

# PERFORMING BELONGING: MEETINGS ON AND IN THE EARTH

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# ABSTRACT

This Masters by Research project involves two ways of meeting that explore, in complimentary ways, the question of belonging. It comprises this exegesis and a performance at a spot near where I've lived for 15 years, on the banks of the Merri Creek in Melbourne. This spot is where John Batman probably met with Wurundjeri elders on June 6<sup>th</sup> 1835, with the aim of negotiating a treaty for the buying of 500,000 acres of their land.

When I walk along the Merri Creek I feel that it is in some way 'mine', but know that this is only the case because the original inhabitants were violently prevented from maintaining their traditional lives here. For contemporary Aboriginal people, Australia can be felt as 'theirs' and 'not theirs'; and many immigrant Australians who now 'belong' here were, either themselves or their ancestors, violently moved off their own homelands. It could be argued that Australians' relationship to the land is paradoxical.

I am interested in what theatre, specifically site-specific theatre, can do to address the issue of belonging. Neil Leach describes belonging as inherently performative.<sup>1</sup> Assuming that the personal, social, historical and spatial are inseparable and interdependent, I have chosen a site that is particularly evocative of my (and hopefully other Australians too), exploration of connection to this country.

The meeting that happened on the Merri Creek between John Batman and the Wurundjeri elders is an example of a contact event, such as those which occurred all over Australia. I am particularly intrigued by a description from the journal of Sir George Grey, meeting Western Australian people in 1838. He is welcomed as a dead relative (as other settlers were in other parts of Australia) and interprets this welcome due to the fact that:

themselves never having an idea of quitting their own land, cannot imagine others doing it; - and thus, when they see white people suddenly appear in their country, and settling themselves down in particular spots, they imagine that they must have formed an attachment for this land in some

other state of existence; and hence conclude the settlers were at one period black men, and their own relations.<sup>2</sup>

Leaving aside discussion of the veracity of this interpretation, I am inspired by the poetry of it. Paul Carter argues that like a poem, contact events reveal their meaning internally through the creation of verbal and spatial interplays that open up a symbolic space where communication might occur.<sup>3</sup> In my performance I explore this concept with my audience. We share the same space, just as we share the same humanity and the same eventual fate — a return to the earth.

In my exegesis I interrogate the relationship between cemeteries and theatre. I describe my visit in 2012 to the country of my ancestors, Lithuania, and the discovery of a theatre clad with broken Jewish gravestones. At a mass grave I left a handful of stones as a sign that I visited, and as a symbol of memory of the departed. I ponder on the immense number of Indigenous graves that are under our feet as we walk on the land of Australia.

My writing is consciously eclectic, inspired by Gregory Ulmer's definition of *mystory*, which combines critical and creative writing, autobiography and cultural history. I embrace the resulting ambiguities to attempt to generate a heterogeneous writing practice that allows for different expressions of belonging. Additionally, I want the varied stories and ways of expressing myself in this exegesis to butt up against my reader's thoughts and memories, so that your own feelings about belonging are also present as you read.

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Leach, "Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Place," *Perspecta* 33, no. Journal Article (2002): 22.

<sup>2</sup> George Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia*, (Google eBook, 1841), <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=JjVCAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>. 302–3.

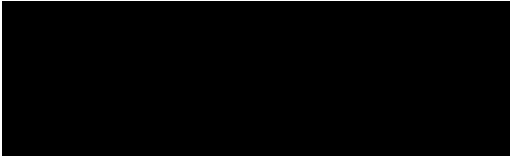
<sup>3</sup> Paul Carter, *Living in a New Country : History, Travelling and Language* (London: Faber, 1992), 173–4.

# STUDENT DECLARATION

Master by Research Declaration (by performance)

"I, Karen Berger, declare that the Master by Research exegesis entitled *Performing Belonging: Meetings On and In the Earth* should be at least 12,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis 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 exegesis is my own work".

Signature

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the student's signature.

Date 12/11/2013

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First thanks go to my supervisor, Dr Margaret Meran Trail, who has stuck by me through thick and thin.

Secondly, I would like to thank others who have read this exegesis and offered their comments: my associate supervisor Dr Elizabeth Dempster, Cath Ryan, and my parents, Linda and Clive Berger.

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A big thanks to those people who have come to look and comment on my performance: Anne O'Keeffe, Ilan Abrahams, Dan Witton, Michael Camilleri, Andrew Wood and Natasha Coleman. And to Lindesay Dresden who is filming it.

Lastly, I would like to thank my partner, David Joseph, for helping in many ways, including taking me to Lithuania and driving me to the villages of my ancestors.

I would like to dedicate this work to my grandparents: Judith and Harry Basson, Faye Nohr, and especially Faive Berger.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title .....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Student Declaration.....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Setting the Scene and Laying the Groundwork.....	1
Performing Belonging: Meetings On and In the Earth.....	20
Endnotes.....	99
Sources of Illustrations.....	109
Bibliography.....	111

# SETTING THE SCENE AND LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

## *Performing Belonging*

In *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, Hélène Cixous elaborates on the schools one needs to attend in order to create 'great' writing: the school of the dead, the school of dreams and the school of roots. On the first page she writes, 'The writers I love are *descenders*, explorers of the lowest and the deepest'.<sup>1</sup> And on the last: 'We must work. The earth of writing. To the point of becoming the earth. Humble work. Without reward. Except joy'.<sup>2</sup> These words excite me. I have become a student of the dead, dreams and roots in order to write this exegesis.

My theme is belonging. Clarice Lispector, one of Cixous' favourite writers, was a baby when her family fled Ukrainian pogroms for Brazil. She wrote:

I am certain that right from the cradle my first desire was to belong ... I must have somehow felt that I did not belong to anything or anyone. ... Perhaps I started writing so early in life because, at least by writing, I belonged to myself to some extent. ... Life has allowed me to belong now and then, as if to give me the measure of what I'm losing by not belonging. And then I discovered that: to belong is to live. I experienced it with the thirst of someone in the desert who avidly drinks the last drops of water from a flask. And then my thirst returns and I find myself walking that same desert.<sup>3</sup>

I am haunted by this ambivalent relationship to belonging. In their book, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs argue that in general, Australians' relationship to the land is paradoxical. For European immigrants, Australia has been 'a duplicitous object' in that it is both familiarly Western, and 'fantastic and otherworldly'.<sup>4</sup> Even for pre-contact Aboriginal Australians, the fact that a person can enter a new landscape and be familiar with it through knowledge of its Dreaming story means that it can be both strange and familiar at the same time.

The paradoxical nature of Australians' relationship to the land can be seen as potentially productive. In *Mapping Cultural Identity in Contemporary Australian Performance*, Helena Grehan argues that:

If resolved, belonging becomes an act of squeezing static images into dull packages. If left open and continually interrogated, it becomes something vibrant and fluid with the capacity to shatter any bland or legitimized packaging of cultural diversity.<sup>5</sup>

I am using my artistic practice — writing and creating a site-specific performance — to interrogate my own relationship to belonging in a way that I hope will also offer insights to my readers and audience. I am using my meeting with you — as reader and audience member — as a way of ‘giving meaning to the environment’.<sup>6</sup> As Neil Leach explains:

The concept of ‘belonging’ as a product of performativity enables us to go beyond the limitations of simple narrative. It privileges the idea not of reading the environment, as though its meaning were simply there and waiting to be deciphered, but rather of giving meaning to the environment by collective or individual behaviour. Belonging to place can therefore be understood as an aspect of territorialisation, and out of that belonging a sense of identity might be forged.<sup>7</sup>

Assuming that the social, historical and spatial are inseparable and interdependent,<sup>8</sup> we can assert that ‘certain spaces act as sites for the performance of identity’<sup>9</sup> — identity itself being ‘grounded on the huge unknowns of our psychic lives’.<sup>10</sup> For Australian art theorist, Ross Gibson, ‘the landscape itself has a memory and the storyteller activates it so that the community can know its place in the world of time and space’.<sup>11</sup>

Performance is a form of storytelling that is extremely productive for exploring these intersecting themes. Why? Because it is itself staged in space; because it is highly interactive — between performer, character/s, audience and space; and because it is inherently ambiguous in its take on truth and the imagined.

My performance will highlight our actual relationship to the earth which sustains us and to which we all return. It occurs at a place that is both significant to me personally, and significant historically for Australians: near where I’ve lived for fifteen years, at the place on the Merri Creek where founder of Melbourne, John Batman, probably enacted the only attempted treaty in Australia to purchase land from the local Wurundjeri tribal elders.<sup>12</sup> This is an important story and will be discussed at length in this exegesis. But in my attempt to explore belonging in a



country in which I was not born, I have also found it important to tell stories about other places I have lived. In 2012 I had the opportunity to visit the country of my ancestors, Lithuania, and stories of discoveries made there are also central to this exegesis.

### *Modes of Meeting in Writing*

In my writing, I am following my intellectual, and also emotional, passions. You'll find quite a few instances of phrases like, 'I love ...', and times where I comment on how I feel about the actions of historical figures, like Batman. This is perhaps not orthodox in an exegesis, but I am being upfront about what has taken me on quite a circuitous journey.

Each reader will have a personal experience of the narrative, different sections resonating differently with their life and inspiring different thoughts and memories. For this reason, I have not always been explicit in explaining how sections relate to each other, hoping that the reader will discover connections as they read.

As a way to meet my reader in different ways and so inspire different connections, my exegesis moves through different modes of writing (sometimes highlighted using different fonts). Often I am telling stories — sometimes from documented historical sources (e.g. John Batman's diary), sometimes my own personal stories. I discuss artists (such as Cixous) who have made significant contributions to the exploration of my theme. I also make use of more theoretical academic discussion.

