenology and spatiality of identity, Aldershot, England, 2003, pp14-15

²⁰ Grosz, 1994, op. cit.

²¹ Davidson, 2003, pp15-16

It is ironically this permeable body that my research practice is encouraging and seeking to attain. Frank van de Ven in his facilitation of Body/ Landscape workshops offered methods/ tasks towards enabling the permeability of bodily borders and my own locating practice works similarly towards a more fluid relation between body-self and the exterior world than is generally perceived in everyday life. Traveling through Europe, my perception was wide open to receiving a myriad of impressions, my bodily borders permeable to such an extent that I knew not what was 'I' and what was the surrounding world. I was so well practiced at opening to perceive a place that I was evaporating into it! In Portugal (and occasionally other places during this trip) my ability and habit to absorb a place led me close to the state of panic described by Davidson. Even when I realised that I was crossing over into this phobic flipside to my practice, I was reluctant to 'harden' my body in defense against the shock of foreignness. This would entail shutting down my perception to a certain extent, and I did not desire to reduce my ability to perceive; I wanted to experience places from a fully embodied, receptive position. So I fluctuated between open, intense interaction with places and feeling overwhelmed, occasionally to the point of disembodied alienation. I determined to stay 'permeable' despite this dilemma, but at a slower pace.

I reduce the input to my body in a sand dune. I barely move for an hour and a half: wind, sand, sky shifting my limbs and frame slightly, falling, breathing, melting my flesh into the comforting warmth of the sand, sensing my density, gathering my self back from the air, releasing my panic. Eventually I am able to roll over the slope of the dune and gaze at the town and the sea. Ever so slowly I amble over the dunes toward the distant town. My bare feet walk very slowly on broken shells, their brittle sharp fragility digging into the skin of my soles, forcing me to feel my feet. Ancient, temporary, mutable and found throughout the world, I enjoy the localised discomfort of the shells in contact with my body amidst the enormous over-exposed whiteness of the beach. Maybe I have started to locate myself.

Walking and Gawking

In Paris I was nauseous almost constantly, as if the immensity and grandeur of it all was overwhelming to my body. However I could not stop walking, gawking at beauty, history, people, art and imposing architecture, although I was exhausted and weak and dragging my feet. It was the same in Berlin for the first few days. With some sort of compulsive sense of obligation mingled with desire to encompass it all, I was impelled to physically comprehend the entire enormous city in the short time I had there, while my body was still reeling from the last place

and the place before that... I recalled de Certeau's essay 'Walking in the City', where he discusses the city's propensity to discourage rest²² and I agreed, that it does seem difficult to stop still in these great metropolises.

Stop! I finally put my foot down in a vacant block in Kreuzberg.

Listen to the wind rattling the graffiti-covered corrugated iron fence, touch the textures of the industrial rubble around me, let the ground move me, or sink into it in stillness and silence. Dance the confusion: meet it with curiosity, lightness. A light meeting is all that is possible in these fleeting glimpses; perhaps a surprisingly deep moment of comprehension will occur, but perhaps not.

The dance I did alone in that vacant block would have befitted a thrashing soundtrack of the hardcore punk music that is so popular among Berlin's artists, activists and youth living in the old East Berlin. There was nothing 'light' about it. Perhaps it is difficult to find lightness in Berlin. The (non-Jewish, non-gypsy, non-homosexual) German people have written heavily into their consciousness the burden of guilt of war crimes: the horrific infamy of 'Nazismus'. Being-German includes this burden; just as being-white-Australian includes the guilt of Aboriginal dispossession and genocide. Anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose makes a similar comparison when she refers to 'the great Australian holocaust known as colonisation'.²³ I lived in Frankfurt for a few months as a teenager and remember that, even in 1987, some older people were still stubbornly silent about the war, while others made a point of telling us that they 'didn't know' what was going on in Hitler's camps, due to the Nazi propaganda that minimised public knowledge of the extent of, and steered public opinion into agreement with, the racist, genocidal policies of the Nazi dictatorship. In both these cases there was a sense of denial of, yet simultaneously guilt for, the inherent complicity in and responsibility for the actions of one's government that exist simply by being a citizen of a country. Place-consciousness often includes this murky conscience. Something about Berlin in its raw, ever-transitional state of flux since the Wall went down in 1989, seemed more honest about its past than the rest of Germany to me. Although Berlin is currently weighed down in the process of grappling with its history, it is therefore closer to being liberated from that history.

²² de Certeau, 1984

²³ Deborah Bird Rose, Dingo Makes Us Human: Life and Land in an Australian Aboriginal Culture, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p2

Antipodean visions

On a train between Berlin and Prague, and between dozing with my head clunking uncomfortably against the window, ideas started to come for a performance, or perhaps it was a film? I had an image of my bare feet standing on orange-red earth in Central Australia, my legs leaning slightly in different directions in erratic order, as if my body, like a radio antenna, was searching incessantly to tune in to an airwave.

Another image came to me of my legs in varying degrees of burial in the red earth. One moment the desert earth surrounded my mid-calves, my feet deeply entrenched, but the following moment they were unearthed, ejected by the ground itself, back to standing on the surface layer next to a messy hole remaining from the attempted immersion.



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I drifted into wakefulness as my thoughts of the desert reminded me of an act I performed for the Solar Eclipse Festival at Lyndhurst in the South Australian desert in 2002: a marionette puppet. Dressed in an authentic German dirndl dress, black-heeled character shoes and round red spots on my cheeks, I improvised as an ‘empty’ blank-faced doll, imagining my ‘strings’ being operated by someone above me, limbs tugged from specific points where the imagined strings attached to my joints,²⁵ in time to the festival’s techno beats. I realised in retrospect that my cute yet troubling, empty-headed, ungrounded and inappropriately attired character, located in the desert as she was, was possibly an absurd yet apt metaphor for European life in Australia.

²⁴ Photo by James Geurts

²⁵ This was my adaptation of a physicality introduced to me by Min Tanaka at the Hakashu Dance Workshop 2000.



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In another performance at that festival that (more consciously) played upon white Australian mythology of landscape, I deviated from the story of Miranda: the graceful, white-lace-frocked, innocent schoolgirl who was mysteriously taken by the wilds of the bush, lost and wayward from her Picnic at Hanging Rock.²⁷ In my version, far from the horrific imaginings of her peers and the local Woodend community about her fate, the young Miranda actually enjoyed her immersion, willfully discarded her conditioned civilised proprieties with her corsets and somehow popped up one hundred years later in the desert, wildly invigorated by her natural experiences!



28

Although mine was a comic, absurd take on the story, Joan Lindsay's depiction of Miranda was, for me, emblematic of white Australian disjuncture from place and the colonial fear of the Australian land. Lindsay's story is also an intriguing portrayal of Victorian perception of the association of the feminine with nature and the supernatural. In my performance of 'Miranda', I tried to re-frame and re-solve (in the sense of imaginatively creating another 'ending') Australian literature's myth of the 'lost child' swallowed by the malevolent wilderness.²⁹

²⁶ Photo still from video *Still Landing* 2008, shot by James Geurts

²⁷ Joan Lindsay, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, FW Cheshire, Melbourne, 1967

²⁸ Photo still from video *Still Landing* 2008, shot by James Geurts

²⁹ Peter Pierce, *Country of Lost Children: an Australian Anxiety*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999

My dreamy antipodean thoughts were interrupted as the train pulled into a station.
We had arrived in Prague.

Falling in to Place

I had heard through other travelers of a ruined castle ‘Divčí Kamen’ a few train stops away from where we were camping by a river in South Bohemia. The castle’s remains appeared to almost grow out of a mountain nestled amidst forest, with a river winding around it serving as a moat. Once occupied by the Celts, Divčí Kamen was in use from 1369 until 1506, when it was (perhaps) raided and burned.³⁰

I lay on an upper balustrade of a crumbly stone wall, humming and then singing absent-mindedly as I looked out over the valley of beech and spruce forest and felt drawn into a dance. It started as a low-energy exploration in relation to a gnarly old tree that had grown up through the ruins of the castle. Soft warm waves of impetus seemed to be rolling in from the surrounding hills from all directions towards the little ledge I stood upon and also radiating upwards from the ground and ancient stones beneath my feet. These waves of energy seemed to gently open up spaces within my tired limbs and inspire movement to cascade through my body. The place was filling me up, moving me, reminding me that there really is ‘endless energy’, as Min Tanaka had once told me. Suddenly we were moving as one force, one breath: the place and I in lucid continuity. As I was dancing I felt an exhilarating sense of the immense power that is life. And again, that deep, warm yet uncanny familiarity. I felt oddly at home and empowered in this remote place in southern Czech Republic that I could not have visited before in this lifetime. A place of spirits or an ‘inspired place’, as Peter Read would say.³¹

Later I felt like having a dip in the river to conclude my ritual, but the place I chose was too shallow, so I resorted to wading in it, splashing my face. Once again I felt the waves of energy moving me, this time surging more strongly through me, as if from the river itself. I heard a high-pitched note ringing in the air as if I perceived an audible resonance from the castle-mountain. I sang with the sound and that seemed to intensify the force that was carrying my movement: I got taken on a wild dance with the spirit of the river, hurling my body with enormous energy in

³⁰ This information is speculation gleaned from faded notice boards written in Czech with some dates and illustrations.

³¹ Read, Belonging, 2000 and Haunted Earth, 2003

flowing, arching shapes and rhythms. When it receded, I looked around, bewildered by the intensity of my own unexpected actions and was surprised to see that the river was merely a stream at this point; a moment ago it had felt like a gushing torrent.

It seemed that, as had occasionally happened to me before, the dance between my body and this place had revealed another dimension—a layer that was more than the (apparent) sum of the two parts. As with the phenomenon of my sensing the spirit of Beatrice Morrison at the Killeavy property back in Eltham, I cannot (and do not seek to) explain what happened during my dances at Dìvcí Kamen.

Body in Flux

I am left wondering about this profound located state I seek and occasionally experience. I yearn to fall into pace with the rhythm of each place I visit, although this is rarely possible for a mere traveling body. What is it to dance in many different places, none of which are ‘my country’ or that I know very much about?

Primarily, my practice of locating was my process of acquainting, my mode of appreciating new influences, sharing in qualities that were new and inspiring to me, as I danced in many different places across several countries of a continent. I felt that I had left some shallow impressions upon the lands I have been to and that they had inscribed multiple impressions upon me. Sometimes we had intersected and a deep wave of intensity had occurred—as at Dìvcí Kamen. There were a few other moments in Europe that I have not here elucidated, such as at a waterfall in Wales, atop a mountain in the Pyrenees, with the trees in Clapham Common, in the Spanish mountains where the dolmen were... These were all quite recognisable to me as experiences of deep connectivity between the place and my embodied self. Sometimes they occurred like unexpected collisions, other times uncanny coincidences and other times we simply met and the conversation that unfolded was profound. These were standout moments among many, many attempted meetings. A traveling body: roaming, scanning the land for points of intersection. I listened out for it with all my senses. I do not know whether it was timing, chance, or whether I was in an open receptive state—a permeable condition—for relating to a specific place at a specific time, but in those located moments I was suddenly no longer *trying* to perceive the place, but simply and powerfully moving with and from the place.

Still Landing

I had just started to truly enjoy traveling in Europe, having found my rhythm with it (a slow one), by the time I had to leave! So I was resistant to returning home, reluctant to settle back into my at-home life. I wanted to be immersed in a space of reflection, allow myself digestion time, in fear that otherwise all of those rich experiences would disappear like a dream into the hazy forgotten past. For a couple of weeks I clung to my fleeting and convoluted memories of European places, attempting to dwell in them, stretch them out a little longer in retrospective thought, writing and dance. I realised I was refusing to let in the Australian landscape surrounding me. My usually perceptive peripheries were closed, as if my consciousness was busily preoccupied with the effort of attempting to be elsewhere. Thus, in some respects, I was still ‘there’, refusing to land. The phrase ‘I’m still landing’ that people say when they are in transition after a trip, made more sense to me than ever; in fact I was existing somewhere prior to that—*refusing* to land here. I thought about the ‘longing’ in ‘be-longing’ and realised the impossibility of really ‘settling in’ or being-here, when one is yearning for some other, distant place. This led me to surmise that the non-Indigenous peoples of Australia will never land here, become embodied here—be-long, until we stop longing to be elsewhere. As the overwhelming majority of occupants of this country are not Aboriginal, but a vast mixture of immigrant races, perhaps many of us are metaphorically hovering above the ground, our yearnings pulling us, as if magnetically, towards our places of heritage, in all directions *but* towards the land we stand on.

This longing for places far away is coupled (in the challenge to ‘sink in’ to or ‘settle down’ in Australia) with the onerous weight of colonial cruelties committed by our ancestors for the privilege of our presence upon this land. Stuart Grant quotes Body Weather dancer Tess de Quincey, who has similarly been driven by her experiences of dancing in Central Australia and encounters with Aboriginal stories to inquire: ‘How do I stand in Australia?’³² Grant, who claims to be ‘as Australian as the broad flat vowels that shape [his] mouth’, goes on to ask ‘How do I live with the murdered ghosts who speak to me from every glow-worm grotto, every unusual rock formation, every medicinal plant, every storm-cloud?’³³

6. Still Landing

³² Stuart Grant and Tess de Quincey, ‘How to Stand in Australia?’ in Gay McAuley (ed), Unstable Ground: Performance and the Politics of Place, (PIE Peter Lang) Brussels, 2006, p248

De Quincey is referring to her *Triple Alice* Laboratory

³³ Ibid.

That's a really important sacred thing you are climbing... You shouldn't climb. It's not the real thing about this place. The real thing is listening to everything. This is the thing that's right. This is the proper way: no climbing.

—Kunmanara, traditional owner

I read Kunmanara's message on a sign at the base of Uluru, in the foreground of the slope being climbed by hundreds of ant-like bodies silhouetted against the bright blue sky.

My white feet and legs look ridiculous against the red earth— skin susceptible to sunburn, delicately vulnerable in contact with the prickly, course vegetation underfoot, utterly defenseless in the face of snakes or insects. But my shadow seems unaware of these incompetencies and is on the way to locating itself here. The twisted shapes of my arms, wrists, fingers, then later my legs, emulate the shadows of the trees moving with the warm breeze in this paradise-like spot I am in, at the base of Uluru. My shadow's ease of immersion into this world that is new and foreign to me seems to be leading my body. This seems possible here. I watch my shadow move in its graceful echo of the shapes and movements around it, watching from my body that is experiencing the textures underfoot, the warmth of the wind quickly drying my skin. The world of shadows erases all differentiation of colour, reducing being to contour and movement. My shadow cannot perceive the textures—I am slipping between embodied and silhouetted existences. We are dancing each other and the place. And the place is dancing 'us'. At once. A multifaceted meeting.



In this chapter the phenomenon and experience of whiteness is explicated from the perspective of locating dances in Central Australia. Experimentation with the ‘kinaesthetic uncanny’ is further developed via the overlaying of movements derived from European sites onto the red desert country. Gelder and Jacobs’ theorising of Freud’s notion of the uncanny focuses a discussion about the postcolonial experience of being simultaneously in- and out- of- place. Anecdotes of experiences with the Warlpiri people in the remote communities of Yuendumu and Lajamanu are interwoven with discussion about Indigenous philosophy and relationship to country. The experience of visiting these communities laid the way for three subsequent visits to Warlpiri country in the course of this research and initiated the creation of the video performance *Still Landing*.

‘The real thing is listening to everything’

The collection of vague filmic images based on red desert earth that had come to me on that train journey between Berlin and Prague impelled me to travel to Central Australia only weeks after I returned home from Europe. Somehow it seemed necessary for me to dive back into the ‘heart’ of the country that was, and is still, such an antithetical environment to the places my immigrant ancestors hailed from. My earlier methodologies of data gathering got left aside as I followed my intuition, determined to simply immerse myself in this country and see what happened. I traveled alone with the intention of trying to locate myself (via dancing) in relation to the desert country, including the iconic presence of Uluru, where I had not been before.

Flitty little yellow-breasted birds, a brilliant red dragonfly, twenty thousand flies and a loud squeaky creature hidden in the reeds were my companions as I admired the previous night’s rain running down the steep curvature of Uluru to a perfect pool, large enough to dip in. I had

followed a smaller track off the main path of the 'Base Walk' to get to this spot, hoping to find somewhere to experience the place and possibly to dance without the gaze of other visitors. I remembered an elder at the Women Elders' Gathering in 2004, advising me to 'ask' the tree for a branch, and 'tell' it that it is to be used for the Sacred Fire Ceremony. I interpreted this not as necessarily a verbal request, but more an energetic engagement between the body of the asker and the tree. Possibly all earth-based cultures/ philosophies would arrive at some similar lore of communication with nature. Still attempting to acclimatise to the intensity of temperature here, with a severe heat headache, in my own invented ritual I silently 'asked' the body of water for permission to enter. This request involved envisaging myself entering the water and imagining that I was 'sending' this image as a question to the place, followed by a sort of whole body sensing as I listened with every pore of my body for a response. I suppose I was listening for a sign or an intuitive feeling—a 'gut' feeling—that it was either not right or that it was okay. Stephen Muecke explains the Ngarrindjeri (South Australian) word *miwi* (via a statement by Tom Trevor) as 'where we get our understandings of things and our feelings and our instincts from,' via the navel or '*pulanggi*'.³⁴ I have previously felt strange about being in a particular place and then later been told I was in men's country, for example. Nothing happened this time however: the sun kept shining and the birds twittering, so I took this as not receiving any objections. I tentatively waded into the pool then joyously submerged my overheated body. A few large tadpoles ducked out of my way.