There are boxed sections that are edited 'stream of consciousness' writing that feel like they came from the same place in my subconscious. I hope that they elucidate the material in a radically different way. There are plenty of pictures, so the reader can visualize what I'm talking about as I roam through different periods in different parts of the world. I have included some quite large quotes where I want to give a clear idea of power and flavour of the original text. At times I do not fully

explicate the pictures or quotes. Here my interest is to create a thematic meeting through the juxtaposition of the material.

My reason for using endnotes (Chicago 16<sup>th</sup> A style) rather than referencing from within the exegesis, is to try not to break the flow of the writing. Rather than having formal chapters with headings, I have divided sections — I imagine them as places where the storyteller and her audience stop to breathe for a moment before forging ahead — using sequential letters of the Hebrew alphabet. I have chosen the Hebrew alphabet as a reference to my ancestry. I was also struck by the fact that the symbols of the Indigenous Wurundjeri chiefs' on Batman's treaty were described as being written from right to left, as Hebrew is.<sup>13</sup> The sequential symbol dividers show that the story is moving forward. However I don't get to the end of the alphabet — the story is not yet finished, just pausing for a longer breath.

I have not included a formal conclusion, rather finishing with a piece a creative writing imagining my own death. My desire is that a conclusion is formed by the reader from the connections formed by the stories told within the exegesis. The performance which will follow is another form of conclusion.

### *Stories and Histories*

In his book, *In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape*, Mike Pearson uses Gregory Ulmer's definition of *mystory*, which combines personal, popular and expert discourses, 'blur[ring] the boundary between critical and creative writing, autobiography and cultural history',<sup>14</sup> to elucidate his own site-specific performance work. His show, *Bubbling Tom*, was situated in the English village where he grew up. He and the audience walked to different places (including his great-grandmother's grave) he remembered from childhood. He related personal memories imbued with his family's history in the village, interspersed with occasional theoretical reflections. He sees this style of performance as a 'critical intervention for re-inscribing and contesting the exclusions and inclusions of experience that shape modern life'.<sup>15</sup> Miwon Kwon agrees: 'site-specific art can lead to the unearthing of repressed histories, provide support for greater visibility

of marginalized groups and issues, and initiate the re(dis)covery of "minor" places so far ignored by the dominant culture'.<sup>16</sup>

The site that I have chosen for the performance is not significant for any member of my family but myself. However as the place where such an important meeting occurred between Victoria's original inhabitants and new settlers, it's highly significant. As I walk along the Merri Creek I can feel, 'This is mine' and know that I can only feel that because the original inhabitants are no longer living as they were before colonial settlement. And I am drawn to reflect on some of the stories of those immigrants to Australia who benefit from that fact: recent Hazara refugees from Afghanistan; Scots kicked off their land during the Highland clearances; descendants of Lithuanian Jews like myself, whose original homeland was 'cleansed' of its Jewish population. As a Jew, I am also very conscious of the drama of contested land currently being enacted in Israel and Palestine. As an immigrant, including knowledge about what happened in the country of my ancestors is a way to connect all our stories to our common earth.

A fascinating ally I have found in investigating the relationships between personal and historical stories is eco-feminist writer Susan Griffin, who intricately weaves histories of significant issues such as war, colonialism and environmental degradation with her own personal stories. In her books she forcefully demonstrates her thesis that:

we know everything, that all history, including the history of each family, is part of us, such that, when we hear any secret revealed, a secret about a grandfather, or an uncle, or a secret about the battle of Dresden in 1945, our lives are made suddenly clearer to us, as the unnatural heaviness of unspoken truth is dispersed.<sup>17</sup>

In my work, rather than investigate personal and social secrets and their relationships, it has been the uncovering of stories that have been new to me and finding their relationships that has been revelatory. In making these discoveries, I have felt, like Griffin, that 'perhaps we are like stones; our history and the history of the world embedded in us, we hold a sorrow deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung'.<sup>18</sup>

In this sentence, Griffin unites two of my obsessions: the pain of our personal and world histories and their mysterious relationship to stones (and I expand this to include the earth). Death enters here, inspired by the playwright, Howard Barker:

To enter the space silently. To enter it thinking of death. To make death the whole subject even when laughter discloses the ambiguity of our passions. To *admit* death.<sup>19</sup>

I explore death as a post-Holocaust Jew. As Dora Apel has written, 'It can be argued the Holocaust stands behind any contemporary sense of Jewish identity, whether it is addressed obsessively, ambivalently, or not at all'.<sup>20</sup> The historian, Saul Friedländer believes that the history of the Holocaust can be written only through the prism of personal stories.<sup>21</sup> Hannah Arendt (another Jew who experienced the Holocaust) emphasized the importance of sharing stories as a way of 'training our imagination to go visiting'.<sup>22</sup>

I explore the stone ruins of the Holocaust: a monument to ruined lives by a mass grave, ruined cemeteries; as well as personal ruins — the house I grew up in. The trauma scholar, Maria Tumarkin tells us:

Ruins do not lie. ... Just like the dead, ruins lure and repel in equal measure. While the dead cannot be fully cast away from our minds, ruins too are an inescapable presence in our public spaces.<sup>23</sup>

'Ruins do not lie' ... but what about when we take those ruins and create stone monuments from them? The stories they tell may be highly ambiguous. Broken gravestones from the Jewish cemetery of the hometown of my mother's grandfather in Panevėžys, Lithuania, have been used to clad its municipal theatre.<sup>24</sup>

Theatre returns. The treaty ceremony that Batman enacted on the banks of the Merri Creek, besides being a performance in itself, incorporated a traditional corroboree. On the opposite bank still exists (unruined) the Old Actors' Association built in 1869 to provide accommodation for hard up actors, (now a general old-age home). The original name of the creek was the Wurundjeri-willam phrase 'Merri Merri' which means 'very rocky'.<sup>25</sup> Since 1974 just above the treaty site there has existed a business, 'Amalgamated Stone Pty. Ltd. — Suppliers of Natural Stone'.<sup>26</sup>

John Batman's memorial has had a contested history, being taken down and moved twice, and is now situated in the car park of the Queen Victoria Market. Additional plaques have been added, graffitied and removed. And I am thinking about the immense number of Indigenous graves that are under our feet as we walk on the land of Australia.

### *Connections*

What's the connection? In my quest to find my place in this land, I agree with American-born, Deborah Bird Rose, now an Australian academic, that:

our challenge is to find scents and guides to help us find our way back home. Our imperative is to recover or discover connectivity and the radical awareness of being at home that emerges as we embed ourselves ever more complexly into the life of the world.<sup>27</sup>

And she elaborates:

the connectivities of life on Earth ensure that we are always called to face ambiguity and to act, to be responsible. ... Connectivity ethics are open, uncertain, attentive, participatory, contingent. One is called upon to act, to engage in the dramas of call-and-response ...<sup>28</sup>

Peter Sutton, 'who knows traditional indigenous country as intimately as any non-Aboriginal alive today',<sup>29</sup> writes:

I do think you've got to be opportunistic about gaining meaning, to link things that may appear to be unlike each other, or linking things which in fact are like each other but which you've tried to forget are like each other. It's the connecting sensibility, and that's what Aborigines are doing talking about the dreaming and the land. ... Connect Connect Connect.<sup>30</sup>

The politics of 'whitefellas' discussing Aboriginal ideas are contentious. In his book, *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the end of the liberal consensus*, Sutton discusses his rationale for delivering the Inaugural Berndt Foundation Biennial Lecture in 2000, on which the book is based. It was the pain of attending a double funeral of friends at Aurukun,<sup>i</sup> a far north Queensland Aboriginal community where he had spent long periods of time, that caused him to

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<sup>i</sup> I am fascinated by the significance Sutton gives to cemeteries. At the beginning of his book, he writes: 'The cemetery at Aurukun reminds me of the Australian war graves at Villers-Bretonneux in France, close to where my great uncle Bert Sutton was killed by machine gun fire in 1918', and that he includes photographs of both cemeteries (Sutton: 2).

feel, 'I could no longer support the view that a non-Indigenous person should leave public statements on these questions of sudden and recent social decline to Indigenous people alone'.<sup>31</sup> Importantly, Marcia Langton, one of Australia's leading Aboriginal scholars and Chair in Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne, concurred, writing in the foreword, 'This book ... is one of the more important works in the Australian Indigenous field in the last quarter of a century'.<sup>32</sup>

My work does not address directly the 'politics of suffering' of Aboriginal people, but as an Australian wanting to trace a personal story of my relationship to the idea of belonging in the part of Australia in which I live, stories of the original inhabitants are very important to me. The 2013 Australian Theatre Forum hosted impassioned discussions about the rights and responsibilities of non-Indigenous Australians in telling Indigenous stories. Key to Injibarndi/Palku playwright, David Milroy's paper and the audience discussion that followed was the importance of consultation from the beginning of a project.<sup>33</sup>

Since 1995 I have been discussing Indigenous issues, and collaborating with friend and colleague, Yorta Yorta and Gunai/Kurnai woman, Andrea James, who is currently Artistic Associate at Carriageworks, Sydney. She has been supportive of my work, and helped to get me in touch with local Indigenous elders. I've met with Wurundjeri elder, Ian Hunter, and discussed his family's historical connection to the land on which I live. I very much enjoyed taking Ian to the spot on the Merri Creek where my performance will take place. He spoke about the edible plants in the area and showed me how to make baskets from some of the grasses there.

As will be mentioned later (see p. 69), I also met with Indigenous Victoria University academic, Mat Jakobi. He encouraged me to find an Indigenous performer to work with. I did explore the possibility of this, but because the performance aspect of my work has taken a long time to clarify, in the end I did not have time to invite another performer and apply for ethics approval.

University of Melbourne Indigenous academic, Tony Birch, also emphasises the importance of collaboration in the making of his projects with non-Indigenous artists as a way to be both creatively and politically proactive, combating the pessimism and inertia that could result from disappointment with our 'supposed leaders'.<sup>34</sup> Birch's article accompanying the exhibition *Common Goods: Cultures Meet Through Craft*, relates the story of how he felt uninspired to work with a particular Scottish artist until that artist revealed 'that it was only through his art practice that he could attempt to make sense of the anger that he felt in response to the Australian government's refusal to respond to [Stolen Generations] history with anything other than silence and selective amnesia'.<sup>35</sup>

Later in this exegesis, I discuss Indigenous writer Kim Scott's prize-winning novel, *That Deadman Dance*, which is inspired by the history of first contact in the part of southern West Australia that his ancestors come from. This area was initially known as the 'friendly frontier',<sup>36</sup> but Scott explores deteriorating relationship between the original inhabitants and the newcomers. None-the-less, as a contemporary Noongar man painfully aware of the disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous standards of living, Scott believes that '[t]he fundamental need is for collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people'.<sup>37</sup> He explains the significance of having his novel's Noongar hero telling stories to tourists: 'To have non-Indigenous people interested in Noongars, and in what we are speaking about concerning our heritage, is a really powerful position to be in'.<sup>38</sup> And he believes that the present day sharing of heritage is a way to improve Aboriginal well-being on physical, social, psychological and spiritual levels.<sup>39</sup>

### *Performing Meeting on Earth*

An early West Australian explorer, Sir George Grey, was fascinated by the Indigenous people he met. In 1838 he wrote of them in his journal:

themselves never having an idea of quitting their own land, cannot imagine others doing it; - and thus, when they see white people suddenly appear in their country, and settling themselves down in particular spots, they imagine that they must have formed an attachment for this land in some other state of

existence; and hence conclude the settlers were at one period black men, and their own relations.<sup>40</sup>

For me this is a powerful and evocative concept and I will be exploring it in my performance. I will reflect later (see p. 88) on arguments for the veracity of Grey's interpretation, but it is not so much whether it is true or not that is my essential starting point. My interest is in the 'poetry' in this interpretation of a meeting across such a cultural divide. Although there is a focus in my exegesis on the story of the meeting of Indigenous people and first settlers near where I now live, my initial interest in belonging and meetings is related to my personal history: arriving in Australia as a child (and being completely bamboozled by the passion aroused by the mention of football in my first Prep class); periodic trips to my parent's homeland of South Africa and witnessing perplexing race relationships; four years working in Africa as an adult; being Jewish in a predominantly Christian culture.

David Harvey writes that 'the elaboration of place-bound identities has become more rather than less important in a world of diminishing spatial barriers to exchange, movement and communication',<sup>41</sup> which helps explain why my paradoxical relationship to belonging can be distressing. I breathe a sigh of relief and understanding when I read Cixous' *'I felt perfectly at home, nowhere'*<sup>42</sup> (see p. 36). However, I take note of Miwon Kwon's admonition that 'the choice to "belong" anywhere, everywhere, and nowhere. ... does not belong to everyone equally. ... the ability to deploy multiple, fluid identities in and of itself is a privilege of mobilization that has a specific relationship to power'.<sup>43</sup> And this is perhaps why I find it so moving that the Aboriginal people that Sir George Grey met were so grounded in their own rootedness and feelings of belonging to the land, that they were able to welcome him as a family member.

John Batman's purported buying of 'Five Hundred Thousand more or less Acres'<sup>44</sup> of Wurundjeri land was part of a process of dispossession of Victorian Aborigines that left them not only wishing the arrivals had never come, but landless themselves. And it leaves us immigrants who have benefitted from this dispossession on uncertain footing.



Where place is no longer believable as a 'reservoir of unique identity', Kwon also elucidates the 'compensatory' behaviour of the 'melancholic' site-specific artist for his/her 'sense of loss and vacancy'.<sup>45</sup> Kwon presents her own paradox, asking whether site-specific art practice can find 'a terrain between mobilization and specificity — to be *out* of place with punctuality and precision'.<sup>46</sup> And she concludes that:

This means addressing the differences of adjacencies and distances *between* one thing, one person, one place, one thought, one fragment *next* to another, rather than invoking equivalencies via one thing *after* another. Only those cultural practices that have this relational sensibility can turn local encounters into long-term commitments and transform passing intimacies into indelible, unretractable social marks.<sup>47</sup>

This brings me back to the ideas I have been tracing in this introduction: Grehan advocating interrogating an unresolved sense of belonging; Leach's understanding of belonging as a performative act; Griffin placing historical and personal stories *next* to each other to uncover earth-buried secrets; Ulmer's *mystory*, which combines personal, popular and expert discourse; Sutton admonishing us to 'Connect connect connect'; Rose showing that connectivity ethics call on us to be responsible and that this is a way to find the path 'home'.

Later in this exegesis (p. 40), I discuss a chapter from Australian academic, Margaret Somerville's book, *Body/Landscape Journals*. Analogous to my choice to stage my performance of belonging at a spot on my local suburban creek, in her introduction Somerville writes about the place which is the focus of her question of belonging — where she takes her daily walk, an unspectacular, 'infinitely colonised space', that she calls home.<sup>48</sup> In this hybrid place she is drawn to ask:

What stories does mine make place for and which ones does it displace? There is still an overarching sense that all the landscape is marked by Aboriginal stories and there has been no resolution to the questions of whose land? and whose story can be told? ... I have been educated into the privileges of the world of writing. Does it make room for multiple stories? Can your story be written in here? Is it a postcolonial space?<sup>49</sup>

Each chapter of *Body/Landscape Journals* revisits an experience Somerville had working with Indigenous women, and is explicitly envisaged as a performance. She writes, 'This place exists here in my performance of it. In telling the story of place it

comes into being as a particular landscape evoked by a particular body, just as I come into being through that performance'.<sup>50</sup>

Her writing practice is consciously multi-faceted, using different modes much like Ulmer's *mystory*, in an attempt to generate a heterogeneous post-colonial writing practice that allows for different expressions of belonging, but strongly resists appropriating the stories of others who so inform her own understanding. In her comprehensive analysis of the book, Lisa Slater criticizes Somerville for being 'disordered by other voices and discourses',<sup>51</sup> giving 'the impression that she is almost incapable, and unwilling, to direct readers'.<sup>52</sup> For myself, I have no issue with the multiple, fragmented and ambiguous tone of Somerville's work. To me it seems like the most appropriate way to approach one's own story of belonging in a land whose original owners have been dispossessed. On the other hand, I agree with Slater that Somerville's 'uncertainty opens her to new connections that might transform her seeking into an act of invention, which could move her beyond colonialism'<sup>53</sup> and that her way of writing is a way 'to bring a new self into being, whereby identity can be predicated on connection, rather than separation'.<sup>54</sup> By collaborating with Aboriginal women and writing her book about that process, Somerville discovers that the way to belonging is an ongoing performance.

Though I have found a written gathering of heterogeneous stories an important tool in the exploration of belonging, my project extends to an actual performance. I invite you, my reader, to meet me in person at the spot where I want to question your and my feelings of being at home. And in an attempt to move beyond the 'world of writing' and 'make room for multiple stories' that you will inevitably bring with you, I will avoid using clearly understood language. It was at this spot that John Batman created a treaty that attempts to suggest that the Wurundjeri elders he met understood his written document — clearly a fallacy. I am inspired by one of the women that Somerville meets in the Northern Territory, Nganyinytja. She is passionate about educating visitors about her country, but refuses to speak in English. Somerville understands that 'translation/interpretation is a fundamental component of Nganyinytja's vision'.<sup>55</sup> As Slater interprets it, she

‘confronts the listener with the too often forgotten understanding that all dialogue is a (failed) process of translation’.<sup>56</sup>

In his article, ‘Performing as a Moral Act’, Dwight Conquergood, ethnographer and professor of performance studies, advocated ‘dialogical performance’ as a path to ‘genuine understanding of others’. He wrote:

This performative stance struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with each other. ... It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions ... More than a definite position, the dialogic stance is situated in the space *between competing* ideologies. ... It brings self and the other together even while it holds them apart.<sup>57</sup>

I’m fascinated by the fact that even as he advances his concept of performance as a dialogue, he hints at the value of the failure of complete understanding. I will now discuss a number of performances that address this idea. Additionally, they are particularly inspiring to me for the innovative ways they deal with spatial and/or interpersonal relationships.