The disallowing of photography at certain sacred sites or 'sensitive aspects' of Uluru and Kata Tjuta prevents them becoming 'visually objectified or captured ... endlessly reproduced and recaptured' representations of the tourist gaze.³⁵ To Aboriginal people a painting is more than a representation of the dreaming it expresses: it is (the connection of the artist to) that dreaming, that place. The visual image is not taken lightly and it is understandable that the Anangu do not want tourists snapping away at their most revered spiritual places. Alongside the requests not to photograph the sacred aspects of Uluru, there are gentle suggestions that it is a multi-sensory experiential place, which does not exist solely for its spectacle. The Anangu traditional owners³⁶ and management team of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park encourage visitors to Uluru to appreciate that its appearance is in fact less significant than what it feels like—'the real thing is listening to everything'—by offering generous, free information through the Cultural Centre,

³⁴ Muecke, 2004, *op. cit.*, p170

³⁵ Urry, 1995, *op. cit.*, p133

³⁶ Uluru belongs to the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people, who together call themselves Anangu.

pamphlets received on entry to the park, signs along the walking tracks and even a free daily walk guided by an Aboriginal ranger. Strangely, the disallowing of photography at some places seemed to have the effect of encouraging many tourists, who arrived with multiple visual recording devices, to take more photos, or for photography to become the primary activity or focus, at the points where it *is* permitted. There is no prescribed role for the visitor at these sites—she is the anomaly amidst an ecosystem that is ancient and self-contained, so tourism has created ‘activities’: photography, viewing (and photographing) the sunrise and sunset over the rock, ‘doing a walk’, shopping (for souvenirs, Aboriginal art and crafts at the Cultural Centre) and of course, climbing the Rock.

I appreciate that the awkward, sometimes ignorant amblings of visitors to Uluru are an attempt to get to know (or at least, see) the country. I do understand the urge to climb an amazing rock when I see one—it is an obvious way of participating physically in the place, an endeavor to encompass its vastness that looking alone cannot satisfy. (And the Anangu men do climb Uluru, but as a sacred rite of passage, a highly considered act). But with signs everywhere as they now are, politely pleading with the tourist not to climb the rock, I was a little flabbergasted by the blatant lack of interest (defiance?) of some visitors in abiding by the law of the place. The act of climbing Uluru by white Australian visitors seemed to imply an attitude of ‘your law doesn’t matter as much or is not as valid as our sport’, which felt to me like an act of perpetuating colonialism.

From descriptions of some of the Tjukurpa stories at the Cultural Centre, I tried to get a sense of the country from the Anangu perspective. The comprehension of the physical sites around Uluru *as* the ancestral beings themselves, as described by the Tjukurpa (or “dreaming”: the traditional Law laid down during the Creation Time that explains existence and guides daily life)³⁷ was a challenging concept for me. The idea of a python woman (Kuniya) having an impassioned vengeful tantrum that caused the dints in the rock and poisoned the surrounding trees³⁸ was far-fetched to conceive as a geological, literal ‘reality’. Stephen Muecke suggests that we are not meant to take the “dreaming” as overt fact, however, when he likens it to ‘the talk which we call poetry’.³⁹ Neither is it so intangible or esoteric as a ‘dream’ though, and is certainly not, as Liam

³⁷ ‘An Insight into Uluru: The Mala Walk and the Mutitjulu Walk’ (booklet for visitors), Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Krim Benterrak, Stephen Muecke and Paddy Roe, Reading the Country, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1984, p14

Campbell points out, ‘limited to a moment in time’, as ‘*Dreamtime*’ might imply.⁴⁰ The dreaming spans from the ancient, mythological past, endures into the present and future and dwells in the land, in places. Muecke, from his recording and theorising of Nyigina man Paddy Roe’s dreaming in relation to his country, the Roebuck Plains in Northwest Australia, understood the dreaming not as ‘a set of beliefs which is becoming lost because it is no longer valid’. Rather, he perceived the dreaming as a ‘way of talking, of seeing, of knowing, and a set of practices, which is obtuse, as mysterious and beautiful as any poetry.’⁴¹

After several days of playing the Tjukurpa creation stories through my imagination, whilst walking, dancing and exploring the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, I started to almost glimpse a sense of the land being formed by and becoming these magical ancestral beings, or “Tjukuritja”. It was by engaging sensorially and seeing the country with imagination and heart that this breadth of perception became possible. It was similar to perceiving the place as Deleuze’s ‘smooth space,’⁴² but with the addition of a sort of whole-bodied appreciation, perhaps something close even to love. Immersed in this place and in the space of Anangu Tjukurpa and keeping my heart and imagination open, I felt that I might have caught a tiny multi-sensory glimpse of the Anangu perception of the country.

Two Snakes

I went on the ‘Mala Walk’ at Uluru one morning, guided by an Aboriginal ranger. I talked to the ranger and his little boy in between the stop-points and afterwards. I confessed I had swum in the waterhole and asked if it was okay. The ranger seemed amused at my intrepidity, compared to the more distanced approach of most other tourists here (perhaps), and said with a grin, it was okay as long as I didn’t get caught! He also thanked me for reminding him about that waterhole—it was the one the locals from nearby community Mutitjulu went swimming in and he might take his boy there this afternoon.

Caught by whom or what? I wondered afterwards.

⁴⁰ Liam Campbell, Darby: One Hundred Years of Life in a Changing Culture, ABC Books & Warlpiri Media, 2006, p9

⁴¹ Benterrak, Muecke and Roe, 1984, p14

⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, 1998
See Chapter 2: ‘Immersion’

I went back to the waterhole for the third time in three consecutive days and I have to admit I felt a bit gluttonous going in for a dip again; after all, I was in the desert—maybe I could just experience being hot without relieving it, escaping from it. Despite these voices in my head, I entered the pool, tentatively as usual at first, then relaxing, becoming more confident and swimming into the corners of the waterhole, even into one end that I had instinctively shied away from the other days. Just as I headed blissfully in that direction, I saw a snake in the water, a long dark shape moving gracefully beneath my feet, then very close to my legs. I bolted out of there, shaking the serenity of the scene with my panicky, clumsy splashing. I did not know if it was a poisonous snake, but I knew it did not want me in its pool. I left the waterhole as ominous clouds were darkening the sky.

Later at the Cultural Centre I ran into the ranger who asked me if I had been to the waterhole again. I told him about the snake and asked what sort of water snake it may have been. To my surprise, he did not know and suggested I ask at the information desk just there. The staff searched all the files on local fauna and pronounced with bewilderment that there were no water snakes in the area. Or eels. Just the ancestral (mythological) water snake Wanampi that was honored at the Mutitjulu waterhole, around the corner from my swimming place. (Maybe you saw Wanampi! the young ranger joked.) It could have been a land snake going for a swim, they surmised, but it would be on the surface of the water, not down beneath my feet. Then the ranger looked away, moving on to something else.

Other mythological snakes: Liru the poisonous snake and Kuniya the python are major players in the creation story forming the landscape of Uluru, their mighty battle creating marks and formations in the rock as visual evidence of their continuing presence in the area around the waterholes. Perhaps I encountered Wanampi or Liru, warning me to back off?

The second snake that affected my journey was an elegant black creature crossing the road in front of my rapidly moving car. The next moment I had run over it—I saw it buckle and writhe in my rear-view mirror. I bit my lip, sorrow crossed my heart and guilt landed in my gut. In that order.

I realised that my presence is destructive, my pleasure causes harm to my environment. The thousands of litres of fuel I was burning, the hundreds of ants I disturbed each time I pitched my tent and now the obliteration of a magnificent animal that belonged here much more than I did. I

had felt more than a little foolish the day before as the words emerged from my mouth, explaining to a ranger that I was sensitive to and careful of the environment I traverse...when I had unwittingly been on a sacred songline path, doing my whitefella dancing there... No idea. Just a clumsy white human like all the other tourists I had been inwardly criticising. Oh well, about time I accepted that.

After running over the snake, I saw endless debris from tyres along the roadside. They all started to look reptilian to me and I wondered if I had in fact imagined the snake. Both of them—the water-snake also. Were they mere desert illusions, like the elusive dance of the mirage ever shimmering on the road ahead?

Noticing my whiteness

Widely recognised as a feminist writer and poet, Adrienne Rich begins to speak of her privilege as a white woman in her essay 'Notes Towards a Politics of Location.' Having established her standing as a writer through her engagement with issues of sex and gender, Rich realises in this essay that she was in fact 'defined as white before [she] was defined as female'. Rich continues:

To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It means recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go.⁴³

As I observed in the dance at the base of Uluru, my skin appeared out of place here. It appeared white to me on this trip around the Northern Territory more emphatically than ever before. Against the red earth and among the Aboriginal people, my white skin made me feel like a foreigner. With this feeling came the realisation that, in spite of my recent explorations that had caused some unsettling of my sense of place, in my Melbourne life I can (and do) usually assume my inclusion in the category of 'normal'—with all the privileges this entails. Anthropologist and social critic Ghasson Hage explores Australia's desire for a 'white nation' and questions whether this desire is limited to white 'racists'. Hage suggests that white Australians who consider themselves to be 'multiculturalists' may in fact share some key assumptions with the white 'racists'.⁴⁴ Hage uses the term 'White' instead of 'Anglo' or 'Anglo-celtic' because he has found it to more accurately reflect the dominant mode of self-categorisation among white Australians,

⁴³ Adrienne Rich, 2003, *op. cit.*, p32

⁴⁴ I expand upon Hage's argument and Thompson's discussion thereof later in this chapter.

whether at a conscious or unconscious level. As dance/ theatre practitioner and writer Anne Thompson notes in her response to Hage's White Nation, the term 'white'

also has salience in this country because of the White Australia Policy. This policy produced a notion of an official Australian population type, the "white Australian". These were the Australians who were welcomed as "official Australians" with the rights of those who belong.⁴⁵

Hage argues that whiteness itself is 'a fantasy position of cultural dominance born out of the history of European expansion'.⁴⁶ While Hage is predominantly concerned with white Australian attitudes to 'ethnic', non-white immigrants, with occasional extension of these attitudes to include Aboriginal people, my inquiry into what it means to be a white Australian in relation to this country most frequently seeks to distinguish my experience from that of an Aboriginal person, though also refers to the distinction of my experience from any other non-white inhabitant of the country. These distinctions are not intended to reinforce this separateness, but to acknowledge that I cannot 'speak for' an Indigenous experience. My acknowledgement of and attention to the particularity of my whiteness is indeed seeking to redress its 'normality', which Richard Dyer explains is so ingrained that:

...Whiteness is felt to be the human condition ... it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it... white people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account of other people's; white people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image... White power ... reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill, and overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal.⁴⁷

Whilst to white people white bodies are so normal as to be seen as almost lacking ethnicity, to Aboriginal Australians the presence of white bodies is a very visible constant reminder that, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson notes, '[their] lands were invaded and stolen, [their] ancestors massacred and enslaved, [their] children taken away and [their] rights denied, and these acts of

⁴⁵ Anne Thompson, 'DIY? Ecologies of Practice' in Writings on Dance 21, Melbourne, 2001/02, p28

⁴⁶ Ghasson Hage, White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society, Pluto Press, Annandale, NSW, 1998, pp19-20

⁴⁷ Richard Dyer, White, 1997, pp9-10, cited in Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Tiddas talkin' up to the White Woman: When Higgins et al. took on Bell', in Michelle Grossman (ed.), 2003, Blacklines, p66

terror forged white identity in this country.’⁴⁸ White corporeality, Moreton-Robinson continues, ‘is thus one of the myriad ways in which relations between the colonising past and present are omnipresent.’ The omnipresence of past and present is intrinsic to the Indigenous sense of place or country and is one of the key ideas I have attempted to evoke in my performance works. In these works I have referred to the multiple layers of time that are still present in a place, although non-Aboriginal people often do not see beneath the immediate layer of (whitefella-dominated) modernity. My insistence on my own whiteness is part of my concern to create works that remind audiences of the continuing impingement of colonial history upon the present. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, editors of Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader state that:

the link between past exploitation and present affluence, and indeed the deeds of past colonialists and oneself, is one which white people have found difficult to deal with in constructive ways ... White guilt is one of the least productive responses to this history.⁴⁹

I wonder: can I admit to feeling this guilt and use it ‘constructively’ (or at least creatively)?

The Kinaesthetic Uncanny

In Melbourne, in my ‘still landing’ phase on return from Europe, I had developed a movement sequence derived from my sensory-kinaesthetic memories of several European sites, which became the work *Foreign/ Familiar* performed at Dancehouse. I tried to be quite insular during its making, so that, for example, the bush around my house in Eltham did not ‘seep’ into my movement. But when it was ‘made’, I traveled to the Central Australian desert. One of my intentions for the trip was to try to dance this sequence, which was a stylised composition of my embodied memories of Europe, in relation to the Australian desert. Recalling the activity from Frank van de Ven’s Body/Landscape workshop, when we had danced our imagined place *in* the green meadow of the Pyrenees, eventually allowing both the imagined place and the actual site we were in to inform the movement, I now overlaid the European-derived sequence onto the Australian desert. One morning I set up my video camera on its tripod in an area off the road outside Yulara with Uluru visible in the distance, laid my weathered yoga mat on the ground and did some stretches among the spindly saltbushes. I then rehearsed my sequence, re-locating the choreography to this new space and remembering specific details from places in Europe to conjure particular qualities in my movements. I gradually also allowed features of my present

⁴⁸ Moreton-Robinson, 2003, p67

⁴⁹ Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (eds.), Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader, 2003, p7

environment to permeate my body and affect my movements. After awhile the European-based images I was working from adapted, almost without mental decision-making, to find ‘equivalents’ in this drastically different environment from the places the images had come from:

On the flat plains in the foreground of Uluru’s iconic contour, the fluttering pair of butterflies from the Pyrenees that my elbows were imitating merged with the buzz of desert flies. The sense of lost-ness and irreparable foreignness that had driven me into uncoordinated panic in Aveiro, Portugal, was easy enough to find here, my soft white body trying awkwardly to acquaint with prickly saltbushes in the vast never-never of red country. The deep familiarity on a sort of primordial level was there too: remembering the French full moon from my stance on the hill and touching the stone walls inside the five thousand-year-old Spanish dolmen seemed to inform my body with a quality almost adequate for sensing the profound force of Uluru itself. When I was moving from and with the river at Divčí Kamen, the ruined Celtic castle in Czech, I noticed an electrical storm rumbling on the distant horizon and let the crackle of lightning merge with the watery surges of my imagined river, in a powerful doubling of places and elemental imagery.

I let the sequence be changed by my present surroundings, sometimes oscillating cleanly between the two sites; at other times one world folded into the other, or each somehow accommodated the other with the mediation of my body and memory. Sometimes it was more like I was using the already-made dance, with its movement qualities, emotions and shapes driven by experiences of places in Europe, as the medium through which to explore, feel and express this place—as a structure for a locating improvisation. At moments though, it was a more complex and exciting experience of perceiving and dancing in relation to two places at once, which surely is almost the same as *being in* two places at once. I had not only re-located the sequence and its embodied memories, but I was in a state of *trans*-locating or dancing-between-and-both, here and there.

A few days later I visited ‘the Valley of the Winds’ at Kata Tjuta. Kata Tjuta is an Anangu sacred men’s site, which I knew very little about, so I was not expecting to feel very much on the subtle levels here, but I had a great walk anyway and was relieved to find far fewer tourists traversing this path than at Uluru. Alone and, as far as I could tell, unseen by other people, I stopped to play with the winds in the valley. I sensed the warm breeze against the exposed parts of my skin, blowing my loose clothing, then imagined wind infiltrating my body and this light impression gently ‘pushing’ body parts in various directions at its whim. I continued to move from the qualities of whisking and whistling, gusting and whispering, following pathways initiated by the

passage of air, until it transitioned from an external force to a sense of wind channeling through my body and then my body moving *as* wind into the space around me. Wind and body as one breath, one unending motion.