In 1971, Joseph Beuys staged *Celtic +~~~* in a former bunker in Basel. One by one Beuys thoroughly washed the feet of seven audience members while the remaining approximately 700 other audience members jostled each other to be able to see the action. Ericka Fischer-Lichte comments that Beuys ‘collapsed the dichotomy between public and private’, a contradictory experience which created a transformational experience for the audience.<sup>58</sup> The performance references foot-washing practices from the Old and New Testaments, particularly Jesus’ washing of his disciple’s feet.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps Beuys was specifically targeting postwar Germany with a message of spiritual redemption.<sup>60</sup>

Marina Abramović’s art also references spiritual traditions: the extreme ascetic practices of early Christian saints,<sup>61</sup> and eastern spiritual practices of people such as Amma, the contemporary ‘hugging saint’.<sup>62</sup> In 2010 Marina Abramović staged an intimate experience of meeting with visitors to her *The Artist is Present* retrospective at New York’s MOMA. One gallery was lit very brightly by film studio lights, creating a strong ambience reminiscent of an operating theatre — nothing

could be hidden. Abramović sat on a chair behind a small table and visitors queued for hours, themselves 'heating up' the atmosphere with their presence and expectations, to sit opposite her as she stared wordlessly at them. The exposed intimacy of the situation was increased when the table between Abramović and her audience was removed. Her ability to be completely open to each person enabled them to open to her, and many experienced highly charged emotions.<sup>63</sup>

Analogous to the way Susan Griffin's writing moves between the personal and the historical, Abramović's work resonates with the deepest shared experiences of what it is to be human as well as referencing her personal Baltic heritage. The curator of her MOMA retrospective points out the connection between her long-duration sitting and an ancient Serbian tradition: 'this way of welcoming guests and giving of 'guest-gifts' is typical ... with all the Indo-European peoples: the guest first has to sit, and only then will he receive the guest-gift'.<sup>64</sup>

Abramović explores practices that may be 'other' to her primarily Western European and American audiences, though they belong to her own culture of origin. Beuys' interest in the 'other' was partly expressed through his ongoing interest in Eurasian nomads. His central 'Story', (as coined by art historian Peter Nisbet) was being shot down in the Crimea while flying a Nazi plane in WWII, being rescued and revived by a band of Tartars who coated his body in fat and wrapped him in felt, which explained the presence of fat and felt in many of his artworks. This Story has subsequently been shown to be false.<sup>65</sup>

Like Beuys, Ana Mendieta's 'Story' had an immense impact on her art. In her case, the Story is true: she lived in Cuba until she was twelve. Following the Communist revolution, her parents had her flown to the U.S. where she initially lived in an orphanage. The experience of exile and otherness was seminal for her work<sup>66</sup> which 'insist[s] on an inseparable relationship between identity, body and land',<sup>67</sup> and could be described as 'shamanistic rituals intended to reconnect with ... the earth upon which she feels like a stranger'.<sup>68</sup> She observed that a group of works entitled *Siluetas* made 'the transition between my homeland and my new home'.<sup>69</sup> *Siluetas* is a series of photographs that document the transference of her silhouette

to the landscape using materials such as rocks, twigs, flowers, blood and gunpowder.<sup>70</sup> Both blood and the white flowers that cover her like a shroud reference death, as does the 'palpable intimacy' shown between the body and the earth.<sup>71</sup>

Mendieta's theme of the necessity of death as a precondition for new life is revealed in *On Giving Life*, a series of photographs of herself in a stylised act of sex with a skeleton. In a 1982 lecture at New York's Museum of Contemporary Art, not long before she tragically died at the age of 36 after falling from her 34<sup>th</sup> floor apartment, she said:

There is no original past to redeem; there is the void, the orphanhood, the unbaptised earth of the beginning, the time that looks out to us from within the earth. There is, above all, the search for origin.<sup>72</sup>

Like American art, Australian art often explores 'the search for origin'. In *Unsettling Space, Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre*, Joanne Tompkins analyses productions that explore the spatial politics that structure Australian cultural identity. All three of the following productions could be seen as exemplars of Kwon's idea of being 'out of place with punctuality and precision' — fragments are placed 'next to another';<sup>73</sup> striking contrasts elucidate Australians' paradoxical relationship to belonging. *Legs on the Wall's* 1998 show, *Homeland*, poignantly stages questions of belonging by having performers enact traumatic immigrant experiences while hanging from skyscrapers that 'otherwise memorialize corporate Australia'.<sup>74</sup> Balodis' *Too Young for Ghosts* layers the explorer Leichhardt's attempt to map Australia, and the experience of Latvian refugees in post WWII Queensland. In a particularly uncanny scene in this play, the rape of Aboriginal women by Leichhardt's men and that of Latvian refugees by American G.I.'s is staged at the same time. Balodis' idea is that Leichhardt's journey and the Stuttgart scenes are like the Ukrainian refugees' Dreaming.<sup>75</sup> In a similar way, in Louis Nowra's *The Golden Age*, Europe during WWII is contrasted with scenes in the Tasmanian wilderness to highlight the ongoing barbarism of humanity.<sup>76</sup>

Tompkins proposes that by the 1960s, Australia's changing demographics meant that the 'character' of the bush could no longer represent the nation. Instead, in theatrical productions it now often stands for history, and becomes a site for 'rethinking national landscape and identity'.<sup>77</sup> But what about performances staged in the bush? Gay McAuley argues that the institutionalisation of theatre into licensed venues limits the transformative power of performance 'which permits the fictional to enter the real, with potentially destabilising effects'.<sup>78</sup> Conversely, site-specific performance recontextualises sites whose histories are apparent.<sup>79</sup>

One of Australia's foremost performance artists, Jill Orr<sup>80</sup> stages her work both in natural and gallery settings. However the power and focus of her concerns ensures that they are never 'sterile'. In 1979, Orr created *Bleeding Trees*, a powerfully ritualistic work in which she used her naked body to stage her environmental concerns. In one event she was strung up naked from a dead tree, in others she was again naked and buried in the earth. For me, in the most disturbing and evocative image of this series, her contorted body is naked with most of her head buried in the earth, except for her mouth 'an opening, through which fear can pass'.<sup>81</sup>

Also relevant to my project are Orr's works that reference our colonial history. In *Lunch with the birds*, she lay on the beach covered with loaves and small fish, becoming a vessel for seagulls to feed from.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps primarily, this work addresses the female condition of passive giving, but her costume of a long white colonial dress also refers to our colonial history. In *Walking on Planet Earth* Orr wore a colonial outfit complete with flaming parasol to enact an environmental battle with a bulldozer.<sup>83</sup>

In *Split/fragile relationships*, Orr explored the fragility of identity, internal relationships, and relationships between people by working with another woman who was bound to a large pane of glass. Initially the glass was shrouded by a cloth, onto which images of Orr's face covered in clay were projected. Then the other woman was untied from the glass which smashed and the two women had a tug-of-war across the shattered glass.<sup>84</sup> The power of earth, in the form of mud, and the

danger of glass are both present. Orr has written: 'I am always aware of a connection with the earth; things born of the earth, return to the earth ...'<sup>85</sup>

In 1982 Orr returned to Australia from Europe to perform a work that 'embraced the celebratory nature of home coming', a return to 'the unique earth of my familiar': *The Digging in and the Climbing out*. In this work, she emerged from a hole in the ground as if the 'energies of home' had pulled her through the centre of the earth to Australia.<sup>86</sup> I particularly appreciate the humour and whole-hearted expression of love for the earth of Australia that this work explores.

In 2007 Orr staged *The Crossing* on the Murray River, a collaborative work that was 'inspired by local stories about cross cultural relationships to place'.<sup>87</sup> The audience was guided to various cameo performances that included local Aboriginal children dancing their ancient River Dance. Another work that explored the themes of colonial and Indigenous relationships to the land and each other was *Southern Cross — To Bear and Behold* staged in a dry salt lake (strongly referencing Orr's environmental concerns) in western central Victoria. One of the characters is a missionary who drags her cross leaving indelible black footprints.<sup>88</sup> These two works address 'trans-generational haunting' — the way in which repressed or unspoken secrets are passed from one generation to the next (a particular theme of Griffin, see above p. 5). Dubbed an 'oracle for modern times', Orr's intention can be seen to be transformative and healing.<sup>89</sup>

Her most recent work, *The Promised Land*, has powerful resonances for me. It consists of a series of photographs of a woman in the unfinished prow of a small boat, that can suggest both a skeleton and a coffin. One photograph was taken at the pier in Port Melbourne<sup>90</sup> where I arrived by boat to Australia as a six year old (see p. 30). Orr is consciously referring to immigrants from the World Wars who arrived here, stating, 'These arrivals are now the fabric of Australian society'.<sup>91</sup> In another photo the small boat and its oarswoman is on the banks of the Yarra River, the river into which the Merri Creek flows not far from the Batman treaty site. The title, *The Promised Land*, is also significant, referencing the Old Testament story of the early Israelites searching for a homeland, the desperate search for a safe place

to live for present day refugees, and everybody's personal striving for a place where they belong.<sup>92</sup>

In 2010 the prestigious Turner Prize was controversially won by a sound artist, Susan Philipsz. Trained as a sculptor, she had loved to sing in a church choir as a child and started thinking about the physicality of sound early on.<sup>93</sup> She made her first sound piece in 1994, exploring the emotive and psychological effects of unaccompanied voice and how it can act as a trigger for powerful memories and associations.<sup>94</sup>

I am most interested in the way Philipsz uses the recorded sound of her own untrained voice in site-specific works that reference the places' histories. She aims for her audience to be simultaneously immersed in the song and aware of their surroundings. By using songs from different eras, one becomes aware that a particular place contains a plurality of times.<sup>95</sup> In 2000, she exhibited in Slovenia not long after it had gained independence from the Soviet Union. She played a recording of herself singing the old socialist anthem *The Internationale* under a public walkway in the city centre. Whether it was a rallying call to political action or a lament to the past was ambiguous, which made the work particularly affective on unsuspecting passersby.<sup>96</sup>

For her Turner Prize entry, Philipsz played a recording of herself singing *Lowlands*, a ballad about a sailor who died at sea, beneath a bridge in Glasgow notorious for its suicides. The music she chooses is invariably sad. Philipsz says 'It's amazing how many songs are melancholic. I think people are really drawn to sad songs because they're fascinated by their own mortality'.<sup>97</sup>

As part of my performance, I have chosen a song that many regard as one of the most beautiful of the Jewish liturgy.<sup>98</sup> It is traditionally sung in synagogue immediately prior to the Day of Atonement when congregants beg forgiveness for the past year's sins. I am attracted to the way its ambivalent melody moves intriguingly from hauntingly plaintive to almost triumphant.



## *Closing Thoughts*

The above examples of very varied performances point to complex and rich relationships between performer, character, fiction and reality, where the audience cannot be complacent, but must themselves work to create meaning.<sup>99</sup> The performer is affected by the site and the audience, which in turn affect them. By using site-specific theatre and crossing over into the audience's territory, I seek to make theatre that engages with my audience in a way that has consequences outside the theatre, opening to the possibility of a rethinking of attitudes, forging new links between the personal, social, historical and natural worlds. How can we meet with one another in such a way that the question of belonging (or not) is fascinating rather than alienating?

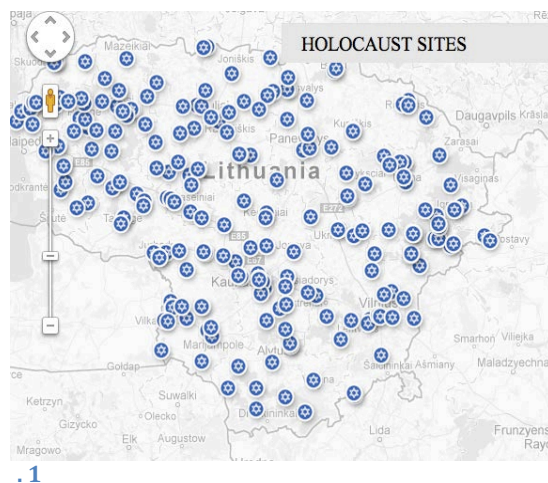
In one of her collaborative books with Aboriginal women, *The Sun Dancin: People and Place in Coonabarabran*, Somerville writes about trying to clarify her role. She reports that a 'New Zealand Maori, asked by a white Australian, "What can we do?", responded, "Know your own history" '.<sup>100</sup> This exegesis is an exploration into my history as a way to provide material for an investigation of belonging. I have included personal history that's very close to me — dreams and stories from my unconscious; stories from my childhood and a recent holiday. Sometimes I write about artists I feel connected to through the way they use their art to explore their history. Some of the stories are closer to standard history — events that happened near where I live, and the real characters that drove these events. Some stories occurred far away in the land of my ancestors.

When I travel I have a sense of needing to keep the reality of other places alive in my mind. ... When I visited Auschwitz concentration camp, I had the sense that I needed to try to understand how such a place had come to exist at the same time as remembering the reality of 'normal' life (and visiting a beautiful Polish pine forest the following day helped!) In this exegesis, I am patching together a quilt of many vastly different squares. As Conquergood advocates, I resist conclusions, my interest being in the 'space between' (see p. 13). It's part of an on-going project to search for ways of finding a place in the world.

# PERFORMING BELONGING: MEETINGS ON AND IN THE EARTH



In 2012 I was sound operator for the European tour of the circus show, *Controlled Falling Project*, produced by the Australian company, *This Side Up*.<sup>101</sup> I was excited that we were booked to perform in Lithuania, the country of my ancestors. In the capital, Vilnius, I checked the website, “Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania”,<sup>102</sup> which has the following map. Each of these blue Stars of David represents the site of a mass grave.



. 1

I typed in the name of my father’s father’s hometown, Svėdasai, and read:

**MASS MURDER OF THE JEWS FROM SVĖDASAI** [Print](#) | [To list](#) | [Minimize](#)

**ABOUT MASSACRE**

In July 1941, according to some sources 245 people were murdered near Svėdasai, and according to others 386, most must have been Jews.

Address: **Svėdasai administrative district, Bajorai village, Anykščiai district**  
Victim number: **245-386**

**Perpetrators**

Unknown

**HOW TO FIND?**

From the center of Svėdasai, near the church, turn onto Šimonių street. Then go straight ahead until you see the white chapel outside of town. Then turn left. After 200 meters you'll see a commemorative marker on the left side, by the road. Walk about 200 meters and you'll find the monument.

Or go down road no. 118 (the Utena–Kupiškis highway), and after the Anykščiai Svėdasai highway intersection go about 1 km and turn right. Going down the road you'll see a commemorative marker on your right.

Latitude: **55.684833** Longitude: **25.348700**

**MONUMENT**

[Unique site code 20717](#)

. 2

It took quite a while wandering around a young pine plantation before I found the monument.



.3



.4

There were stinging nettles and small wild strawberries and I got bitten on the cheek by a wasp but it wasn't that sore. Finally I found the plaque. My grandfather, Faive Berger, left Svėdasai in about 1914 as a young man. None of my immediate family have ever visited. Via Skype, I'd asked my father if he wanted me to do anything for him there. He asked me to put stones on the grave.



.5 *My grandfather is the man in the middle, my father is the boy on the right.*



.6

The practice of placing flowers on graves is ancient. Flowers are a good metaphor for life — they both eventually wither. But Jewish authorities have often objected to bringing flowers to the grave, seeing it as a pagan custom.

Stones on a grave are intended to keep the soul from wandering around prematurely. They are a marker of a visit and a symbol of the permanence of our memory of the departed. According to Rabbi David Wolpe, 'While other things fade, stones and souls endure'.<sup>103</sup> In the Bible, an altar is no more than a pile of stones, but it is on an altar that one offers to God. The stone upon which Abraham

takes his son to be sacrificed is called *even hashityah*, the foundation stone of the world. The most sacred shrine in contemporary Judaism is the wall of the Second Temple, another pile of stones.<sup>104</sup>

A very large woman, gold lamé dress sparkling in the sunshine, high heeled silver strappy sandals, a bit worse for wear, runs full pelt down the sloping stones towards the Wailing Wall, wailing. Loudly. Snot runs too and she gags on it sporadically, which interrupts her wailing. She reaches the wall without tripping and starts laying into it, banging it with her fists in rhythm with her wails. Once she kicks the wall but she's a bit concerned about the fragility of her high-heeled sandals so she returns to her fists. She's using up a lot of energy. When a letter falls out of a crack in the wall's stones she stops to pick it up. It's in Yiddish, her mother tongue, so she reads it, without even thinking that it's a private letter to someone else. The letter says: 'Lord, why are you doing this to me?' She's a little taken aback. That's exactly what she'd been screaming.

She takes a breath and looks around at the other people at the wall. Over at the men's side she can see plenty of religious men praying, some knocking their heads against the wall, though not as violently as she had been knocking her fists. There are a few women praying too, children playing chasey, tourists taking photos. She thinks, 'Why is God doing this to us?' Then she thinks, sssllloooowwwlyyy, ' But

nothing

is

being

done .'

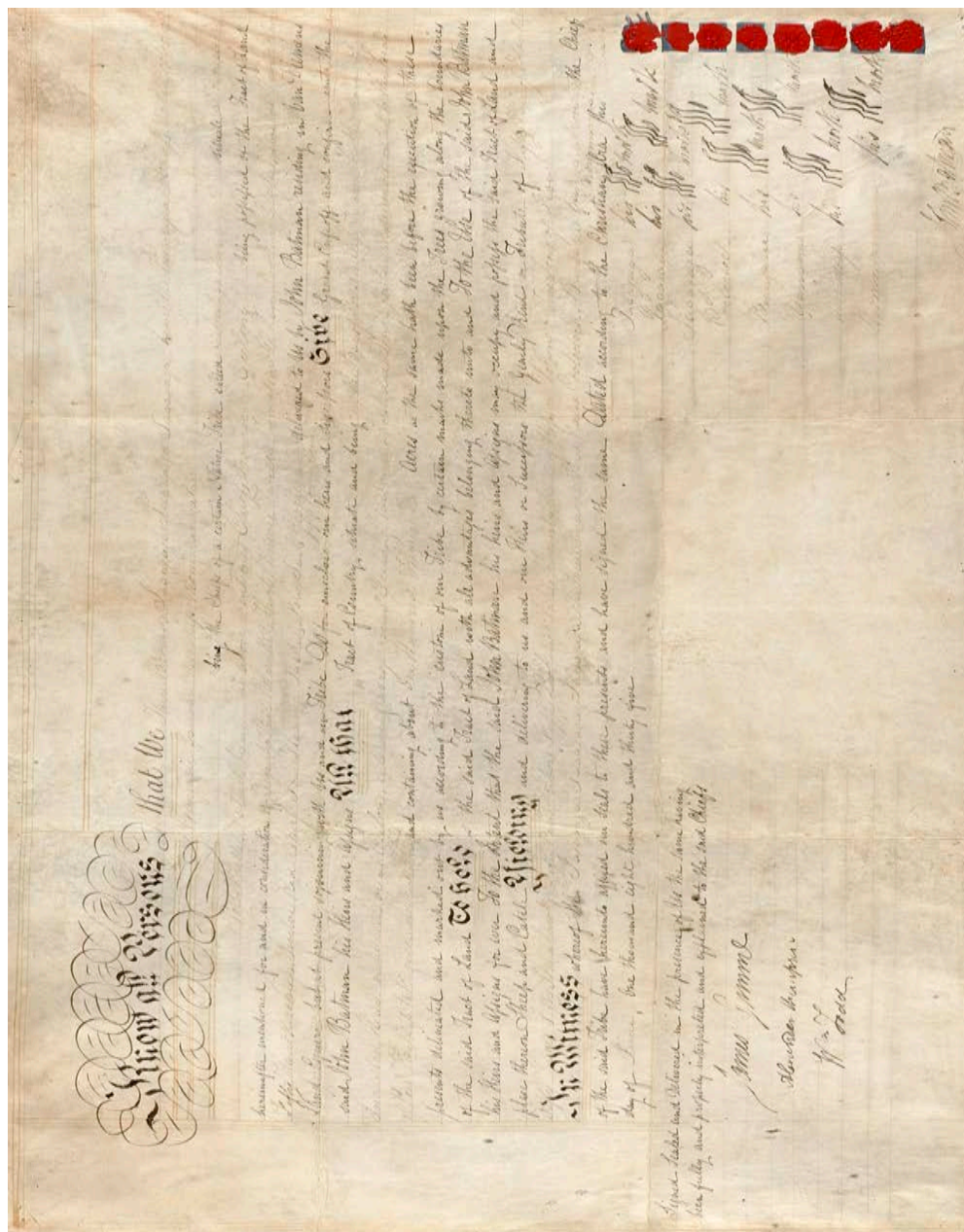
She notices that her gold lamé dress matches the colour of the wall. Her eyes follow the wall up to where it reaches the sky, clear and

blue.