From this wind-initiated warm-up, I tried dancing the *Foreign/ Familiar* sequence on the rocky path. This time the slippery stones from the Pyrenees stream became the red rocks on the track, my hands reached for these rocks, gathering them instead of my blanket in the chill wind of the moonlit French hill, then the sun (instead of the moon) made me drop my rocks and stand in humble awe. Tripping over my feet (from my clumsy curb moment in Porto) came easily on the irregular gradient of the rocky hill, as I mouthed incomprehensible words at the black twiggy trees, trying to explain, but not knowing the language, as in the Spanish cafe... pulling my hair out in parched sun-struck delirium blended with the exasperation of not being understood. And the river spirit from Dìvcí Kamen wove together with the spirited winds whistling through my body and the valley.

What was this doubling of place or ‘trans-locating’ and what does it, could it represent?

It may simply be an interesting choreographic tool, inspiring some new qualities to add to my repertoire and an engaging focus derived from the effort of imagining two contrasting environs, but I suspected it had the potential to symbolise/ actualise more than that.



trans-locating in relation to Kata Tjuta and European sites

I began to wonder if my employment of the practice of trans-locating could correspond to the white Australian mode of relating to Australian places: of (consciously or unconsciously) superimposing imagined/ remembered Europe over the landscape that is actually here. Although it could refer to the colonial habit of effacing that which was native, and replacing it with the European, I suggest that this dance of two places at once reconfigures the notion of palimpsest: the place is over-written, but without erasing what was/ is already there. Both the imagined/ remembered place *as well as* the actual place are present simultaneously: one does not have to efface the other. That the two places do not always sit easily together (in my dance), but fluctuate, alternate, slip in and out of focus and rub up against each other in a state of dynamic friction, is highly appropriate to this reading of the dance, and to the historical moment.

In Uncanny Australia, Ken Gelder and Jane M Jacobs bring their readers' attention to Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay 'The Uncanny', which examines the sense of place in a changing environment and the anxieties symptomatic of an ongoing process of realignment in the modern world post World War One.⁵⁰ Freud used the German word 'unheimlich' to define the uncanny, as the unfamiliar, strange, inaccessible, unhomely, and the opposite of 'heimlich' meaning home, familiar, accessible place. As Gelder and Jacobs note,

An 'uncanny' experience may occur when one's home is rendered, somehow and in some sense, unfamiliar; one has the experience, in other words, of being in place and 'out of place' simultaneously.⁵¹

It is specifically the combined presence of familiar and unfamiliar that generates the anxiety of uncanny: 'the way one seems to inhabit the other.'⁵² Whilst Freud was referring to the uncanny sense of place in war-torn Europe, Gelder and Jacobs apply his notion to postcolonial Australia and their identification of the white experience. As the colonial blindness to the presence of Aboriginal people is finally becoming de-institutionalised, the familiar is becoming strange.⁵³ The uncanny reminds us 'that a condition of unsettledness folds into this taken-for-granted mode

⁵⁰ Ken Gelder and Jane M Jacobs, Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998, Ch. 2

⁵¹ Ibid., p23

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

Gelder and Jacobs note that this change has been underway since the 1992 Mabo precedent and 1993 Native Title Act overturned the notion of *terra nullius*: now that 'what is ours' is also potentially or even always, already, 'theirs'.

of occupation.’⁵⁴ According to Gelder and Jacobs, the two possibilities for future Australia—‘reconciliation’ and the impossibility of reconciliation—co-exist and flow through each other in ‘a productively unstable dynamic’. They categorise non-Aboriginal Australians as either innocent—in the sense of not being implicated in earlier colonial processes, or guilty—in the sense that ‘all of us’ are drawn into ‘the guilt industry’.⁵⁵ They go further to conclude that the innocent position casts non-Aboriginals as ‘out of place’, uninvolved, while the guilty position casts [them/ us] as, ‘in fact, too involved, too embedded in place, in the sense that even the most recent immigrant inherits the (mis)fortunes of Australia’s colonial past.’⁵⁶ They then suggest that these categories may not be separate:

In postcolonial Australia, however, it may well be that both of these positions are inhabited at the same time: one is innocent (‘out of place’) and guilty (‘in place’) simultaneously.⁵⁷

Gelder and Jacobs’ theorising of Freud’s notion of the Uncanny in relation to postcolonial Australia is in striking accord with my experience of dancing *this* place, and *that* place, at once. The ‘unfamiliar familiarity’ described in Uncanny Australia assisted me to realise the potential relevance of this doubling of place that I have explored in both Chapter 4: ‘Empty?’ and in this chapter. My practice of dancing two places in overlap could be seen to *represent* the uncanny experience of white Australians’ relation to Australian place—that is, the innocence/ guilt and out of place/ in place simultaneity. But in the moment of performing the dance of trans-locating, I am also actually *having* an embodied kinaesthetic experience of the uncanny inhabitation of two distinct places that are distant from one another at once. The process of recollection of movement stimuli from ‘there’ is (at times) so vivid that in some ways I *am* there—I am in a space of embodied imagining of that place, intensely present to specific aspects of that place, whilst the process of perceiving ‘here’ means I am strongly present here also.

Anthropologist Naomi Smith in her article, ‘Dance and the Ancestral Landscape’, reports that the Kugu Ngancharra people (traditional occupants of the Kendall and Holroyd Rivers area, Cape York Peninsula) believe dance is the integrating element in re-connecting with the ancestors, who

⁵⁴ Ibid., p24

⁵⁵ Ibid., p24

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

are inextricably bound to the land itself.⁵⁸ The act of dancing is thus vital for the well being of these clans, in that it enables a continuing, reconstituting relationship with the land and the ancestors, even when the dances are performed in locations and situations far from their historical context, now that many Kugu Ngancharra people are spatially removed from their traditional country.⁵⁹ Smith argues that ‘the Ancestral landscape may be recreated wherever and whenever it is ritually invoked by the body through Ancestral ritual modes.’⁶⁰ This ability of dance to ‘transport’ the dancer to the place the dance comes from and relates to, may be more widespread among Australian Aboriginal groups than Smith’s study of Kugu Ngancharra people. Franca Tamisari emphasises that to the Yolngu people of North-east Arnhem Land, dancing establishes real relationship between people, country and ancestors.⁶¹ “Human movement”, Tamisari cites Best, “does not *symbolize* reality, it *is* reality”.⁶² Warlpiri elder, ‘Darby’, the subject of Liam Campbell’s book, “‘knew” the country and had grown up walking in the places referred to in the *Jukurrpa*. When he danced as the emu in the *Jardiwarnpa* [fire ceremony], he was taken to those places in his mind’⁶³ (whilst he presumably performed the dance elsewhere).

From the above sources, I do not know whether the Kugu Ngancharra or other Indigenous Australian dancers relate consciously and specifically to the actual place in which they perform *as well as* to the country they and their dances are from, or if the dancers’ relationship to the (live, actual) place they perform in is incidental. It could be surmised however, that Indigenous Australians also have an uncanny experience of their country. They live at once in the country of their Tjukurpa/ Jukurrpa/ Dreaming, where the ancestor spirits continue to play out their epic stories across the land, weaving together people, animals, plants, sites and events, and also in the modern day ‘Australia’ with all its whitefella physical, social, governmental and legal structures grafted upon this ancient land.

‘Soft Edges’

I noticed a road sign warning of ‘Soft Edges’ as I drove my entirely inappropriate rental car up the Tanami Road to visit a friend for a few days at the end of my trip. My friend, who was working for a youth program at Yuendumu, happened to be taking a group of teenage girls on a

⁵⁸ Naomi Smith, ‘Dance and the Ancestral Landscape’, in *Writings on Dance* 20, Melbourne, 2000, p65

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp71-2

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p71

⁶¹ Franca Tamisari, ‘Dancing the Land, the land dances through us’, in *Writings on Dance* 20, 2000, p31

⁶² David Best, *Philosophy and Human Movement*, 1978, in Tamisari, 2000, p31 (original emphasis)

⁶³ Campbell, 2006, p19

Note: The Warlpiri word for Dreaming/ Law is ‘Jukurrpa’, similar but different to ‘Tjukurpa’ further south.

road trip that weekend, to Lajamanu, the next community (a mere six hundred kilometers away), to see a performance by Darwin-based company Tracks and the Lajamanu community. I was lucky enough to accompany them.

My friend laughingly told me that before she arrived in the Aboriginal community of Yuendumu she had thought she was ‘pretty earthy’, but she was still sometimes taken aback by the disregard for hygiene and ‘personal space’ of the Warlpiri people.⁶⁴ I talked to an old man sitting on the concrete outside the gallery, watching him create an incredibly vibrant painting whilst he was saturated in his own urine. (I later found out he is quite a famous artist). An extremely excited little girl dressed in a pink bikini with a lot of mucous gushing from her nostrils met me for the first time with a running jumping, almost-strangling embrace. Feral dogs shuffled through the garbage that was everywhere, then affectionately licked their willing human recipients. Flies gathered around children’s eyes, nostrils and mouths, occasionally ingested. I got in the filthy ‘troopy’ vehicle,⁶⁵ which featured a smashed windscreen and total absence of mirrors, brake-lights or handbrake, with twelve Warlpiri teenage girls squeezed in the back. That was to be the only infrastructure between our fifteen bodies and the desert for the next three forty- to fifty-degree days. I realised I was still rather contained bodily. For the first hour I tried not to lean too much into the sweaty body of the large young man I was sharing the front passenger seat with, who often yelped loudly and gestured suddenly across me in joking distraction of my friend who was driving. My attempt not to lean into the man, but also to prevent my feet from burning with the heat rising from the hole around the gear stick, meant my hips were on an uneven plane, my stiff neck gave me the beginnings of a headache. Better to stop struggling and surrender my accustomed boundaries of bodily space to the inevitable grime.

Hours later I swapped places in the vehicle with one of the girls. I sat/ lay in the back with all the girls sprawled on dirty mattresses, leaned up against each other in a breathing mass of dark limbs, hip-hop style nylon t-shirts and shorts and mischievous smiling faces. Focus shifted from the ‘Dolly’ magazine being passed around to the action outside the windows: a snake, kangaroo, emu, goanna, ‘wedgy’ eagle, bush turkey, giant termite mounds, owls, special rocks, mountains... Often the girls joked around, but a lot of the time they stared silently out the open

⁶⁴ Yuendumu community is situated around the junction of Warlpiri and Anmatyerr country, and is thus inhabited by a mix of Warlpiri and Anmatyerr families (who I could not distinguish between). Lajamanu is firmly on Warlpiri land, as is Mt Theo/ Purturlu where I later made the film, so I tend (probably incorrectly) to call everyone in the area ‘Warlpiri’.

*All names have been changed, to protect the privacy of the individuals mentioned.

⁶⁵ troop carrier, four-wheel drive

windows, hot wind blowing dusty matted hair. We watched hundreds of kilometres of country flying by. No-one complained that it was too hot or uncomfortable, that they were thirsty or hungry or wanted a swim, even after we had encountered delays (enormous puddles on the already-rough dirt road, from recent storms) and it was getting on for two a.m. and the twelfth hour of our cramped journey to Lajamanu (expected to take six or seven hours). They simply fell asleep on top of each other.

The man I had been sitting next to swapped places with my friend and drove most of the way. He was an impeccable, if over-confident, driver, able to spot (and chase) all sorts of wildlife, as well as drive very fast and keep totally in control, deciding which was the optimum part of the road's atrociously bad surface to inhabit each moment. I admired his ability to read the country—close-range features and the entire distant horizon at once—a practiced, perceptive and responsive way of seeing-being, that to him was second nature. He was applying something like my 'stealth practice' to the act of driving and he was far better at it than I am, being able to also concurrently laugh, smoke and banter around.

The girls had been a little shy towards me, but curiosity had the upper hand and they asked me a few questions (most frequently 'Where you from?'). I had also been shy and curious—eager to get to know anything and everything about them and of course particularly their relationships to country. I wouldn't say our conversations flowed easily—what with their spoken English in strong Warlpiri accents, my absolute lack of Warlpiri language, the constant loudness of the troopy's engine, lack of suspension on the rubblely road and the buffeting wind further compounding our mutual shyness. Direct questions rarely seemed to get answered anyway; much more information emerged by just being amongst it all. It was really the extended period of closely shared body space that made us find comfortable co-habitation. (Oh, and my ownership of a camera! They all wanted to be photographed repeatedly and to have a go at being the photographer, so I became highly popular when I brought out this toy.)

Late at night the girl they called 'little crazy one', nestled into me, totally at ease to press her tiny body against a stranger's and fall into a deep sleep. (By this time I had substantially relaxed and had had a glorious day of laughing and country-staring in the heat and discomfort of the back of the troopy with the girls). The girl's skinny yet strong legs, pointy elbows and inquisitive tough little face, now softened in slumber, made me feel intensely maternal. The girls had given me a

skin name, ‘Napangardi’ so that they could make sense of me in relation to their kinship system. I was ridiculously happy amidst the squalor.

We finally arrived at Lajamanu and tumbled out of the troopy to sleep in swags on the ground. There was some inter-family brawl going on in the community that night—there was yelling and a lot of people were running around, although it was well into the small hours. There was nothing we could do, however, being outsiders here, and where we lay was a little away from the main town, so we figured we would be out of the firing line. There was no sign of the unrest the next day. The performance that evening was a wonderful event involving members of all ages of the Lajamanu community, facilitated by dance theatre company Tracks. The traditional men’s and women’s dances were combined with new hip-hop style re-interpretations of the Milpirri (Spring storms) story by the youth, with spectacular iridescent paintings as a backdrop, illuminated in the firelight of the ceremony.⁶⁶



our camp at Lajamanu

We traveled back to Yuendumu along the Tanami Road in a loose convoy with another vehicle—transporting some Warlpiri elders and a couple of toddlers, driven by a middle-aged Warlpiri man. At one stage, the other troopy disappeared from the road and we realised the driver had ‘gone hunting’: chasing some emus with a shotgun out the window of the car. Failing to shoot an emu, I understood that he got out of the troopy and grabbed a bush turkey, breaking its neck by hand. When we caught up with him further down the road he showed off the large bloody-necked

⁶⁶ Tracks is a Darwin-based dance company which facilitates large-scale outdoor performances, sometimes in and with remote Aboriginal communities.

bird and then threw it on the roof rack, head hanging limply off the side. At a (much-anticipated) lunch-stop at about five p.m. Sunday, we watched thousands of white and gray feathers fly across the flat red country as the bird was plucked and prepared by a Warlpiri woman and a Kardiya (white) woman. The kids ran around chasing each other with the head and the teenage girls took turns holding the wings to their shoulders like angels.



Bush turkey for lunch!

Watching the turkey's feathers littering the ground made me think about the appropriateness of this debris and wonder about the apparent lack of differentiation that the Warlpiri people have between (what I saw as) the 'natural', 'appropriate' waste and the 'inappropriate' (in my eyes) litter of bottles, cans, plastic, appliances left scattered across the desert. Most things do corrode in the desert, eventually, but plastic and fabricated metal will take a long time anywhere to merge into the earth. I postulated that their perspective might be that these things are all part of the world (now) and this country is the world. In the past, before access to these whitefella-processed materials, everything that was discarded would re-incorporate itself into the earth. When Paddy Roe threw his drink can out the car window, Stephen Muecke hypothesised 'Maybe these blackfellas are just dispersing the rubbish, as they go, so that it can reintegrate, while it seems whitefellas want their rubbish to accumulate in a rubbish tip. They want to gather it all together to make a really big stink.'⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Muecke, 2004, *op. cit.*, p49

As Benterrak, Muecke and Roe have also described, Aboriginal people have often integrated the whitefella objects that have arrived in their communities in innovative ways, as a necessary adaptive practice, a 'bricolage'. They give examples of the use of barbed wire as clothes lines, forty-four gallon drums as fire-places, adapting cars in ways which defy the 'mystique of the engineer' (as is brilliantly exemplified in Warlpiri Media's 'Bush Mechanics' TV series)⁶⁸ and even in one case plastic mixing bowls becoming fashionable headwear among the women.⁶⁹ The modern additions that are not useful, that is, the rubbish, can also perhaps (in their eyes) be incorporated into the country. It's just that it stays visible for longer than the traditional 'natural' materials. Muecke also suggests that Aboriginal people tend not to judge anomalies in their country, such as feral animals, as necessarily 'bad' or wrong, as (whitefella) 'ecofascists' would, but consider them to have 'a right to live like anything else and on this basis being connectible to us'.⁷⁰ So maybe to the Warlpiri people, rubbish is not very visible or outstanding as a negative anomaly. It's all part of the world. And perhaps it would be no more appropriate if it were underground, neatly out-of-sight, in whitefella style, because underground is as much part of the world as above ground.

Early next morning I drove back along the Tanami out of Yuendumu towards Alice, to catch my flight home. I stopped and took a photo of my now-weathered bare feet standing on the red earth and remembered my first impression of the desert a couple of years earlier (near Lyndhurst, South Australia), that cliché that I had held as truth: the *harshness*. My initial response arriving in Yuendumu only a few days ago had been similar—despite fore-warnings by my friend who lived there, I had been a little shocked at the third-world appearance of the community and its people. I recalled how I had overcome my sense of the Lyndhurst desert being an uninviting, hostile place, by my surrender to its 'harshness'—allowing myself to melt into its intense heat, its insects, rough, prickly surfaces and the subsequent, almost immediate experience of it as a nurturing, exuberant place. Again I had 'softened' my (urban, middle-class, whitefella) 'edges' these past few days with the Warlpiri people on this wonderful epic road trip to Lajamanu and the 'harshness' had given way to an incredibly heart-warming engulfment.