She blinks. Her snot is still running a bit. There's a piece of paper in her hand and she uses it to wipe her nose. The texture of a letter to God is rougher than tissue paper.



Have you visited the Batman Treaty, on the fourth floor of the State Library of Victoria? It's much smaller than I expected, only 35.4 x 67.7 cm, and made of parchment.



According to John Batman and his Port Phillip Association, it was a legal document that detailed the exchange of

All that tract of Country situate and being at Port Phillip, Runing from the branch of the River at the top of the Port about 7 Miles from the mouth of the River, Forty Miles North East and from thence - West. Forty Miles across Iramoo Downs or Plains and from thence South South West across Mount Vilanmarnartar to Geelong Harbour at the head of the same and containing about Five Hundred Thousand more or less Acres as the same hath been before the execution of these presents delineated and marked out by Us according to the custom of our Tribe by certain marks made upon the Trees growing along the boundaries of the said Tract of Land.<sup>105</sup>

This was in exchange for:

Twenty Pair of Blankets, Thirty Tomahawks, One Hundred Knives Scissors, Thirty Looking Glasses, Two Hundred Handkerchiefs, and one Hundred Pounds of Flour, and Six Shirts ... [and a yearly] Rent or Tribute of One Hundred Pair of Blankets, One Hundred Knives, One Hundred Tomahawks, Fifty Suits of Clothing Fifty Looking glasses, Fifty Pair Scissors and Five Tons Flour.<sup>106</sup>

I think it's a beautiful document. I love its yellowy colour and the red stamps next to each 'chiefs' signature' — eight sets of nearly identical marks — three wavy lines and a small circle. In his diary, Batman describes how this 'signature' was copied from a ritual mark cut into a nearby tree.<sup>107</sup>

I also love the different kinds of script used in the text of the treaty. The beginning 'Know all Persons' large and decorated with twenty-one encircling spirals. 'that We' also stands out, then 'being'. And again in the bold calligraphic script of the opening words, but slightly smaller, dotted through the text: 'Give'... 'All that'... 'To hold'... 'Yielding'... 'In Witness'. The names of the chiefs are virtually illegible.

The reason for some of these calligraphic variations is that the treaty was drafted in Van Diemen's Land (as Tasmania was then called) by a leading lawyer, Joseph Gellibrand, before Batman and his team had set sail for Port Phillip. He left space in the document where relevant details could be filled in.<sup>108</sup>

So where were these details filled in? The treaty states: 'Signed on the Banks of Batman's Creek Sixth June One thousand eight hundred and thirty five'.<sup>109</sup> But the name, 'Batman's Creek', has not lasted (neither the proposed name for what is now

Melbourne — Batmania!)<sup>110</sup> so the site of the treaty signing is unclear. Contemporary Wurundjeri elder, Ian Hunter remembers family picnics on the banks of the Merri Creek in the Melbourne suburb of Northcote and his elder brother recalls their grandmother telling them that it was here that her great grandfather, Jerum Jerum (also called Bebejan and named Jaga Jaga on the treaty) was one of the co-signatories on Batman's Treaty.<sup>111</sup>



In a 2012 submission to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register lodged by archaeologist Gary Vines on behalf of the Wurundjeri and Wauthaurong tribal groups, this is the map used:<sup>112</sup>



*. 8 'Proposed boundary of Batman treaty signing, cultural heritage place. Oval is suggested location of Aboriginal camp.'*

The Merri Creek cuts across this map diagonally from left to right. The 'grassy hollow ... well known as a native camping ground ... in its natural state, ... a perfect camping ground, being sheltered from the wind by an abrupt rise at the back'<sup>113</sup> where Batman quite possibly spent the night after signing the treaty, and the site of my performance, is just to the right of the blue Rushall railway station sign. On the other side of the creek, the buildings that the red oval encompasses are part of a masonry works, Amalgamated Stone. The scar tree referred to later (see p. 78)

used to stand in the upper side garden of the big square house that sits by itself just to the right of the oval. I live to the right just off this map, on Walker St.

The submission also includes this map:



. 9 A. C. Allan, *Plan of Melbourne & suburbs, 1888*

I love this map because it shows very clearly the location of the Old Actors' Association, which later amalgamated with the Old Colonists' Association and still exists, 'providing dignified Living Communities for elderly Victorians'.<sup>114</sup> The associations were founded in 1869 by a group of prominent Melbourne identities led by George Selth Coppin (1819 – 1906), dubbed in his obituary, 'founder of the Australian stage'.<sup>115</sup>



. 10 Tom Roberts, *Portrait of George Selth Coppin, c. 1895-99*

Coppin was born in England. His father had been disowned by his family for abandoning his medical studies to join a group of strolling players, and Coppin Jnr



first played violin on stage as a child, later becoming a comic actor. In 1842, the toss of a coin decreed that his search for greater fortune would take him to Australia, where he bought and sold hotels and theatres; tried his luck (for two days) on the goldfields; imported the first shipments of ice, live turtles, and deer for venison; ran Melbourne's first Turkish baths; was the first Freemason grand master in Victoria; and was elected to the Melbourne and Victorian Legislative Councils.<sup>116</sup> Having faced bankruptcy himself on three occasions, and given his inclination as a philanthropist, it was natural that he would be concerned for aging actors, instrumental in building the Old Actor's Almshouses in a lovely spot on the Merri Creek, which later became a place generally for 'aged persons and deserving poor'.<sup>117</sup>

## 7

I've lived near here for 15 years. The Merri Creek is an important place for me. I have walked, jogged and sat on its banks many, many times. Residing in a city, I've loved living near an area of partial wildness, all-be-it one containing many weeds and other, more invisible, pollutants. But the Merri Creek Management Committee has worked very hard since 1989 and has made the creek hospitable to many native species, including inviting the return of special creatures like the sacred kingfisher and platypus.<sup>118</sup> And so I have chosen to create a performance that explores notions of belonging on the banks of the Merri Creek, near where I actually live, in a small rock overhang directly opposite the site Wurundjeri elder, Ian Hunter's grandmother identified as the site of the signing of Batman's treaty.

In his book, *The Lie of the Land*, Paul Carter writes of 'our relationship to the land',<sup>119</sup> (and by implication, 'our' signifies non-Indigenous Australians). He says, 'we appreciate it only in so far as it bows down to our will'.<sup>120</sup> In some ways this is an accurate description of how settler Australians regard their land. But, as I'm sure Carter is aware, there are many of us who love to spend time in minimally human impacted environments.

My sister lives near a national park<sup>i</sup> outside of Townsville. One time there I'd been scrambling on rocks along Alligator Creek. As I returned to the bush track that led to the creek, I could feel my brain state changing, some level of stress returning. As the track changed to a concrete path, the sensation intensified. Once I'd arrived at the car park, I was aware that I'd completely lost a particular quality of ease I'd felt when I was on the creek, where there was no obvious evidence of other people (though of course, many, many people had been there before me).

In contrast to Carter's concept, this experience is more aligned with the way Susan Griffin remembers visiting wilderness as a child: 'Were I to put language to these experiences now I would describe them as *meetings*, transformational exchanges which touched me and through which I learned the nature of existence' (my italics).<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, my longing for an intimate connection to land is real. Napping directly on the ground provides me a form of rest not found as powerfully in any other way.



. 11 Me at the Merri Creek cave.

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<sup>i</sup> I can imagine Carter writing eloquently about how we like to package our wilderness in safe little national parks!



For me, there is comfort to be had in the fact that all my atoms come from our earth. This is how the primary mythical text of my tribe<sup>i</sup> describes it:

And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.<sup>122</sup>

And here is part of a Wurundjeri creation myth as told by Ian Hunter:

And Bunjil created everything according to our rules — the land, the earth, the animals. And then after creating the earth, he then went to the Yarra [River], which originally was called Birrarung, place of the mists, he got two great clods of clay and fashioned two great clods of clay into two forms. Now most people think that these two forms would be man and woman, but they weren't they were two men. ... Bunjil created the two men, which he called Kulin out of clay. He then kneels down over the two men and breathes from the top of their heads to the tip of their toes and then around in circles around their navels and gives them life.<sup>123</sup>

And I love this anonymous Middle English poem, written at the end of the thirteenth century in the South-west Midland district:

Erthe toc of erthe erthe wyth who,  
erthe other erthe to the erthe droh,  
erthe leyde erthe in erthene throh,  
Tho heuede erthe of erthe erthe ynoh.

Meaning:

---

<sup>i</sup> In 2002 I went for an interview as a drama lecturer at the University of Ghana. My two interviewers, experts in their own culture and that of the West, having both completed PhDs in the U.S., knew that I was Australian. But they asked me, 'What tribe do you belong to?' I responded, 'I'm Jewish', and they both nodded their heads — I'd understood their question correctly. Much later, once I had the job, I offended one of these two men. As much as I apologised, he couldn't bring himself to forgive me. One day I was walking back from the campus market with a pineapple in my hands and I happened to pass him. On impulse, I offered it to him saying, 'Please take this as a peace offering'. He accepted my offer and I could see in his face that he had completely forgiven me in that moment. For me, it was an important lesson in another culture's way of operating.

Earth took from the earth earth with woe,  
earth drew other earth to the earth,  
earth laid earth in an earthen grave,  
then earth had of earth enough earth.<sup>124</sup>

Ecologically, bacteria make the body into the living earth — death is a return.<sup>125</sup> I'm reminded of Griffin's sensitivity for perceiving moments of meeting as she writes about the experience of caring for her dying mother. Becoming acutely aware of her origins in her mother's body, she began to witness the universe as a place of small chores of merging and separation — plants taking nourishment from the earth and fusing with animal's bodies as air moves between different bodies. And she reflects on the first time she looked into her baby daughter's eyes and realised she was 'meeting a new life'.<sup>126</sup>



My grandfather, Faive Berger, born in Svėdasai, Lithuania, is buried in Brakpan, South Africa. In the early 1900's Jewish boys were being forcefully recruited into the Russian army. So Faive ran away, stowing away on a boat to Rio de Janeiro where he sold hotdogs on the street to earn enough money for his passage to South Africa, where an older brother was already living.

My parents met and married in South Africa and soon after immigrated to England for work, study and adventure. There they had three children and once my father finished his studies, he applied for work all over the world. There was a big postal strike at the time and most of his application letters were held up. But he asked a friend to post his application to Australia from France — and Dad got the job. First we travelled to South Africa to see the family, and then sailed to Melbourne from Cape Town on the *Arcadia*, landing at Station Pier, Port Melbourne in 1972. My father taught me to swim on the boat, ensuring my membership of the 'Royal Order of Pollywogs' — I still have the certificate.

We arrived in Melbourne when I was six and initially stayed in a flat near the university. My sisters and I shared a room. Every night I'd tell my littlest sister that if she didn't stick her hand out through the bars of her cot so I could hold it as I fell asleep, crocodiles would come in through the window and eat her up. It was only much later as an adult, that I realised that it was my own fear of the unknown land that was driving my need for the comfort of her small hand.

Then my parents looked for a house to buy. I remember visiting a potential house and my sisters and I knocking a sliding door off its hinges. We didn't stay there. The house they did buy, I was really keen on. The garden consisted of a big elm tree and dry grass. Being six, I was small enough that the grass reached above my eyes and so I thought the garden went on forever. I was really disappointed when fences went up to reveal a normal sized garden. The elm was a winner though. I can remember the first time I climbed it high enough to be able to see over the surrounding fences. The bird's eye view of the land was intoxicating. And in my favourite childhood dream I could see even further: looking through the kitchen window I see the sky completely full with large swirling comets, planets, galaxies.



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This is the land on which the house stood. In 2003 I'd been living in Africa for a few years when my parents decided to move to Queensland. They spent many hours repairing and cleaning the house for the sale. But soon after it had exchanged hands, the new owner knocked it down. The house's architect had lived opposite. He died of cancer a number of years ago but his Russian widow, Irena, had to

watch it gradually being destroyed. One of her daughters had also died. She knew all about wakes. When our beloved dog, Yofi (which means lovely in Hebrew), had died and we drove her body back to the family home to bury her, Irena came across the road from her house to invite us to a feast of herring and rye bread and vodka.

When I arrived back from Africa I went to visit Irena and across the road, instead of our house, there was a half dissected shell. Irena warned me to be careful as I pushed through the demolisher's wire fencing surrounding what had been dense native garden.

*I want to do a personal autopsy of what had been my childhood home. The whole left side of the house is gone, a mess of rubble. I can see into the open skeleton to the stairs that now lead to the sky. At the back of the house, a two-storey high window pane lies shattered in little pieces on the concrete patio, also cracked. I continue the circuit to stand outside my bedroom window, looking in. The black and yellow curtains are still hanging, the floorboards half pulled up. I lean forward, I'm looking for ...? I feel something enter my right foot. It's a nail. I pull off my sandal and a big gob of blood oozes from me onto the earth. I feel satisfied. It's the perfect libation.*

I was back at that house again a few months ago, not to visit the block of churned up land, but the reserve across the road where we played on two ancient pear trees. One was my house (you can just see it in the top right hand corner of the aerial photo, above) — each branch a different room, and one my sisters'. The trees are doing well, the fruit's inedible, but the flowers are still lovely.

Hello darling ... You ready for bed? ... Yes, it's a lovely quilt isn't it? My mother made it for me and now — it's yours! ... Remember that patch? That's from my favourite dress when I was about your age. I can remember wearing it to parties and thinking I was soooo pretty ... This patch ... hmmm, I don't know. But this one we remember don't we? That was my brother's sailor suit ... Hey, it's getting late — I'll tell you a story and then you're going to go to ... sleeeeeeeep ...

My mother, father and I are going to visit another family who live in a hovel ... A hovel is like a hut, poor, probably made of wood and mud. There could be a window and a door but no glass in the window and maybe even no door in the door frame. Anyway, inside this hovel, there's another family. There's a father. He's robust — that means he's strong — and he's virile — ahhh ... that also means he's strong — and he's got short dark hair. And the mother, she's meek and mousy. You know what mousy means, don't you? And she has thin stooped shoulders.

They've got five daughters. The youngest is a baby and she's hale and hearty — that means she's healthy. The second girl is missing an arm ... I don't know why she's missing an arm, she just is. The third is missing her legs. The fourth is a head on a torso ... This is the torso ... And the fifth is a head, with her hair in a bun that sits on a plate on the mantelpiece covered by two checked tea towels, one green and one blue.

Anyway, like I said, it's a poor hovel but there's a good table in the centre and it's set for lunch. Father's already at his place at the head of the table and mother gestures for the rest of us to take our seats, so we all sit down. But the head with her hair in a bun that sits on a plate on the mantelpiece covered by two checked tea towels, one green and one ... bluuue — good girl — can't move by herself. So mother goes and fetches her. And when she puts her down on the table in front of father, the head tilts a little, out of control.

I'm walking in the night

I'm walking in the night with my mother and father

I'm walking in the night with my mother and father through a blacked out city of Melbourne

I'm walking in the night with my mother and father through a blacked out city of Melbourne to a place called the Powerhouse

I'm walking in the night with my mother and father through a blacked out city of Melbourne to a place called the Powerhouse and my mother turns to me and whispers, 'Yes, the world is a terrifying place.'

In *Returning to Nothing: the Meaning of Lost Places*, Peter Read discusses forms of bereavement experienced by non-Indigenous Australians who have lost their homes and special places — the Victorian town of Yallourn destroyed as the coal mine grew; Tasmania's Lake Pedder being inundated to make a dam. Read writes about psychologist Marc Fried's work with grieving people forcibly removed from Boston's west end suburbs. Fried reasoned that 'an individual's sense of continuity of person and community was intimately bound with spatial identity'.<sup>127</sup> Read also quotes Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel:

I will tell my son that all the fires, all the pain, will be meaningless, if he will not transmit our story to others, to his friends, and one day to his own children. ... What distinguishes a Jew is his memory. ... If we stop remembering we stop being.<sup>128</sup>



*Today I left my boyfriend's family and went off by myself. I took a minibus to the top of Mt Wellington. At the peak are a variety of information boards. The best is the one with quotes from eminent people who have visited. Darwin found it wonderfully calm. Now it's cold and windy. The bus driver was right — it's 10.5 degrees cooler up here than in Hobart. And the plants are right to hug the ground as close as they can. It's the plants that I remember from the last time I was here, 14 years ago. But today there's also a wonderful view of the Tasman peninsula and Storm Bay and the Bruny Islands laid out below, extraordinary wiggles of bays and islands and very narrow isthmi. As soon as you're off the top of the mountain, the weather becomes milder and I've had a great hike down to Ferny Creek, duly noticing (and enjoying) all the vegetation changes, loving the varying colours of the heath berries — white through darkening pinks to red — and mutually surprising a small black feral cat.*

*I've dawdled so that I can catch the very last bus to take me back to Hobart to get picked up to be taken to the airport. Shit — the bus I wanted only runs on a Friday. Never mind — I've always enjoyed hitchhiking in Tasmania, feeling safe enough to enjoy taking a chance with serendipitous encounters. I wait a while but no cars pass. There's a pub nearby. The first guys I ask would have been happy to help but they're*



*on their way up the mountain for a quick mountain bike trip down. The second guy is talking to a friend with a German shepherd. When they part, I approach him. He's also going a different direction ... but, he's planning to go into Hobart in about half an hour, would that suit me? Yes, and in the meantime I can go to his place for a cup of instant coffee and also to look at the photos of his great grandfather on safari in Kenya, puttees and khaki helmet and rifle and sullen natives and all. It's extraordinary how well these old photos have been preserved. None-the-less, the exposure has worked to the great grandfather's advantage — he's bathed in an aura of white light, shining among his sable companions.*

*Instant coffee is soon drunk and we head down the hill to Hobart. He drops me off at the GPO ten minutes before I'm due to get picked up. I don't like waiting. I ring my father in Townsville. He's just back from his grandson's wedding in Christchurch. When I talked to him in New Zealand, I'd been working on my Masters exegesis and had realised that I wanted to write about his father. I don't know much about my grandfather so, on the phone, I'd asked my Dad to write down what he knew about him. He took my request very seriously (postgraduate study being highly valued in my family) and said he'd email me when he got the chance. This present phone call from Hobart to Townsville, where my parents live, we gossip about the wedding — the joined candles and released doves and modern music that never-the-less my parents managed to do the Joburg jive to. My boyfriend and his brother arrive to drive us to the airport and I want to hang up, needing to greet them after a while apart. But Dad has delayed getting to the most important part, 'Oh, Karen', (his voice is high pitched and a little insecure), 'I tried to think about my Dad, but I don't know any more than what I already told you. ... I told you about the goat didn't I?' (Dad told me in Svédasai his father had had a pet goat that was more like a guard dog, furiously headbutting any visitors. He'd already told me about the goat. I'd passed it on to my boyfriend who claims he has the art of making Lebanese goat yogurt cheese, labne, in his blood). Dad's voice is really sad now. 'I really should have asked him more, but you know, I was a teenager when he died, I thought I had lots more time to talk to him ...' I say, 'Of course, Dad, that's totally normal for a teenager not to bother asking his Dad about his past'. 'Oh, you think so?' I'm surprised that he's taking my justification*

*seriously, it's sounding like it's helping him. I'm sorry that now, nearly 60 years after his father's death, my father is feeling that loss ...*

In 2005 I came across a groundbreaking book published in 1975 by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*. This book played with my brain in a way that was somewhat analogous to the experience described above of being in non-human-impacted environments (p. 28). At first I found I could barely understand it, which was painfully frustrating. But there was enough to keep me interested — stories of witches and hysterics<sup>i</sup> — and so I persevered, and discovered that as I read I began to adapt to the mode of communication that was so unusual to me. By the end of the book, I loved not only what I had learnt, but the feeling that my brain had been changed to be open to new ideas. Since then I have been an avid reader of Cixous' abundant works.