⁶⁸ 'Bush Mechanics', Warlpiri Media Association and Australian Film Commission, 2002, screened on ABC TV

⁶⁹ Benterrak, Muecke and Roe, 1984, *op. cit.*, p148-151

⁷⁰ Muecke, 2004, p50



I wrote the above notes from the strongly contrasted space of the airplane, transitioning rapidly from the third world to the first. Suddenly I was among predominantly white faces, neatly clothed bodies. My cheap ticket took me from Alice via Sydney to Melbourne and the fast-paced Sydney business passengers accentuated my culture shock—ordered bodies, boundaries sturdily intact. My middle-class boundaries and self-consciousness returning with a jolt in this spatially controlled environment, I became aware that although I showered with soap and shampoo in the middle of last night on return to my friend's place after the twelve-hour trip back from Lajamanu, I still had orange dust encrusted in the pores of my skin and throughout my clothes. Possibly I stank; I had on some of the clothes that were in my rucksack on the rancid floor of the troopie with that indistinct slime these past three days. Oh well. Occasionally as I scrawled my notes I laughed like a madwoman to myself, in memory of some gorgeous moments of the last few days: my 'tap-dance' barefoot in the clay-mud created by the dripping tap at the water tank, chasing Jakamarra, the most beautiful little boy I had ever seen, shining with naughtiness and embodied sense of self-in-place, snot hanging from his nose... Holding hands with elder Japangardi (my brother by skin name) as he said warmly, 'You are welcome' [to our country]... Allowing my body to be dragged by the warm fast-flowing waters over rocks in the sometimes-crocodile-infested river to the sound of children's squeals of delight at the basic joy of being in water...

I missed being Napangardi already.

Then I fell asleep on the person next to me.

My stories are sentimental, through the rose-coloured lens of a brief visit and a desire to like and be liked. There are many humbugs⁷¹ in the community life of Yuendumu and Lajamanu, evident

⁷¹ Humbug is a commonly used word meaning 'bother' or 'hassle', both as a noun and a verb: He humbugged me for hours to borrow my hat.

even in this short period of immersion, stemming from the loss of the traditional subsistence lifestyle and the fact that this has not been replaced by employment or significant roles for people (particularly men) to contribute to their community. I have no right or authority, however, to comment upon these humbugs.

The media explosion of material relating to Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, which led to the Howard Government's controversial Intervention in 2007 occurred predominantly in the two years after this, my first visit to Yuendumu (although some social/medical workers, academics and community elders had written about and attempted to bring public attention to the problems for many years). Like most Australians, I was shocked and disturbed by the extent of sexual violence reported in the communities, because this had not been evident to me in Yuendumu. I had perceived Yuendumu to be a vibrant community despite the humbugs. This was a strong culture that was definitely not fading away: famed and proud of their achievements in healing the petrol-sniffing addiction, allowing of new cultural influences—hip-hop styles borrowed from black America that they hold in high 'cool' esteem, as well as respecting and upholding the traditional ways of relating to country, learning their own language in school, painting and selling wonderful works of art, and, best of all, caring deeply for each other. This was the most striking and heart-warming aspect of this community: their spirited humour and their looking after of each other. It was apparent to me even on such a brief first encounter, that each sector of society, each rung of the family, is responsible for some aspect of life for the whole community and each sector is looked after by another. I am sure this traditional kinship system has some modern ruptures, but these were not clear to me. The Warlpiri people generously include Kardiya residents and visitors in their network of care as well. Non-Aboriginal workers in Yuendumu seemed to genuinely appreciate being there and working with the Warlpiri and Anmatyerr and in exchange gaining a rare and valuable insight into a culture we city-dwellers barely know anything about. I only hope the exposure of Indigenous problems by the media and government bodies is a starting point towards assisting these people in ways that are empowering and that by listening to and learning from 'Yapa' (Aboriginal people), positive relationships, better communication and understandings grow between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. At least we non-Aboriginal Australians are now traversing the difficult terrain of colonial aftermath and (hopefully) taking some responsibility for this debt.⁷²

⁷² I do not mean to minimise or cast doubt upon the severity or seriousness of child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities, but simply state that I did not witness evidence of it, and that I did witness tremendous warmth and caring between people, contrary to the perception cast by much recent media.

Healing Acts

Back in Eltham, Victoria, I met for a second time a Wiradjuri elder at a gathering at Lenister Farm. She inhabits and was an early founder of the Aboriginal (Tent) Embassy in Canberra. The ‘embassy’ was erected on Australia Day 1972 as a constant protest against the Government’s treatment of the Aboriginal people of Australia—its refusal to recognise sovereignty, the continuing genocide, or even to say ‘sorry’ for the removal of children: the ‘Stolen Generations’.⁷³ As Paul Dwyer points out, the ‘inspired piece of improvisation’ that was the erection of the Aboriginal Embassy, by its very existence ‘enacts the paradox whereby “Aborigines are treated like aliens in their own land”.’⁷⁴ This ‘Aunty’⁷⁵ is also a proponent of the Sacred Fire ceremony, which she has performed all over Australia and at several international locations, as a healing, cleansing ritual for the specific place and people where it is performed. I had first met this Aunty at the Women Elders Gathering (in the Otways, Southern Victoria) and had heard her talk about taking the Sacred Fire to England, to the very beach “Captain Cook” had set out from. By some incredible chance, she had found some Eucalypt (gum) leaves (required to light the fire) and their little party had performed a Sacred Fire ceremony on the pebble beach, with the intention of cleansing the origins of the Invasion. They had also jokingly planted an Aboriginal flag on the beach in a mock territorial claim, in a gesture typical of Aboriginal ‘black humour’. There had then been some brushing with the ‘Bobbies’, the police and a fire engine turning up to extinguish the reported fire, which had by then disappeared without a trace under the pebbles.

The elder picked up from that point in the story and told me about her journey in Britain, in particular about being in Ireland, attending an anti-uranium festival, where a well-known ‘Uncle’ was presented with an award for his work in Australia against uranium mining. It was there that she had heard about the Irish Fire Woman. Legend told that Saint Brigid, who was ordained as a bishop but was associated also with the Celtic Goddess Brigid, kept a flame of peace and healing alight in Kildare, and after her death this flame was kept alight by nuns for several hundred years. Puritan Oliver Cromwell finally extinguished St Brigid’s fire as a symbolic stamping out of pagan practices around 1650 during the Protestant Reformation.⁷⁶ ‘Aunty’ again miraculously found gum leaves on her way to St Brigid’s cathedral and she lit a Sacred Fire there, re-igniting St

⁷³ Kevin Rudd’s government has finally rectified this last point with the official Apology in February 2008.

⁷⁴ Paul Dwyer, 2006, ‘Re-embodying the Public Sphere’ in Gay McAuley (ed.), *Unstable Ground*, pp194-5

⁷⁵ Older Aboriginal people are often affectionately called ‘Aunty... (their first name)’ or ‘Uncle...’.

⁷⁶ St Brigid website, <http://kildare.ie/local-history/kildare/saint-brigid.htm> viewed April 2008

Brigid's flame, with the intention of bringing peace and cleansing to the land. A week later, they heard some major news of Northern Ireland's liberation from British rule.

She also recounted how she had met a man in London Parliament, who was a descendent of the only survivor of the Burke and Wills expedition. This descendent made the effort to approach and thank 'Aunty' and her Aboriginal companions, because it had been due to the care of Aboriginal people that his ancestor had survived.

Some sort of re-balancing is underway in all of these small acts and incidents. A sort of re-negotiating of history, now. A belief in the continuing co-existence of the past within the present is a premise underlying these actions—an enmeshing of all times at once. The response of emotional gratitude from an overwhelming number of Indigenous Australians to Kevin Rudd's historic apology to the Stolen Generations on February 13th 2008 was a perfect example of the importance of acknowledging the wrongs of the past to the Aboriginal people. It is not thought that these 'healings' of history make the injustices of the past go away, but that they have to do with the well-being of now. Much of the work of elders (and others) like 'Aunty' is not about the past at all, but (peacefully and persistently) demands justice for present and future Aboriginal Australians and, inextricably, for their country.

Unsettling

As introduced earlier, Ghasson Hage analyses the attitudes and experiences of White Australians in relation to 'multiculturalism', and to the on-going unsettling of what he terms the 'White nation' fantasy, as even the majority position of White is threatened. Hage convincingly exposes that both White 'racists' and White 'multiculturalists' share the conviction that they are 'masters of national space.'⁷⁷ Hage identifies the 'governing right' assumed by White Australians: the belief that it is up to them to decide who stays in and who is kept out of the national space.⁷⁸ In this nation structured around a White culture, Aboriginal people and non-White 'ethnics' are 'merely national objects to be moved or removed according to a White will.'⁷⁹ Hage sees multiculturalism as yet another White construct that is 'merely a different way of reinforcing

⁷⁷ Ghasson Hage, 1998, *op. cit.*

I am using Hage's capitals 'W' in 'White', to indicate I am referring to his category of White, which he argues includes many non-Anglos, who also (largely unconsciously) define themselves through 'the White nation fantasy'. (pp 19-20)

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p17

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p18

White power.’⁸⁰ By a close analysis of the politics of ‘tolerance’ by the mainstream, whom he terms the ‘good White nationalists’, he reveals how ‘we’, just like those ‘we’ consider to be ‘racists’, also assume the ‘right to tolerate’ non-White immigrants and Aboriginal people.⁸¹

Anne Thompson, in an extension of Hage’s identification of white Australians’ ‘governing right’ assumption, points out that the challenge of Aboriginal land claims has fueled the dislodgement of this assumption in recent years and thereby unsettled white Australians’ sense of place.⁸² If we assume the nation to be our home, Thompson continues, ‘how do we honour prior claims to land and demands for compensation which challenge the fact that we built our ‘home’ on the back of attempts to eliminate the indigenous population?’⁸³



A response to Thompson’s question might lie in the notion of ‘unsettlement.’ Gelder and Jacobs use the word ‘unsettlement’ to paint a picture similar to the one I infer through my practice of ‘locating’. ‘Unsettlement’ also encompasses the notion I have adopted from Miwon Kwon, of ‘belonging-in-transience,’⁸⁴ that involves engaging with and inhabiting the struggle, dwelling within an endless (or very long) process and living with its tensions and contradictions. Gelder and Jacobs seek to ‘give unsettlement an activating function’, suggesting that ‘reconciliation is never a fully realisable category; it can never be completely settled’.⁸⁵ They thus propose ‘unsettlement’ as a ‘productive feature of the postcolonial landscape.’⁸⁶ It is the movement

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p20

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p78

⁸² Thompson, 2001/02, *op. cit.*, p28

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p28

⁸⁴ Kwon, 2002, *op. cit.*, p8

⁸⁵ Gelder and Jacobs, 1998, *op. cit.*, p xvi

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, intro. p. xvi

between—this soliciting, folding, unpredictable, perpetual motion between features of the postcolonial socio-political-spatial landscape that is highlighted by Gelder and Jacobs as the pertinent, ‘most activated’ zone to dwell within: in the locating. The desire that the intrinsic polarities within Australian society—united nation/ divided nation, innocence/ guilt, modern/ sacred, in place/ out of place, etc. —will somehow simplify or integrate into peaceful, synthesised, stable rest is a fantasy. The contradictory forces implicit within each coupling keep them ever moving. What choice is there but to co-exist with the mobile, conflictual forces that are inherent in this nation and our Australian identities? What is more obvious than to move with them?

The uncanny kinaesthetic feeling I get in the moments when I am dancing in relation to two places at once sends a shiver tingling up my spine, even in the arid heat. Instead of the ‘anxiety’ Freud attributed to the conditions of the uncanny, I am elated by a sense of the wild potential of life—the slippage between worlds, beyond what is known and bounded. I find this cusp between two places exhilarating, potently alive. Similarly, I find my increasing ability to read the country as an ancient and enduring Aboriginal place beneath and beyond all of the ‘developed’ whitefella infrastructure, actually *enriches* my experience of being-here. Rather than being disturbed by the unsettling of my previous (ignorant?) assumption of ‘it’s ours’, I am seeing-feeling-imagining with the knowledge that these are storied and highly inspirited places, which enhances my appreciation of their beauty and manifold unknown, unfamiliar depths. This realisation of course diminishes my personal significance in relation to Australia and from the perspective of a history dating back to the beginning of human time, the significance of all immigrant races in the last two centuries. But from this orientation of a broader view, it feels like there is a greater chance of becoming present here, with an acceptance of the unknown that exists all around me. Acceptance of the unfamiliar other—that it exists, that I will never fully know it or control it and that it will always be there in some form—can turn the overwhelming ambivalence Freud ascribed to the uncanny into a broader, deeper, more open potential experience of the world. As Thompson puts it, the ‘only way forward is to be in this place, to inhabit “not knowing” as we meet the “other”. But we must meet “the other” and listen.’⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Thompson, 2001/02, p36

7. Sorry

Be transparent like the water like the wind. Nothing stuck. All I can do is keep it flowing: feeling, expressing, releasing. Then surely there will sometimes be space for spontaneity, laughter even. It will never all be gone, returned to a clean slate, but is this ever so? I howl at the waves' never-ending immensity, which roars back. Power, spirit, uncontainable dance. She heard me. She is everywhere.

As indicated in the 'Locating' chapter, each of the chapters of this exegesis use physical states as their titles. This concluding chapter is no exception. It will suggest that 'sorry', which is used in

the sense of the Aboriginal meaning of sorry—grieving—can be a corporeal condition (or a range of conditions). The chapter includes the personal experience of the loss of my baby, Charlotte Rose, who was stillborn in May 2006. From my acute corporeal experience of grief at this loss, I become more conscious of the repressed sorrow that I perceive as an underlying presence in postcolonial Australia and which affects the process of ‘locating’ in relation to Australian sites. This chapter draws upon other white Australian writers’ and artists’ expressions of grief in relation to the land, linked to a sense of colonial debt to Aboriginal Australians. It also comments upon the Prime Minister’s Apology to the Stolen Generations that has initiated the mobilisation of this national grief. This chapter will also describe the processes of creating the video installation *Still Landing*, which took place amidst my emotional, physical and intellectual processes of grieving. The video work, which evolved to a three-screen installation with a live performance aspect, was the culmination (and distillation) of many of the images and ideas explored in this research project *Locating: Place and the Moving Body*.

Although the loss of my baby is not a focus of this thesis, it is relevant in terms of the subjective nature of the research—it is *my* body specifically, that the title *Locating: Place and the Moving Body* refers to. Some of the observations and insights I have made in this exegesis could be transposed to broader contexts—for example, my representing of my own ‘whiteness’ participates in a discourse concerning the group of people from Anglo-European ancestries who live in Australia. But some aspects of my body/self are of course unique to me and *all* aspects of my body/self come with me to meet with a place. By the parameters I laid out early in the process of this research, in this meeting of body and place I aim not to exclude or present my body as an entity isolated from its background, circumstances, etc. This is primarily how my locating dances differ from the Butoh ideal of starting from the ‘empty’ or ‘neutral’ body. The fact that for some of the process of this research my body was pregnant had a profound influence on my perception of the places I was in, the dances that evolved and the way I thought and wrote at that time. The shock and anguish of the experience of then being post-natal and without a live baby had perhaps even greater impact on my perception. For a long while after the event, I would literally, that is, kinaesthetically, get a sensation like ‘sea legs’, particularly when I had a strong image flash to mind of Charlotte’s birth, the hours afterwards with our limp pink bundle, or medical moments of ultrasounds, meetings with specialists... The lolling legs sensation was shock—as if I were floating, rocking about in the world unsupported, the ‘ground’ ripped out from under me in a literal ‘spinning out’ at the events that seemed so unbelievable even after they had occurred. Days, months went by: time was suspended in this haze.

As I slowly became more capable of functioning in the world again, I would temporarily withhold the expression of my grief—until I got home, or at least until I was out of the shop or away from my students, for example. My main physical experiences of this withholding were incredible tightness, tension, constriction. Relieving tightness in the body is a first step towards opening to perceive a place (or indeed to be receptive to any sensory information), which is why I usually begin my locating improvisations with some simple stretches, breathing into my body, opening up space in areas that are tight. Tightness is defensive, holding, divisive of the interior and exterior worlds, whereas an open, ‘soft’ body is receptive and more able to flow between interior self and surrounding world. At first, in my grief I was so enshrouded by an almost impenetrable dense heaviness that I felt utterly detached from the place I was in. It is common for one’s perception to be dulled in the early stages of grief—to find oneself off-balance, dizzy or uncoordinated and even to experience weaker vision, mis-hearing or mis-seeing.⁸⁸

Later, however, as I expressed a seemingly endless stream of emotions, the sense of absence from place and numbness to my surroundings passed and my perception became alive again, perhaps exaggeratedly so. I noticed I was experiencing heightened sensory perception, particularly when I was in places I associated with Charlotte and when I was emotional. Some of my locating dances were informed by this increased sensory awareness. Charlotte’s presence had become part of the interplay that transpired between my body and a place. During the film-shoot at Purtulu I felt Charlotte dancing with me, and it was as if my body became more permeable to the effect of miniscule sounds, the bristly textures and the all-encompassing heat of the desert country. My dance of place and her ‘dancing of me’ were merged, in that indistinguishable, abject way of mother and child. Even many months on, when I intended to do a locating dance of place, I was also dancing my grief.

Locating Grief

After three months of leave from my research, I decided to return to my work by developing the ideas for my film, so I traveled again to Central Australia in search of locations, a ‘script’ and sound samples (with my partner, Tom Berteis, as sound recordist). We followed a similar route to my last journey, winding up again at Yuendumu, where Japangardi, whom I had met on my previous visit, gave me permission to film on his country: Purtulu or Mount Theo, north-west of Yuendumu. The women custodians of this country came out with me to ‘show me the good

⁸⁸ Alla Renee Bozarth, *A Journey Through Grief*, 1994, p7

spots', thereby giving me their blessings to be there also. Some of the women were mourning their sister's recent death.

For some of the Warlpiri women elders living in Yuendumu, visiting the Purtulu country was like visiting a graveyard. Just as I might place flowers on a gravestone in a cemetery and send a silent 'prayer' or message to a dear departed family member, one of the women asked me to stop the car when we passed a particular type of eucalypt tree, from which she picked many sprigs of leaves. As we traveled across her recently deceased sister's country she tossed the leaves out the window, loudly wailing a song of mourning, communicating her reverence of this dear one. On this massive day outing I was struck by the women's dignity in allowing their grief. The authenticity of their sorrow was almost confronting for me at first, although I was grieving also. I tried to allow myself to be as open and honest about the process of grief as possible, but the difference in our cultures was evident as I observed myself still trying to maintain a façade of 'normality', attempting light conversation and false frivolity. The Warlpiri women's grief and the behaviour I observed around it contained an acknowledgement of the deeply painful but special experience the mourner was going through. One of the other women indicating the woman who had performed the leaves ritual, said to me "She sorry one" (meaning "She is grieving"). I got the feeling, from following the other women's lead, that I was therefore supposed to show her particular respect or care, allow her space and understand that she may not participate in conversation or activities with us. All six of the ladies⁸⁹ had become quite upset as they sang the traditional songs of the country when we had stopped for lunch (five goannas charred over a fire, walloped by the old women's crow-bar on the way!).⁹⁰ Apparently the country and the songs had resonance of sorrow and deeply heart-felt memory for them, to do with relatives both long gone and recently departed. For these women, the country, its songs and their grief or 'sorry business' were inextricably interrelated. By the evening driving home I had finally settled into a comfortable quietness with the ladies.

⁸⁹ Warlpiri (and in other desert communities) women elders are generally referred to as 'ladies' by Kardiya (white people) and by each other when speaking English. I gather it is considered more respectful than 'woman'.

⁹⁰ Anthropologist Georgia Curran had driven out in another vehicle to accompany me with the women that day, and she had brought her recording equipment (her own study involved documenting the women's songs). I had not expected to be so fortunate on this trip, but I asked the women if they would allow me to include their singing in my film, to which they very generously obliged. They even offered to paint me in ochres for my dancing in the film. (I declined their offer; I was not attempting to represent myself as Warlpiri.)

Each time I return to Warlpiri country or speak to a Warlpiri person, I am called Napangardi, the skin name the teenage girls had given me when I had traveled from Yuendumu to Lajamanu in 2005. The name has become very much entwined with my relationship to the country; I am someone a little different to Gretel when I am Napangardi—someone covered in that red-orange dust, dirtier and scruffier and perhaps a bit stronger and brighter—from the eyes and the heart, than Gretel. This description is inadequate, but I know I step into that name and that country and something happens. The skin name Napangardi is associated with Goanna Dreaming. On the outing described above to ascertain permissible sites for my film, the women had emphasised that Puturlu is Goanna Dreaming country and therefore Napangardi and Napanganka (another female skin name) country, so I had felt personally enveloped in the stories of this place. As soon as the women (almost all Napangardis and Napangankas!) had embarked the vehicle, the lady in the front passenger seat noticed a small pink crystal on the dashboard and pointed to it quizzically. I told her the rose quartz represented my baby daughter: “I’ve had some sorry business lately too”. Not a great deal more discussion about this, but a certain understanding was implicit. Somehow I had chosen, only a few months after the most major loss of my life, via a partially random, partially intuitive process, to shoot my little film here in Purtulu, which incidentally was known as a healing place, and at a time when there was more than usual ‘sorry business’ under way in the community.

Later that week I returned to Purtulu with my friend, artist and filmmaker James Geurts for a week-long film-shoot. During my locating improvisations on Purtulu country, it was as if I felt the support of the country itself, stabilising my post-natal wobbly legs—I could literally stand on one leg there for a lot longer than usual! I went through various emotional stages in my process of locating and grieving with this country throughout the week. I could actually hear the ancient songs the women had sung that Sunday resonating out of the earth itself, very faintly at first, but growing louder and clearer as the week went on and as I acquainted more with the country, reminding me that the women had blessed and protected our being-there. I also felt my baby Charlotte’s presence in my dances and she visited James, in a dream one night as we camped out on country.

At some stage on the road I told the ladies that I thought it was appropriate that Aboriginal funeral rites go for a long time; much better than the whitefella convention of a half-hour church service usually presided over by someone who knew neither the departed nor the mourners. I had never attended a ‘sorry’, but I know that mourning Warlpiri families usually camp together in the deceased’s country for up to several weeks. “Yes, proper way”, was the response.

Without this culture of a proper way to ritualise death, I attempted to improvise my own ceremonies, memorialising and releasing Charlotte, and most of these took place in one location. I sensed quite strongly that my baby's spirit was located in and around the river spot near our home in Eltham. It was a three-minute walk from our house where she had been conceived, down the track to the river. This was the place I visited for swims, dances and just to sit on the rocks and dream when I was pregnant. It was also the location of what I thought of later as her 'etheric release':

About a week after we had found out via ultrasound that my pregnancy was not 'normal', when I was in deep distress at having to make a decision as to whether I kept her and had a severely disabled child, or let her go, I went to the river. At this special location for us, I 'asked' Charlotte what *she* wanted. I got a clear response that she was okay, in fact she was in bliss: a joyous soul who did not need to become a human at this time.

I found a sound emerging from me, a long high-pitched tone that resonated off the rocks and water and seemed to ring out into the trees and sky. Everything shifted with this sound, became slightly illumined, as if hyper-alive. A light warm breeze arrived and wrapped around my pregnant body. More than ever before I felt the presence of spirit forces, gathering around me, empowering me in this moment of need. Like the time the river danced me at Dívcì Kamen in Czech, but more intensely passionate, I was dancing involuntarily, as if the waters were swelling upwards from the river at my feet, through my legs, hips torso arms head. I was still singing the sound, and somehow the sound—and the place—were singing me. I felt Charlotte's sweet warm glow dancing up through me, emanating from her residence in my belly, up and out like light through my arms and arching neck, tears streaming down my face, back into the river. A swirling singing ecstatic dance for an unspecific length of time. Interior and exterior space became a lucid flow via my dance that was Charlotte's dance of departure.

And then it was over. She had gone. I felt myself left behind: standing there on the rocks, a mother with her earthly sorrow. I knew I still had to go through the physical ordeal of the induced labour to eliminate the fetus still technically alive within me, but that Charlotte's spirit had gone to join the other beings for whom it is unnecessary to linger in this realm of minds and density. I stood there awhile sensing that her presence was dissipating into the air, the water, the trees

around me. Somehow she was becoming part of the ethereal fold of nature, not far removed from my access, just on the other side of things.

This river spot was the site to which we returned two weeks later, with our closest friends and family members, for a final releasing ritual. We sent the ash of Charlotte's little body and hundreds of rose petals down the bubbling rapids into the Yarra River and again our grief was intermingled with a mysterious ecstatic beauty.

Strangely, I had had premonitions at this bend in the river, in other dances I had done there, over the two and a half years I had lived there. I had felt a strong sense of a grieving woman expressing her sorrowful dance through me. Poor woman! I had thought, supposing that it had been someone else's mourning place, perhaps a Wurundjeri woman driven from her country or having suffered the loss of a husband or child at the hands of the new white 'landowners' in the 1800s. I will never know whether this imagining was true of a figure from this site's past or whether it had been a premonition of myself becoming this grieving woman on the rocks.

Miranda

It was whilst dancing 'Ode to Miranda', the colonial figure in my film, during the film shoot at Puturlu that I broke down. I was performing choreography derived from memories of European sites when I snapped at some minor disagreement with James over the shot and stormed 'off set' to wander into the desert to die!

I had experienced before the desert's capacity to make one break—the flies, the heat, the damned 'harshness', the exposure that leaves one standing bare, unguarded, insignificant in the vastness, vulnerable at its mercy. The film-shoot in the desert was four months since I had given birth and my grief was still raw, my being still quivery with shock. Attempts to focus outwardly to perceive the place and perform the tasks (creative and logistical) of the shoot were still through the blurry lens of mourning. The task I had set myself as director and performer was not an easy one either, attempting to be 'outside' and 'inside' the work at once.



‘Film me now!’⁹¹

So when I fumed off then returned with tear-stained face, filled with intense emotion and demanded that James ‘Film me now!’ and proceeded to perform a dance that bore little resemblance to the planned choreography, I had not considered that my anguish had to do with the costume I was wearing and the role I was assuming as colonial woman. In retrospect, the footage of this dance of rage and sorrow is more appropriate than anything I could have choreographed for this character. She would have been too simplistic if shown only as the graceful English lady/ maiden ‘getting dirty’. She embodies the grief of displacement from ‘home’ (England/ Europe) as well as my own contemporary grief in the knowledge and remembrance of the dispossession of Indigenous people that colonisation entailed—and that white women, although in many instances heroic in their sheer survival, were far from innocent to the colonial project.⁹²

Dealing with the abuse of this country and its people has often been relegated to historical context in film, literature, etc, but that seems too easy, too resolved or at least resolvable. Aboriginal people still acutely feel the effects of colonisation and white Australians are still benefiting directly and indirectly from that exploitation.⁹³ I feel, by my very presence in Australia today, implicated in this most horrific period of the country’s memory. Anne Thompson states, ‘at this

⁹¹ Photo by James Geurts

⁹² Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (eds.), 2003, *op. cit.*, Introduction

⁹³ Lewis and Mills, 2003, p7

time I consider it strategic that whites identify themselves as part of a colonial history which devastated and continues to impact upon indigenous Australians.’⁹⁴ Thompson cites actor/performance artist Margaret Cameron, who recognises a trend in much new Australian writing, of reconciliation as an underlying need or drive—‘that this “story” is becoming part of our understanding of ourselves in the world ... we are no longer “new” ... our history is finally being absorbed into our psyche ... [we are becoming] people with a history.’⁹⁵

From these strategic and emotional motivations to reintegrate or reabsorb colonial history, I return to the Indigenous sense of country as omnipresent, inclusive of all-times-at-once,⁹⁶ in my representation of the multiple aspects of white Australian woman in my video: the British colonial ‘Miranda’ figure is me; I am also the cruel (modern) corporate suited woman dividing, claiming and domesticating the land; the absurd Germanic marionette doll dancing ungrounded upon this foreign place; *and* I am Napangardi/ Gretel attempting to listen to and form relationship with the country and its original people. The performed characters or personas are not intended as totalising stereotypes of whitefellas, although they certainly have some recognisable traits, which enable their humour. They are in fact references to the overlaps between my own cultural background (British and Germanic) and the site of Purtulu. These nationalities were prominent European influences in Warlpiri country. Lutheran churches and many roaming cattle originating from German-run cattle stations and missions remain in this area.

The personas/ characters are introduced separately in the video, in distinct scenes, though not in chronological/ historical order. Towards the end of the film however, the distinctions between characters blur, costumes are mixed as each aspect of this white Australian woman joins in the locating dance. The dispossessing ‘real estate bitch’, who callously stamped out the Warlpiri women’s voices emanating from the earth, is implicated even in Napangardi/ Gretel’s sensory locating dance by the appearance of her white heeled shoes. The past is now; our histories are included in the present.

Filmmaking

My choice to work with video rather than live performance for the *Still Landing* piece was largely practical—the site in which I was working was so remote that it would have been challenging

⁹⁴ Anne Thompson, 2001/02, p32

⁹⁵ Margaret Cameron, cited in Thompson, 2001/02, p36

⁹⁶ as introduced in *Blasted Away* chapter

even to gather an audience from Yuendumu, a mere hundred and fifty kilometers away along the very rugged road. Although I did screen the completed work on the graffiti-covered wall of Yuendumu disco to show the locals what I had been doing on their country, my intended audience was primarily non-Aboriginal Australians. Video effectively (but differently to live performance) transports the place to an audience—or even to many audiences in different locations. New Media and film theorist Ross Gibson, in his essay ‘Enchanted Country’, emphasises the dominance of landscape in Australian film and claims that the moving image is a medium by which the viewing subject can be ‘stitch[ed] in’ to the landscape:

Film...folds a spectator into the scene through the all-encompassing environment of sound and through editing sequences which lay out a space over and around a viewer, who is being ‘shifted’ constantly in vantage point to a profusion of possible sites-of-being and sites-of-seeing.⁹⁷

Gibson concludes: ‘the place of the film enters the spectator’s mind and soul.’⁹⁸

Dance film to me has the potential to take this even further than other genres of film, to engage the viewer’s senses of kinaesthesia and touch in a deeply phenomenological interplay. In some respects, therefore, dance film may have the potential to kinaesthetically engage the viewer with both the dancing body and the place/ location. It also enables the viewer to be drawn into the place in a way that is closer to the experience of the dancer. For example, in relation to *Still Landing*, the camera can bring the viewer into closer range with the spinifex, the earth, the anthills, etc. that the dancer is engaging with, from a mobile perspective that follows the dancer’s point of view. By contrast, in a live dance performance the audience is always viewing the dancer’s movement ‘from the outside’, seeing the dancer’s body from some more distant perspective. Hence it was partly my desire to create an experience of ‘smooth space’ immersion for the viewer that motivated me towards dance film/ video. The decision to edit *Still Landing* as a multi-screen installation rather than a single flat screen work, expanded upon this aspiration to create an immersive environment for the viewer. (I do not claim, nor consider that *Still Landing*, my first real attempt directing this medium, has achieved this to its full potential.)

⁹⁷ Ross Gibson, ‘Enchanted Country’, in *World Literature Today*, Summer 1993, pp475, cited in Muecke, 2004, p77

⁹⁸ Gibson 1993, p476, cited by Muecke, 2004, p77



Originally, when I had started to envisage the images for the film, it had been the red sandy flat desert of Central Australia that I imagined as the site. However, journeying in Central Australia, it had become increasingly important to me, to not only garner permission from the traditional owners of the site, but also to develop some relationship with the people whose land it was. I felt that would enrich the film, as well as make the project more worthwhile on a personal level. It was difficult though, in these remote areas, to actually *find* the owners of any given area of land. Furthermore, to approach as a white academic stranger asking favours would not necessarily be met with great co-operation.⁹⁹ It would also have felt uncomfortable to me to approach a community without knowing anyone. Being in the raw state of grieving, as I was when I traveled around the desert regions in the planning stage of *Still Landing*, the ‘path of least resistance’ seemed appropriate as well. It was for these reasons that I returned to Yuendumu, where I already had the beginnings of relationship with some people. I had a conversation one morning with Johnnie Miller, a charismatic elder with whom I had spent time in both Yuendumu and Lajamanu on my earlier visit to Warlpiri country.¹⁰⁰ Being my brother by skin name (Japangardi), he gladly granted me permission to film on Puturlu country and gave me names of some other traditional owners I should ask, including some of the women elders who later came on the outing to show me the ‘good spots.’¹⁰¹ At this stage I had not even seen the Puturlu country and I admit I was a little disappointed when I first saw it. It was not the typical flat red earth of my clichéd

⁹⁹ Maori education writer Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that many Indigenous people have a well-founded distrust of academia: ‘research has been implicated in the worst excesses of imperialism.’ (Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1999, cover blurb)

¹⁰⁰ Johnnie Miller is quite famous for the success of his Mount Theo youth drug re-habilitation program (primarily reforming teen petrol sniffers), for which he has received several government awards.

¹⁰¹ By showing me the ‘good spots’, I gathered that they were not concerned I would damage or trespass upon their sacred places, but more that they were concerned for my welfare—that the spirits may make me sick if I went into men’s country, for example.

imagining of Australian desert, but rather was scrubby and dotted with anthills! After this initial disappointment however, I resolved that Puturlu would work with the images of my film, being still a far cry from any European environment and was possibly more interesting than my clichéd original vision, with more to respond to. It was also becoming more beautiful to me each moment.

In the same spot I had eaten goanna cooked over the fire with the ladies a few days earlier, James and I slept in swags under the stars for the week of the film-shoot, with the mysterious rustles and scuttles of night creatures through the spinifex around us. We would awaken with the pink and orange of the desert dawn, followed rapidly by the buzz of flies. From soon after sunrise we began working up the road at the expansive ant-hilled plain that was our site or 'location', which the ladies had approved our use of. By about eleven a.m. it got too excruciatingly and dangerously hot to work physically, so we would start early, then have a long break from eleven until about three or four p.m., when we would do another shoot until sunset. Most mornings we spent around an hour improvising: I would undertake my locating practice in relation to the place and James attempted a similar process with the hand-held camera, experimenting with filming my dance and the country, following his own sense of curiosity. James is not a dancer and had not made a dance film before, but I knew he was intuitive and embodied in his own art practice, which usually engages with place or space. He had attended a Body_Place_Project workshop I led a few years earlier and we had since shared dialogue about our practices, so he was not new to my approach. I encouraged James to 'dance' with the camera: to attempt to emulate qualities from my locating dance in the movement and focus of the camera, linger on details of the country he was interested in, include my body only partially or incidentally in the shot, follow tracks on the earth, motion of wind, shoot my dance from the earth or from the sky, from very close proximity to my body, etc. Occasionally I actually held the camera as I moved, when it was not possible for James to get close enough inside my movement to capture my point of view. An example of this self-filming technique in the film is a scene where the white-suited woman is rolling backwards and the camera is also rotating backwards revealing the sky, termite mounds, spinifex, earth and her stockinged feet against the sky.

This shared locating practice was important as a means of acquainting with the place, which was new to both of us. It was also in keeping with my performance-making process, as well as developing a visceral, kinaesthetic language between James (the camera), the country and myself. I needed to become accustomed to sharing my locating process with James and the camera,

having most often undertaken these explorations alone with a place. Over the course of the week I found ways of sometimes allowing the camera to witness my movement more intimately and other times to almost forget it was there, so that it did not detract from my corporeal listening to place. For James it was a process of tuning in and experimenting, through the camera, with the dancing body. This filming process also provided us with seven hours of footage to edit down to a matter of seconds in the post-production phase!¹⁰²

I had also written a ‘script’ of sorts, as well as a shot list, to which we adhered fairly closely.¹⁰³ Apart from the improvised locating sequences edited from the locating material described above, most scenes were quite choreographed or structured before I arrived at the site and were adapted to fit into the place. Some new ideas and images emerged whilst on site, so extra scenes were added (notably a ‘twitchy toes’ final image of my feet, uncertain and unstable upon the red earth), while some of the planned shots and choreographed movement became unnecessary. My physical and emotional state on the day and the actuality of being in the place—the specificities of the terrain, such as the stunning shapes and presences of a particular group of anthills, and the weather, which was more tempestuous than usual for the area—in some cases inhibited, but most often enhanced, my original plan.

The gaze of the camera, in the shoot and in post-production, though operated by James, was constructed according to my direction. As a female artist, I use my own body as subject. Although I did not specifically direct all of the shots, I set the parameters of the process by which they were taken, an example of which is the shared locating process described above. My interest in giving attention to the senses and my attempt to find ways of bringing other senses into the visual medium of film could be construed as subversion of the mastering (masculine) gaze. As I outlined in Chapter 1: ‘Locating’, this research is grounded in the subjective, specific experiences of *my* body, not *The* (universalised) body. I can only express from my own experience. I do not attempt to visually represent the Indigenous experience of place—this would, in itself, reiterate a colonising model.

¹⁰² Establishing a collaborative and distinctive working practice is part of a larger project, extending beyond the confines of this specific video work: incorporating James’ various visual practices and my locating/movement methodologies.

¹⁰³ See Appendix 4 for script



The script notes or plan of scenes changed in the post-production phase, as I considered the actual footage. The decision to edit the video as a three-screen work was only made after the shoot, after the experience of inhabiting the Purtulu country. A desire to give the country plenty of coverage also—to communicate its breadth and give focus not just to my dance and actions but also to the dance that is always already underway, the life of the country itself—instigated the decision to work across three screens as opposed to a standard single-screen video. I envisaged the projections occupying large white entire walls/ screens so that the audience would in effect be situated ‘within’ the country.

James and I worked together throughout the sporadic but lengthy edit process (spanning more than a year) and then I worked closely with Tom developing the soundscape. The recordings of the ladies’ voices telling stories of the Goanna Dreaming country through song were rich and evocative, so Tom used samples from their singing to create deep earthy drones and harmonic frequencies, as well as using sections of the original recordings. We sourced other sounds from eclectic sources—the buzz of radio signal to signify attempting to ‘tune in’ and a Wagner operatic score from an old four-track reel-to-reel player played at high speed for the Germanic marionette scene.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Although I was clearly directing the postproduction phase (and the entire work), both James and Tom were substantially more than mere technicians, contributing creatively from each of their fields of expertise.

From my selected 'favourite' and conceptually necessary sections of footage, the previously written storyboard/ script was roughly constructed. From this basis, I was able to see whether my shifting/ evolving vision was being realised and to then make changes: paring the work back, manipulating it, adding a few (subtle) effects. Constructing sequences across the three screens was truly a choreographic exercise: sculpting the improvised dance material (and the cinematographically improvised footage of country) into a rhythmic, aesthetic and kinaesthetic sequence. The black frames between the three screens provided spaces for movement across frames, creating further dynamic.

Sorry Business

It was during one of my locating dances that I started to question the blaring arrogance of it—who the Hell was *I* to think I could dance this place? Whose place?

From my very early dances in relation to natural environments in Australia, I had the experience of having to release some layer of sadness before I could 'get through' to sensing and moving in relation to the place I was in. I used to think this superficial layer that I had to release before I could 'sink in' to a deeper phase of sensing was just my own regret that I was so pre-occupied with my urban lifestyle that I felt numb and unreceptive to the natural environment. Now I wonder if it was more than that. Now I strongly sense 'something wrong' in many sites in Australia and I know that is not my stress or emotion projected onto these places. It is either the country still 'shuddering' from a massacre of its Indigenous people taken place at that site (not so long ago, in terms of the history of this country), or some major environmental damage that has caused the country's natural cycles to be disturbed and become sick. (And of course the two are inter-related, especially from the point of view of the Aboriginal people themselves, for whom 'The land grew the people and people grew their country.')

¹⁰⁵ I sense this 'something wrong' from the land itself, but then my response to it is complicated by my own guilt, in realisation that it was 'my people' who brought this destruction. The experience of guilt has to do both with my non-Indigenous-Australian relationship to Indigenous Australians as well as to the land itself, which has also been abused and exploited. In both cases, there is sorrow amidst the guilt for the loss of potential inter-relation. I always found that releasing this emotion, even if I was not sure why I felt it, would help me to become more receptive to my surrounds.

¹⁰⁵ Judy Atkinson, Recreating Song Lines: The Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia, Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 2002, p29

Carolyn Connors wrote a song for Jill Orr's site-based project *The Crossing*, on Loch Island in Mildura (March 2007) performed to largely Koorie audiences. Connors was playing the role of a colonial district nurse in a hospital tent tending to smallpox victims, singing her story as she hung out the bandages. One line in her song was: '...diseases we brought, Oh what a debt...' Connors' use of 'debt' (which, in context, alluded to more than the diseases) struck me as somehow more accurate, or at least more useful, than the more widely used reference to 'guilt'. Although debt implies something that can be re-paid, which is not a real possibility in the case of colonialism of course, it nonetheless augurs constructive action, whereas the emphasis on 'guilt' effects only a lethargic bad feeling. Of course, no one likes to be reminded of their guilt *or* their debts, but those of us who want to consider ourselves honest, do at least intend and attempt to re-pay our debts, though we may not choose to dwell in our guilt. Whether it is debt or guilt, or indeed both, many non-Indigenous Australians tend to consider it unfair or unfounded that those who were not directly involved in the colonial genocide and dispossession 'way back then', must carry this burden. I was not taught to disrespect Aboriginal people, nor was I taught to particularly respect them. The issue was really that I knew nothing about them, or barely even knew *of* them. Aboriginal people simply were not visible to me, growing up in the bayside suburbs of Melbourne and they were not part of the history I was taught at school (less than two decades ago) about Captain Cook and those brave explorers... Only when listening to the country and allowing my dances of locating to unfold in dialogue with Australian places did it strike me: the booming absence.

I spent time with some Gunditjmara dancers whilst working on another of Jill Orr's projects, a site-specific film installation *From the Sea* at Warrnambool in 2003. Watching the Gunditjmara people's dances, I saw the coastal country inscribed in their bodies. This was their place and they knew it; it inhabited them as they it. Generations of living in, on, with and from this particular area of country was written into their every movement. In between shots, a lithe young woman followed a snake track with me across the sand dunes, proudly pointing out the varieties of bush foods along our path and telling me about her traditional dances as we went. I was overwhelmed with gratitude as well as some sort of grief after this, in realisation that this was the first such experience I had ever encountered. What a massive void in my being-in-the-place. What tragedy that this situation—this complete ignorance of Indigenous Australian ways and knowledge and

this dearth of relationship between blackfella and whitefella—is so normalised in average Australian life.¹⁰⁶

‘Decolonisation’ writes Stephen Muecke, ‘cannot be about the removal of one kind of state power; it is about the creation of a new assemblage. A new Australian modernism connects along multiple lines with Indigenous antiquity. This involves recognising the political devastation...and mobilising the sadness.’¹⁰⁷ By Kevin Rudd’s action of saying ‘sorry’ to the Stolen Generations, the sadness was mobilised; the period of repressed grief—denial—passed into the time of mourning. According to grief therapists Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler:

As denial fades it is slowly replaced with the reality of the loss. You begin to question the how and why... As you accept the reality of the loss and start to ask yourself questions, you are unknowingly beginning the healing process. You are becoming stronger, and the denial is beginning to fade. But as you proceed, all the feelings you were denying begin to surface.¹⁰⁸

Most Australians were relieved by the apology to the Stolen Generations, but jubilation was mingled with the beginnings of the emotion, the grief—not only for the child removal policy and its repercussions, but also for the manifold exploitations of Aboriginal people that began with Captain Cook’s ‘discovery’ of the continent and continue today. We could not really, in this one statement by the Prime Minister, hope for ‘an expulsion...of a national burden’, as Tony Wright suggested in his article in *The Age*.¹⁰⁹ By acknowledging and grieving the past, it does not go away; on the contrary it becomes more ‘real’, as suggested by Kübler-Ross and Kessler. What is being released or ‘let go of’ is not the history itself, but the resistance to it and the associated tension of denial, which manifests in bodies. Indeed “the time for denial, the time for delay, has come to an end”, as Kevin Rudd’s speech declared. But the time for feeling—the real ‘sorry business’—has just begun.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ This experience is recounted in Gretel Taylor, ‘Perceiving and Expressing Place: Site-specific Performance by a White Sheila’, in *Local-Global*, Vol. 3, 2007, Arena Printing, RMIT Melbourne, p137

¹⁰⁷ Muecke, 2004, p48

¹⁰⁸ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, Simon & Schuster, London, 2005, p11

¹⁰⁹ Tony Wright, 14/02/2008, ‘Outburst of emotion echoes across the land’, *The Age*, p1

¹¹⁰ My discussion here is about emotion, but I do not wish to diminish the appropriateness and necessity of this also being a time for action, in assisting Aboriginal communities and individuals to improve their living circumstances, and action also in restructuring Australia in ways that tangibly reconfigure colonial paradigms.

Now that the sadness has been mobilised, opportunity arises for other rigidities to also be destabilised. A space opens up for the potential reconfiguration of many paradigms that have long been assumed to be set in stone by mainstream Australia: the stuck can become unstuck. From this vantage point, it now seems more possible, for example, to re-shape the nation in the way Muecke envisioned in the creation of a new assemblage: 'a new Australian modernism [that] connects along multiple lines with Indigenous antiquity.'¹¹¹ These connections with indigeneity could move into closer alignment with, for example, an anti-anthropomorphic approach to country, place, land and all its animate and inanimate life forms and resources.¹¹² From this condition of mobilisation, white Australians' governing right assumption could also be redressed,¹¹³ as ties with the monarchy look set to finally be cut, severing the parental relationship and thereby liberating the colonial link with Britain. Perhaps some subtle changes could even occur in the bodies of non-Aboriginal Australians, in relation to perception of place...

Reminding

In 2002, when a national apology would have been difficult to even imagine under John Howard's secure conservative stronghold, Joy Damousi's article 'History Matters: The Politics of Grief and Injury in Australian History' argued for the 'need to move beyond certain conventional narratives of Australian history' and for historians to 'give a fuller account of the place of grief, trauma and loss in Australian histories'.¹¹⁴ Damousi did not refer specifically to the colonial and Indigenous incidences of grief, but her premises could be extended to these areas:

[The inclusion of a fuller account of grief, trauma and loss in Australian history] is important for two reasons. First, memories of these experiences are political and highlight the oppression by institutions and government of psychic life along the axes of class, gender, race and sexuality. Second, a public expression of trauma emphasises the politicization of emotional life and points to the crucial roles of the 'personal' in progressive politics.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Muecke, 2004, p48

¹¹² The movement occurring in Aboriginal/ non-Aboriginal relations is occurring simultaneously to the global recognition of the urgent need for action on climate change, so human relationship to environment is also undergoing a major transition.

¹¹³ Ghassan Hage, 1998

¹¹⁴ Joy Damousi, 'History Matters: The Politics of Grief and Injury in Australian History', Australian Historical Studies, Issue 118, 2002, pp100-114

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p100

Damousi acknowledged that Australian history had broadened in recent years beyond the ‘tales of conquest, the worker’s paradise, the coming of age at Gallipoli, the golden age of the 1950s and so on’, to an expanded view of what it meant to be Australian, taking into account the experiences of Indigenous populations, women, immigrants, the working classes, gay men and lesbians.¹¹⁶ She points out that the role of trauma and grief is an important aspect that has however been overlooked when considering the place of history in contemporary Australian cultural life.¹¹⁷ Damousi also proposed: ‘It is up to historians, journalists and cultural commentators to call into question accepted versions of history and to remind us of what is not convenient or comfortable to remember.’¹¹⁸ I would include artists in Damousi’s ‘cultural commentators’ category.

Judith Wright, remembered equally for her work as an activist for environmental issues and a leader in the 1980s and 1990s reconciliation movement, as for her poetry, foregrounded the role of loss and grief in Australia, calling colonial history into question. That loss is a commonality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was expressed in Wright’s poem ‘Two Dreamtimes’:

Over the rum your voice sang
The tales of an old people,
Their dreaming buried, the place forgotten ...
We too have lost our dreaming ...

If we are sisters, it’s in this –
Our grief for a lost country,
The place we dreamed in long ago,
Poisoned now and crumbling.¹¹⁹

Wright felt a strong affinity for the drought-stricken countryside of ‘New England’, in New South Wales, where she spent much of her life. Her love of Australian country was tormented by the

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p101-2

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p101

¹¹⁹ Judith Wright, ‘Two Dreamtimes’ in *Collected Poems: 1942-1985*, Angus & Robertson, Pymble NSW, 1994, pp315-318

grief and guilt she harboured, her own belonging in this place she loved ‘made uneasy’ because of the ‘old murder’ of her colonial forebears:

But I am a stranger, come of a conquering people,
I cannot share his calm, who watch this lake,
Being unloved by all my eyes delight in,
and made uneasy for an old murder’s sake.¹²⁰

In her novel The Secret River, Kate Grenville has expressed similar themes and sentiment through the genre of historical fiction. She comprehensively and compassionately portrays protagonist William Thornhill’s journey from stealing in order to feed his family in the squalor of eighteenth century London, to being transported as a convict to New South Wales, to being made a ‘free man’ and acquiring land to develop on the Hawkesbury River. Through Thornhill’s eyes:

There were no signs that the blacks felt the place belonged to them. They had no fences that said, *This is mine*. No house that said, *this is our home*. There were no fields or flocks that said *we have put the labour of our hands into this place*.¹²¹

Yet Grenville’s sympathy for this character is sharply balanced by her gruesome descriptions of a massacre that her protagonist is accomplice to. She is incisive in ending the saga with Thornhill reflecting upon ‘his’ land years later, with a deep unease still dampening his enjoyment of it.

My listening to the country via locating dances and meeting with Aboriginal people whilst traveling in the Northern Territory made my whiteness the most urgent aspect of identity for me to represent in my place-based performance works. Through the performances created for this project I have represented the uneasy implications of my whiteness in various ways. Each of the specific sites I worked with enabled me to approach and performatively explore this aspect of my identity from a different perspective, alongside other theoretical and physical concerns particular to each place. The ‘Killeavy’ homestead at Eltham enabled an empathetic character-based narrative to ensue around the settler relationship to place, whilst also drawing attention to the colonial disturbance of native ecologies. The site of the removed and forgotten waterfall in the midst of the contemporary metropolis of Melbourne provided a potent reminder of the

¹²⁰ Judith Wright, ‘At Cooloolah’, 1955, in Collected Poems: 1942-1985, 1994, p140

¹²¹ Kate Grenville, The Secret River, The Text Publishing Co., Melbourne, 2005, p93

significance of the Yarra area to the Kulin nation prior to the arrival of Fawkner and Batman's parties. My performed remembrance of this site in *Blasted Away* unsettled my relationship with the city in which I had lived all my life. In working with remote Aboriginal desert country as the location for the video project, I dived into terrain that is still unfamiliar to many white Australians to emphasise the extent to which we are 'still landing'.

In my installation of *Still Landing* at the Arts House Meat Market gallery (May 2008), I included the presence of my body within the environment of video projections. Developing this live performance (having presented the installation at other times without the live element), I considered what effects it would have. It would bring the audience's attention differently to the spatiality of the installation—my physical contact with the gallery's walls and floor would maintain the presence of these features throughout the work instead of allowing them to subside as viewers entered the space of the video projections. This would also prevent any tendency for the video work to become a mere spectacle for its viewers, the liveness of my presence in the space insistently engaging kinaesthesia and the more tactile senses. My live dance would also affect a bleeding of *that* place of Puturlu as depicted in the video, into *this* place and time. Again activating the 'kinaesthetic uncanny', my dance was seeking relationship to *there* from here, as well seeking to locate myself in relation to *here*: this place—Melbourne, Wurundjeri country, this actual space or site of the gallery and this situation of the video installation. I hoped to carry the implications of my locating as a white woman in the Aboriginal desert country, where whiteness is more obviously anomalous, into this urban environment. I wanted to thereby suggest and acknowledge the relative newness of white presence all over Australia and to de-stabilise the normalcy of whiteness and the certainty of 'it's ours', even in this urban space where little visual evidence would otherwise remind us of the Aboriginal country we inhabit.

The intensity, as well as the artifice or contrivance of the performed moment, lends it the potential to broach the omnipresence of place. The performer is enabled, via the established conventions of theatre, to represent 'as if' and audiences understand that in a performance situation, a performer can be a person becoming-something, in the Deleuzian sense. My locating dances have sought to relate to a place on multiple levels, but this very practice of seeking relationship has brought my awareness to the gap, the rupture that exists between my body and the country as a result of colonial debt and grief. In my performances I have sought to construct this rupture, making it visible to the audience via images and symbols. I have also taken advantage of the potential of performance to refer to the multiple times of the specific site, which

are co-existent, reminding my audience of histories that are (in Damousi's words), 'not convenient or comfortable to remember'. From my experience of locating in Australian sites, these repressed histories have emerged as intrinsic to the national sense of identity and the relationship of body to place in Australia.

Locating Dislocated Country

I often experienced my own reluctance to 'sit' in my grief for Charlotte. Knowing its heaviness and propensity to overwhelm, I procrastinated going there. This repression of emotion when my grieving core was calling for some attention, would result in me becoming literally—physically—wound-up, strangled by my attempt to cling defensively to superficiality. I found however, that when I did allow myself to reside in that deep core of sadness, I was relieved. My muscles relaxed, breath deepened, tension dropped into the earth. I became more grounded, settled, present. It was easier to be there than to be attempting-not-to-grieve. Even if I was sad, at least I felt I was being true to myself. Grief cannot be rushed, but it did give way gradually to a sense of healing and then renewal—small inklings of *joie de vivre* filtered through occasionally, then more often.

Incredibly, non-Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia are still welcome here—every Aboriginal nation (to my knowledge) 'welcomes' anyone to country. By doing so, traditional owners cleverly and persistently remind visitors of the inherent Aboriginality of the country,¹²² as well as demonstrating their willingness to share their places, despite the exploitation they have experienced at the hands of 'visitors' in the past. The country itself I find to be equally generous. Contrary to Judith Wright's feeling that the Australia she loved could not return her appreciation ('Being unloved by all my eyes delight in'), I sense that, even as a descendent of the 'conquering people', country becomes increasingly hospitable to me, the more I acquaint with it, in spite of all. In Europe, I realised reluctantly that the tourists and the presentation of places for tourism are very much part of the 'reality' of the place. Similarly, I accept that the structures—architectural, social, political, etc.—imposed by Europeans in the construction of 'Australia' as a nation upon this ancient country—and indeed our presence here, are now inseparably part of the place that is contemporary Australia. Nostalgia for a 'real' Australia, beneath, before and *without* the layers added by the whitefellas is futile: this is as 'real' as it gets.

¹²² Elizabeth Dempster, 'Welcome to Country: Performing Rights and the Pedagogy of Place', in Gay McAuley (ed.), About Performance No. 7, 2007, p87

My philosophy and dance of locating is a form of 'belonging-in-transience', in that it foregoes the desire for resolution and even the need to feel that 'everything is okay', as I surrender to dwelling within the process. I do not in any way erase a place in order to experience it, nor do I attempt to empty my own self-body of its history or emotions in order to approach this place with (fictitious) authenticity or purity. I recognise the intrinsic and ongoing Aboriginality of the entire continent, which is storied with rich layers of meaning, most of which I accept will remain unknown to me. I also acknowledge that the means by which European peoples came to live in this country were often cruel and unjust. Negotiating the complexities, gaps and discomforts, I persist in my attempt to locate my self-body in relation to Australian places *anyway*. I do not avoid, but feel and move with the waves of grief or stabs of guilt as they arise. Towards the cultivation of nearness, I encounter the issues and emotions at close-range through my dialogue of listening-to and acquainting with specific places. As Emily Potter suggests, it is here, 'in the irreducible tactile, aural, and visual encounters that occur between self and other, [that] the future opens up.'¹²³

Inhaling damp forest air in the Dandenong Ranges where I now live and which is also my birthplace, I allow the motion of my breath to instigate small movements of my spine. The movement spills out through my arms emulating the rippling and swirling of the mountain stream I stand beside. Via perceiving and responding, the construed separation between my body and this place gradually diminishes: we entwine in a subtle sensory inter-relation. At the point when my conscious attempt to connect ceases and a flow-between is formed, I glimpse an increased sense of my inclusion by the place. Immersed in this place, which is, after all, more my place than any other place in the world, I sigh from my heart, down my arms and out through the palms of my hands into the cool mossy earth and feel my breath accepted by it. My body softens and I feel the soles of my feet settle into the ground beneath them. The dance continues.

¹²³ Potter, 2005, op. cit., p128

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Appendix 1

Immersion/ Excursion: Killeavy

The following are some excerpts from my writings-from-dancing at the Killeavy site that became the choreography/ performance score I performed at the site.

Start beside the incinerator, sort of draped as if I'd cascaded out of it like the couple of broken bricks beside it also. Come to standing thinking of smoke, followed wind and constant slow beat of the Powerful Owl's 'Hoot! Hoot!' gradually making my way towards the water tank. Grasping its metal rungs and peering in to the tank, almost sticking my head right through the intriguing rusty hole, echo softly the owl's hoot: 'Who? Who?'

I turn and become elderly Mrs Morrison, simple, stable but slightly stooped stance, gazing out at the horizon. She dissolves and I become a young woman, flirtatiously waltzing with an imaginary gentleman and having her hand kissed. She fades and I move down to grass, grasp it as if trying to get a tangible sense of the land beneath me, squatting until the grass breaks in my grip and I fall backwards, mouth open in a silent scream, legs open for a suspended moment. Then soften and exhaustedly yet compulsively reach between legs and cradle baby in my arms as I spiral up to standing.

Character and baby fade away and I walk following wind, fairly brisk, past water tank to ant-ridden driveway space. A slithering sensual snake movement/ feeling build up to rapid snake-arm movement extending out of me, snake is arm then arm follows imagined snake through the grass to near tank, grab it, whack it gesturing to kids hissing to Get Back, in sudden realism, breaking the snake's spine. Body sighs in relief as I go to my children, gather them around in a protective embrace, looking out at the bush with sense of its ominous threats. Drop character, walk 'as me' at-appropriate-pace, listening through my feet, looking wherever my eyes are drawn to, across to old cold-box. I turn and start addressing audience again, talk about cold-box/ refrigerator, Felix, plates, salad, poppies...

A few 'civilised' actions of entertaining friends/ relatives in the grassy patch I call the 'meadow lawn', with idea of Devonshire tea, but become distracted by the sounds and textures of nature pulling upon my body, calling me into a dance. (That's how it feels today here—compulsive, involuntary). Then down the path through, over and under the fallen branch, through the tangled

gateway into the 'other world' beyond the branch, into a tangled dance-walk down the treed lane as spirit morphing through the ages, body parts adopting different elements, timings, qualities. This was when the wind really started to infiltrate my being and is still in me. Lightness overtook and I was deeply engaged whilst also detached and easy. I had that feeling of being moved: everything was perfect—it felt like there was no choice of movements to be made—I was just going with the obvious, necessary ones. I guess this is what I mean by being 'located'—or is it God?! There always seems to be a bird watching me intently when I realise I am there, at this point of location. This time it was a white cockatoo sitting uncharacteristically quiet and attentive in the wild old pines at the front gate.

Some longing moments out on the front driveway, as if bidding farewell to my loved one, then walk again up the first driveway with a sense of several small companions surrounding me. Gesture to my children, holding their hands, as we walk up the drive. Then in another wave of energy I feel a storm crashing branches of trees, throwing my body to the ground a few times in violent cracking movements, feel my body to be the branches, dry and breakable under the force of the weather, stoic courage disintegrating in the storm of emotion. With a sudden wail, on my knees, I again grasp at the grass, this time in the pain of grief, until the blades of grass break in my grip. I collapse backwards and become still. Rising as smoke, spirit, I 'waft' further up path, then run (like a child) to water tank, sing 'Waltzing Matilda' into it and disappear behind it, song trailing off as I run to the wooden archway remaining from the cattle-yard, gaze optimistically out at the power-lines, hold a still moment, then crumble behind steps.

‘Tickets Please’

Having gotten to a stage where I felt the work was overloaded with information to impart, a few days prior to the event I impulsively cut up my notes into small bites and gave them out randomly to audience members as they arrived, as ‘tickets’. As well as ‘thinning out’ the load of words for me to deliver, I hoped this would set up the random and particular variations of perspective that each individual was invited to experience of the event. They each received a different ticket, such as these:

Foxes have taken out many species of the area; one always finds feathers scattered around their dens, which are often rabbits’ burrows they have stolen, being too lazy to build their own. Foxes like to live near humans to scavenge their food.

‘In those days such things [raffles, dances, committees...] formed the social life of Eltham, and joined us all together in a way that seems to have passed. At one time there were 32 committees in Eltham and I remember one of them meeting on the steps of the Old Shire Hall because every other possible spot was filled!’

I saw a helicopter from the poppy field one day and my landlord told me ‘they’ were looking for the body of a man who drowned in the Yarra at Warrandyte (Pound Bend tunnel). Some sort of drunken bet with his mate to get to the other side of the torrentially gushing river on a blow-up raft.

A car that I’d never noticed before was in the middle of the plain under the electrical wires. I headed over there through the bracken and found the abandoned vehicle to be totally burnt out, the bush and grass around it also burned. Recently. It had a sort of shocking energy about it and I thought of my neighbour’s friend’s report that very morning of three men (including one Eltham man) who had just gassed themselves in a car and their three wives getting together to talk about it. This car looked like it had been blown up. The burned area around it was like a creeping scar from this painful intrusion.

As I was crossing the field under the looming electrical towers, I was stopped in my tracks by a boxing match between two male kangaroos, their female companions (possibly the cause of the conflict) standing by nervously. The mob is often to be found grazing in this area, but today they were so engrossed in their dual, they did not even notice me, observing from less than ten metres away for at least ten minutes, as the pair threw brutal blows at each other until one was so injured he was too weak to respond and limped off into the bush.



Locating Place and the Moving Body
Excursion/ Immersion 1: 'Killeavy'
a performance research event by Gretel Taylor

Sat. 4th & Sun. 5th December
Meet 6.30pm sharp
@ corner of Yarra Braes Rd & Reynolds Rd, Eltham

Please wear long pants/ boots.
Car-pool if possible; parking is limited.
Allow 1 hour 15mins for whole event,
including guided walk to & from the site.
This event is free, but please book.
Bookings/ Inquiries: 0425 759 988

Part of Gretel's PhD project through Victoria University

Appendix 2

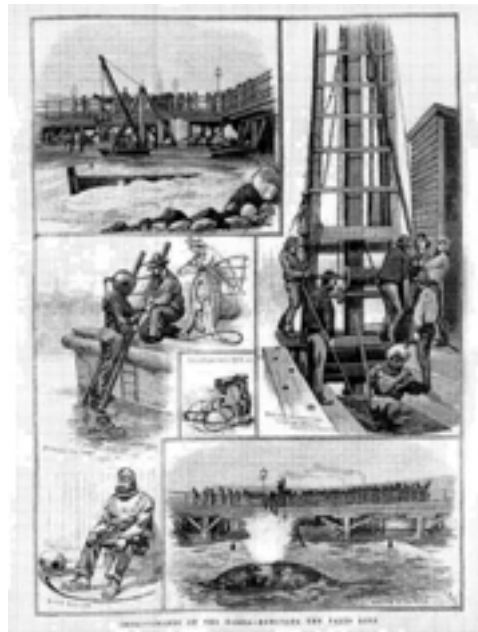
Blasted Away



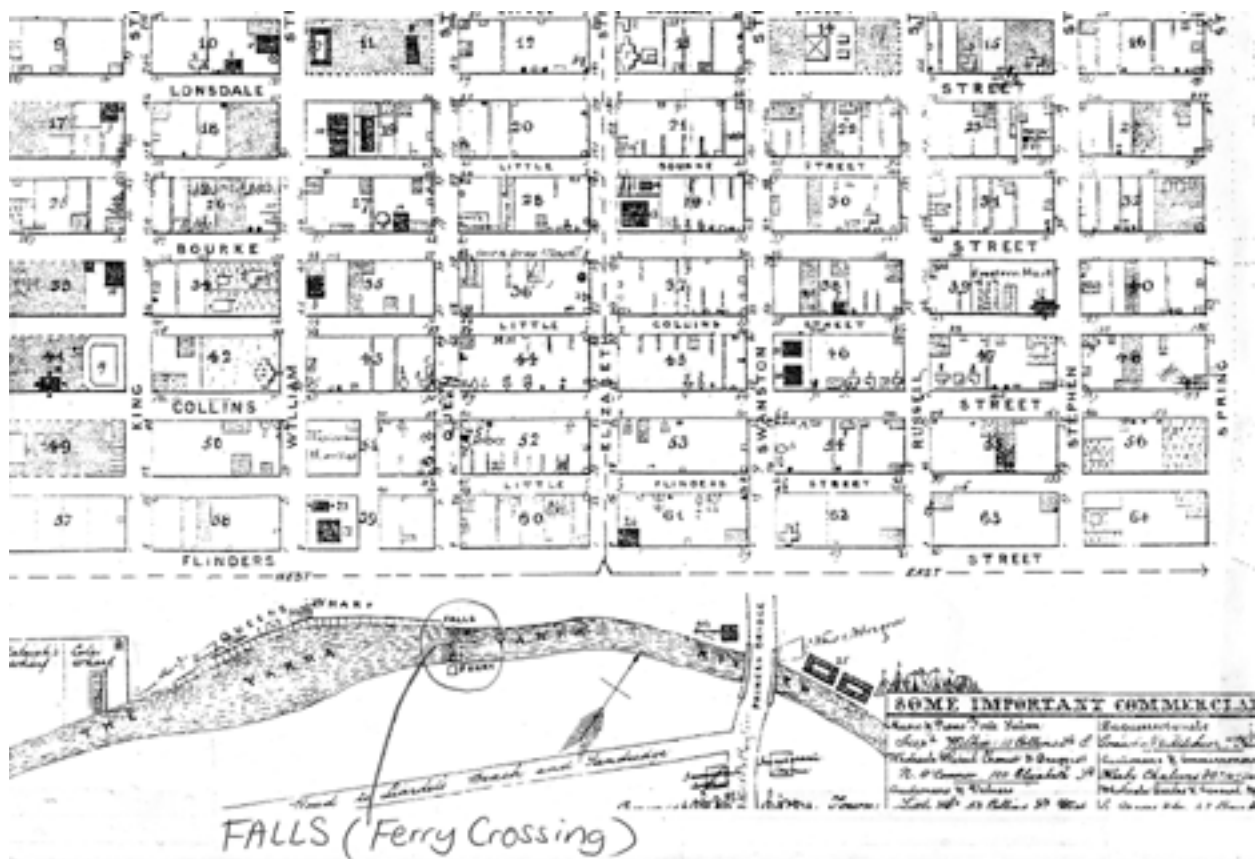
excerpt of map by Kearney 1855

Melways map 2002





'Improvements on the Yarra- Removing the Yarra Falls', 1883 etching



1853 F. Proeschel, excerpt from 'The Most Complete Popular & Mercantile Map of Melbourne, Victoria'

Blasted Away

A Performance event at the site of the Yarra Falls, June 2005

Performance Score (with photos by Christian Alexander)

Site 1. Rail Overpass, corner of Flinders and Market Streets

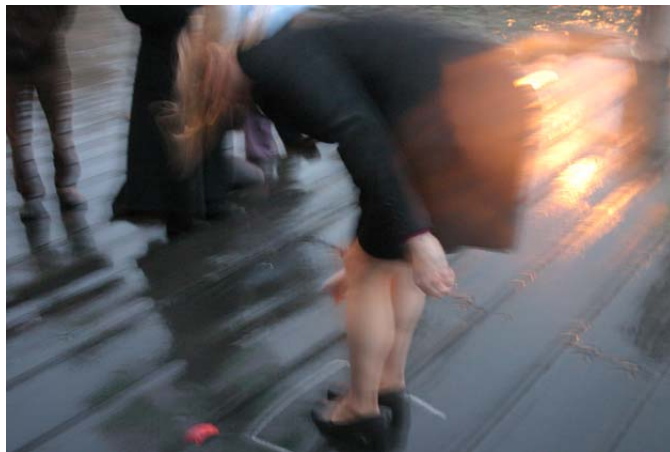
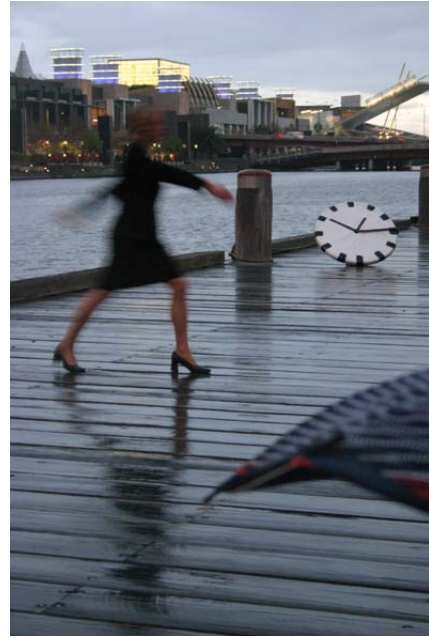
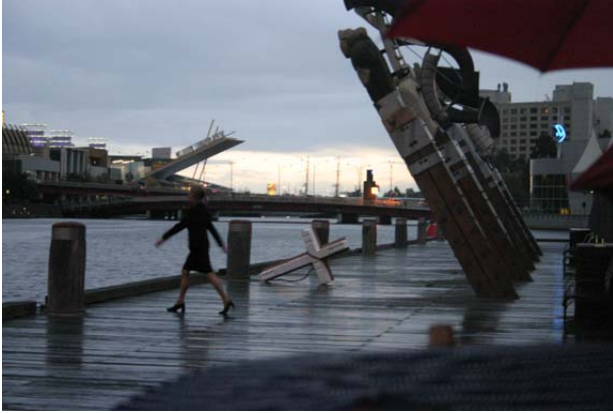
Strut down Market Street in suit and heels at 5pm with the other office-workers rushing to get home, cross at traffic lights and walk towards the audience gathered under the rail overpass beside the river. Pass through audience without acknowledgement, then walk in a large square several times in close proximity to audience. Walk on and the appointed guide brings audience after me.



Site 2. Saltwater side: Queen's Wharf

Cross road at traffic lights and go down bluestone steps, walk along Queen's Wharf to almost level with the sculpture, lean against mooring post, look down into river. (Wait for audience to follow and arrange themselves along the wall.) At this actual site of first British landing, I haul up large polystyrene props that are floating in the Yarra attached by shipping rope to each mooring post. One at a time: a cross, clock, picture of the Queen of England and a Coke bottle—slowly, until Coke bottle—trivially. Set each prop on the wharf.

Find chalk next to posts and draw grid patterns on wharf, dividing the wall, the boards beneath people's feet, tiny fern growing through the wall...into squares, boxes. Start subdividing my own body, chalking grids upon my black suit.



Sit down on bench beside bridge.

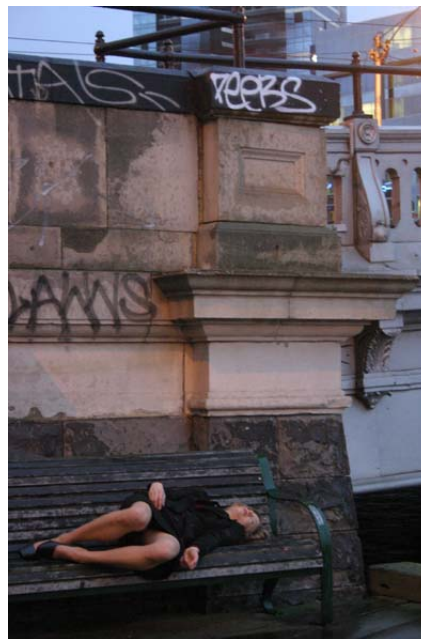
Manipulate body parts in seated position on bench—lift knees up, push them down, shove them out to the sides alluding to sexual violence, punch chest with left hand causing torso to contract, some scrubbing actions on my arms, push head sideways with right hand, body falling across bench, business-like brush thighs away three times, jagged elbows move three times (with intent to “elbow them all out of the way”), briskly brush/ slap hands three times with finality (idea of “washing my hands of it”). Pause, then repeat whole sequence twice.

Sit properly, hands clasped, face clear and innocent looking at audience for the first time, as if they are my business clients. Speak **“Is there something missing?”**

Leave words hanging—start to slowly deteriorate from this false composure, from the inside out as if guilt is a disease that is eroding my body, starting from my heart.

Face melts then expresses intense anguish.

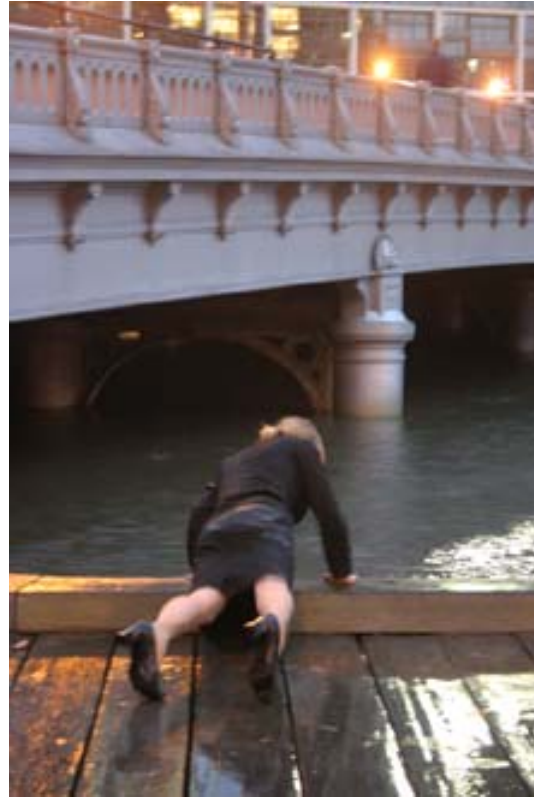
Hold still moment, then this also melts.



Transition to locating dance mode: gesture in response to the shapes and textures of surroundings—the skyscrapers on the opposite bank, the movement of a tram crossing the bridge, roll along boards of the wharf, look through them to the river below... then back to the bench.

Shift to being a drunk asleep, wake to yell at 'spirits': "What're yous lookin' at?" "And yous?"
Stagger up to piss in corner, drunk character fades.

Climb up and over wall, onto bridge, follow pedestrians imitating their gestures along bridge, talking on a pretend mobile phone, press button of traffic lights, wait for signal, cross road disappearing from audience view.



Site 3. Freshwater side: Banana Alley landing

Stand at the base of the ramp on the jetty in the light. When the audience has assembled along the railing of the ramp, very gradually ‘become’ the waterfall. Imagining the rippling of rapids beginning in my legs as a minimal sensation, let it slowly build to take over the movement of my whole body—move with this image to the sounds of the place in the present moment—trains, traffic, ferries. Let the ripple grow to a wild wave cascading up the ramp towards the bridge closer to the audience. At the climax of this movement the sound and video of waterfall start behind the audience, projected onto the bridge and I retreat back down the ramp into darkness. As the waterfall image and sound fades, light illumines me again, standing on the wharf with a rope around my waist, leaning from a mooring post, wavering ever so slightly.



Appendix 3

Foreign/ Familiar

I was curious as to which impressions from Europe would remain upon my body. I made a sequence of movement back in Melbourne in a studio. Trying to be as accurate to particular memories of Europe as possible, the sequence comprised several varied moments from my trip that had been outstanding for their resonance of familiarity or 'located-ness', or extreme moments of displacement. My choreography required direct and particular corporeal recollection of the site from which it derived in order to create the quality of each movement and transition. The live movement was interwoven with projected clips of mini-videos shot from my stills camera. The footage was predominantly point-of-view moving scenes, implying my (the photographer's) embodied presence in the place. Tom Berteis manipulated and edited together sound samples from various places (also collected via the low-fi technology of my camera) to create an eclectic soundtrack that exacerbated the sense of traversing contrasted places in rapid succession. This semi-choreographed sequence was an experiment in the memory and transportation of kinaesthetic and sensorial experience. My ten-minute piece: *Foreign/ Familiar* was performed at Dancehouse as part of a season of works by Butoh-influenced practitioners entitled 'BB05: Solo, Self, Site'. BB05 was curated by Tony Yap, Yumi Umiuare and Dancehouse and was presented in November 2005.

The Foreign/ Familiar sequence or movement score was as follows:

1. Feet walk on slippery stones at the edge of a creek in the Pyrenees, whilst my torso and arms respond to the flickering light of sun shining through the canopy of trees above my head
2. Lower right arm is bark hanging, flapping from its tree (as I observed in Pyrenees forest), bark/ arm falls to the ground
3. Elbows echo lilting flight of a pair of butterflies bringing me to standing
4. Butterflies fade as torso reflects the tousling motion of wind in the poplars and face becomes beaming yellow daisy
5. Gather blanket from the earth feeling like ancient crone upon the hill, turn in a circle drawing blanket cloak around me
6. See French full moon- arms float up magnetised by her force, look at hands walking backwards
7. Turn and run suddenly traversing space as if on a train
8. Bombs hit, fall to ground, get up, fall again, get up (London)
9. Ridiculous step-trip-hop over own leg move from Porto curb clumsiness, repeat twice traveling sideways
10. Suddenly head-banging in Berlin punk bar, laughing furiously

11. Turning in circles still head-banging career off-course, catch hold of something
12. Get sucked into Spanish mountain quicksand, hoist leg out
13. Calmly mouth (silently) asking directions whilst feet are flapping involuntarily
14. Get more frantic as they ignore me, rebuff after shut door until I'm pulling hair out,
mouth puffed full of words not understood, feet still flapping madly until one stops the
other by standing on it.
15. Look up. Ask an audience member 'What?'
16. Look down at feet, cringe slowly realising my very feet are wrong, misplaced, slow-
motion fall to ground, toe in mouth, rock in a ball
17. Melt tense body like snot hungover to drag along the floor
18. Gather water from stream to wash face, gradually, gently, refreshing, opening, repeat
gathering motion in a diagonal backwards through the stream at Divčí Kamen, movement
becoming like a wave, body becoming the surging swell of a river singing soprano...

Let all the images fade until I am simply standing there, but not 'empty'—instead containing all
as memories. Walk away maintaining this sense of containment.

Appendix 4

Still Landing

‘Script’

(This was my original script that we used as a guide only. It changed in the process of the shoot and postproduction and the final video work is quite different to this plan.)

Location: Warlpiri country near Mt Theo, near Tanami Rd, northwest of Yuendumu, NT

1. Bare white feet walk a step or two slowly on red earth
2. Head shot of colonial schoolgirl (‘Miranda’) standing pristine in white lace, staring innocently out at the desert. She turns slowly in a circle and camera sees from her point of view the entire panoramic horizon, uniformly flat, foreign and apparently empty.
3. Show legs leaning erratically in different directions trying to tune in to a recognisable radio signal, eventually many body parts join in this attempt, reaching in different directions [to sound of radio fuzz]. (Gretel in ‘plain clothes’)
4. ‘Miranda’ figure is doing a dance derived from memories of European places, in the desert environment.
5. Close-up of white hands touching red earth, then ‘plain clothes Gretel’ starts locating herself in relation to this place via a perceptual improvisation with sounds, textures and impulses. [sounds of desert—birds, flies...]
6. A white-suited ‘lady’ marches in straight lines, dividing up the land into squares with a stick, absurdly mechanical in her white heels. [desert sounds with mechanized, cold effect]
7. Close-up of plain-clothes Gretel’s face, literally listening to the earth, ear to ground. [faint sound of Warlpiri music]
8. Suited lady rakes up rocks/ sticks [to mechanized nature sounds], domesticating the landscape. She pauses briefly, [hearing Warlpiri music] and stamps it out with her white heels, with annoyance.
9. ‘Miranda’ who is now in a bit of a trance, and dirtier, performing her European sequence of movements, which are now influenced by the conditions of the desert [echoes and weird effects on the desert sounds].
10. (Brief shot of) Dolls’ houses and Christmas trees ‘appear’ upon the red earth. [European classical music]
11. Wide shot of Gretel in plain clothes standing still on top of red earth, looking at camera as if a portrait (a long take, sped up in postproduction to create a slight unsteadiness). [radio static sound or road train?]

12. (plain-clothes) Gretel's locating dance for a longer stint, becoming more immersed in place as it progresses—close-ups and point-of-view angle shots aim to intensify the viewers' experience of kinesthesia [sounds of body moving and encountering textures, surfaces of desert]. (Locating improvisations from different days mixed, layered and cross-faded between, showing peak moments of involvement, immersion [with a layered mix of effects on desert sounds]).
13. Miranda is entranced and really dirty and disheveled, in the later stages of her European-sequence-merged-with-desert-influences, particularly the Czech river spirit dance that now has a sorrowful grieving feel to it. [Echoes affect desert bird sounds]
14. Brief still shot of Gretel in plain clothes with feet dug into ground, buried to ankles. (A long take, sped up in postproduction to create a slight unsteadiness) [radio static?]
15. Gretel's shadow dances in harmonious relation to surroundings, feet building up a rhythm [to percussive mix of desert sounds].
16. Brief wide still image of Gretel with legs buried in earth up to knees. (A long take, sped up in postproduction) [radio static?]
17. A scrap of Miranda's white lace frock blows in the breeze from a twig. [fly goes by]
18. [Sound of road train coming from the distance across the desert, roaring up close, then fades into the distance again] as image fades to black.
19. Brief wide still image of Gretel standing, white feet on top of earth, beside hole, ejected. (A long take, sped up in postproduction) [radio static?]
20. A marionette puppet dances through dolls' houses and trees (shot from a weird angle that gets miniature houses in foreground in size relation to marionette Gretel. Speed up footage slightly in postproduction to intensify the jerky-quirky movements of the puppet). [European classical music sped up]
21. Suited lady touches earth, listens to earth [Warlpiri voices], kicks off white heels and humbly, quietly starts a locating improvisation, as if just arriving here from somewhere else. Subtly she starts to fit in to place [to desert sounds and faint echo of Warlpiri music]. We see her bare feet (through ripped stockings?) now dirty with the red dust. Eventually, in the late afternoon-dusk light, suited lady rolls like a tumbleweed across the desert. (Sometimes shot from dancing/rolling perspective, seeing moving earth, sky, bits of body, horizon line, as well as a wide shot of body rolling into distance.) Camera remains shooting as darkness falls over the desert. (Speed up this process in postproduction.) [sound of dusk crickets in the desert]



BODY_PLACE_PROJECT PRESENTS

STILL LANDING

A VIDEO INSTALLATION BY GRETEL TAYLOR

A white Australian woman's attempt to locate herself in relation to an Aboriginal place

CAMERA JAMES GEURTS
SOUND DESIGN TOM BERTEIS
VOCALS WALPIRI WOMEN ELDERS

OPENING FRIDAY 8TH FEBRUARY 2008 6-8PM
GALLERY B, ARTS HOUSE MEAT MARKET, 7 BLACKWOOD STREET, NORTH MELBOURNE
(ALSO OPEN SATURDAY 9TH AND SUNDAY 10TH FEBRUARY 1-5PM)

THIS IS AN OUTCOME OF GRETEL'S PHD PROJECT* SUPERVISED
BY ELIZABETH DEMPSTER THROUGH VICTORIA UNIVERSITY'S PERFORMANCE STUDIES

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