Cixous has lived most of her life in Paris, but was born in Algeria of a German refugee mother and a Mahgrebian father. Belonging has always been a loaded issue for her. Her memoir about growing up in Algeria, *Reveries of the Wild Woman*, starts, 'The whole time I was living in Algeria I would dream of one day arriving in Algeria'.<sup>129</sup> Deprived of French citizenship under the anti-semitic Vichy administration during WWII, in 1998 she wrote that where she belongs is:

Neither France, nor Germany, nor Algeria. No regrets. It is good fortune. Freedom, an inconvenient, intolerable freedom, a freedom that obliges one to let go, to rise above, to beat one's wings. To weave a flying carpet. *I felt perfectly at home, nowhere.*<sup>130</sup>

I love this ambivalent, paradoxical and poetic statement about belonging. Reading it, I feel that *I* am taking off on a flying carpet, leaving mundane anxieties: 'Where do I belong? ... Oh, poor me, I don't belong anywhere!', for a different perspective. Looking down on the world (in an analogous way to looking up at the universe in my childhood dream, see p. 31), I can start to feel the joy of a universal freedom.

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<sup>i</sup> For example: 'A woman, by opening up, is open to being 'possessed' ... She comes out of herself to go to the other, ... to experience what she is not, what she is, what she can be' (Cixous, Clément: 86).

Four years previously, in her book, *Rootprints — Memory and Life Writing*, Cixous wrote:

When I speak today in terms of genealogy, it is no longer only Europe that I see, but, in an astral way, the totality of the universe. The families of my mother ... had two fates: the concentration camps on the one hand; on the other, the scattering across the earth. This gives me a sort of world wide resonance.<sup>131</sup>

Again, Cixous uses her personal experience to elucidate a phenomenon more generally in a beautifully expressive way. For Jews, the consequences of exile and the possibilities of return are fundamental concepts from Biblical times (see p. 66) until now. Maurice Blanchot argues that the conventional idea that monotheism is the religion's most important legacy is incorrect. Rather,

being Jewish exists so the idea of exodus and the idea of exile can exist as a legitimate movement, ... so that the experience of strangeness may affirm itself close at hand as an irreducible relation, [and] ... so that by the authority of this experience, we might learn to speak.<sup>132</sup>

And if not exiled, then enclosed (in the Pale,<sup>i</sup> the ghetto, the concentration camp). In *Reveries of the Wild Woman*, Cixous writes about the double strangeness of being the dog of a Jewish family:

He suffers our fate and his own to boot. We are shut in, whereupon we shut him in. He suffers the double misfortune of being us and not being us. We lock up our own brother. ... Am I Jewish, the Dog wondered.<sup>133</sup>

I think of my childhood dog (see p. 32) and other significant childhood memories. Even though in general my Jewishness did not play a significant role in my youth, incidents where I became aware of my 'otherness' in this way stick out strongly: my compulsion to join in games of 'Jew Jump' at primary school (where a found coin is thrown in the air and everyone jumps to catch it), endeavouring to jump with as much enthusiasm as the other kids; hiding myself behind a gum tree outside synagogue while waiting for my father to pick me up from Hebrew school, just in case someone I knew drove past and asked what I was doing there; answering my ballet teacher's question, 'What religion are you?' with 'I'm a Jew',

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<sup>i</sup> In 1791, Czar Catherine the Great established the 'Pale of Settlement' to rid Moscow of Jews and confine them in the territory of present day Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Ukraine and Belorussia (Oreck: Acc. 31/7/2013).

and feeling that phrase reveal a raw exposure I could never take back. As a child, I don't remember having any feelings (or knowledge) about the original occupants of Australia. Nor much awareness of cultural diversity besides a (now shameful) disdain for an Italian boy called Vincent who 'everyone' in my Grade 2 class looked down on.

A painful example of the strangeness encapsulated in being Jewish is the experience of proud Jewish German WWI soldiers as Nazism started to take root in Germany. One of Cixous' grandfathers was a WWI German soldier. In *Rootprints*, she reproduces photographs of his 1916 grave in a Russian forest. As she copies the grave inscription from the photo she cries.

Why these tears? Because I am dead. I am so dead. Because I have become this raised wooden stone that repeats my name and my date of death to the air where I never lived. The wooden page informs the empty wood that henceforth it is here that I live, become foreign earth and wood.

... I am planted in a forest where no one I know has ever come to see me. ... The shafts of the pine trees rise very straight among our crosses and our simple wooden stories. God is an unknown pine forest'.<sup>134</sup>

Though Cixous mourns this grandfather and his gravesite, she has never chosen to visit. Similarly, my parents and their siblings have no desire to visit the Eastern European country of their forebears. My mother even refuses to visit South Africa. She feels she somehow betrayed her parents by leaving them when they needed her — why would she go now that they're dead?

I haven't asked her whether she sees value in visiting their graves. I certainly did. It's hard to define what it means to visit the grave of someone you knew who's long been dead.

*The tension builds as I approach the cemetery, but also a feeling of numbness. I enter the visitor centre and approach the elderly lady behind the counter. I need to tell her whose graves I'm looking for. But under her concerned gaze I turn into a blubbing mess — I cannot even speak to say their names. Why? I am hit by the strength of my*

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<sup>i</sup> I think of the young pine forest that shelters the mass grave in my grandfather's village.

*feeling for these people who died so many years ago and now lie in this earth, here. ...  
There is paradox in the intimacy and infinite distance of death.*

Back to *Rootprints* and Cixous continues:

My life begins with graves. They go beyond the individual, the singularity. I see a sort of genealogy of graves. ... My father's grave is also a lost grave. It is in Algeria. No one ever goes there any more or will ever go.<sup>135</sup>

As for my mother, swearing never to return to South Africa, Cixous' return to the country of her birth, is extremely controversial, 'an idea of death'.<sup>136</sup> Both South Africa and Algeria have brutal racial histories, but there is also the angst of returning to places that one had left behind. I feel this same angst when I consider returning to places that have been significant for me: 'Will I feel that I belong there? Will I feel that I don't belong there? Which is worse? ... or better?'

But Cixous is brave both in her life and her writing, and she *did* return to Algeria. In *So Close*, published in 2007 she recounts her visit to her father's grave. First she visits the house she grew up in:

To go in spite of myself ... to see the house that had no longer existed for quite some time, whose total disappearance and replacement by a tall building without opening I discovered in 1970, thus to go and see the annihilation of all remaining trace not a one anywhere in spite of myself I can't prevent myself from doing it. It's not me, it's my body. I am my body, I follow my body. ... it senses that we are going to arrive in front of the Cemetery. ... We are coming close. In the end, there will be no end.<sup>137</sup>

But in Algiers, the gate to the Jewish cemetery is closed. Cixous imagines herself crawling through an underground hole, falling into a narrow gorge, going back up a rock.<sup>138</sup> Finally inside the cemetery, she cannot find the tomb. Once more, I'm reminded of myself visiting my grandparents' grave. I was silenced by tears. She finds herself thunderstruck, as if committing blasphemy by yelling her father's name 'as if [he] were dead', and as she 'confesses' his date of death 'blood streams on [her] cheeks'.<sup>139</sup> She walks towards the top of the hill, 'shards of gravestones' rolling beneath her soles, crossing the 'edge of a crumbling wall',<sup>140</sup>

I lay down upon you. I fastened myself with all my strength to the Tomb I felt how living it was, its hardness supple at my call. ... Sin to wash your granite except with tears. Your red dust.<sup>141</sup>

In Algiers, at her father's grave, she has found 'the immortal sadness',<sup>142</sup> that will stay with her as she journeys on. She returns to France but finds that:

I was in Paris, but I was not with Paris. I was with Algeria, I was not in Paris, I did not belong to Paris.<sup>143</sup>

And we are back with the sentiment quoted above (p. 36): '*I felt perfectly at home, nowhere*'.<sup>144</sup> Or, in a different formulation from *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*:

Today we are in an era of nationalism. ... It is primarily a need for the proper, for a proper country, for a proper name, a need for separation and, at the same time, a rejection of the other. ... A harsh trenchant desire not to be you.

I want the word uncountr<sup>y</sup>.<sup>145</sup>



I'll follow with a story about a visit to a cemetery in Australian academic Margaret Somerville's book, *Body/landscape Journals*. One section starts with Somerville relating that she spent an afternoon crying about the loss of her home after her divorce. In bed that night, Paul Carter's *Living in a New Country* gives her comfort.<sup>146</sup> Carter analyses first contact meetings between settlers and Indigenous people:

The meaning of the event ... consists in its ability to create, albeit briefly, a provisional mode of exchange, a physical and symbolic space inscribed with meaning. But the meaning lay in neither the future nor the past, but in the moment itself when two culturally diverse groups of people without a language in common made contact.<sup>147</sup>

Somerville realises that she sees her present day meetings with Aboriginal women in this light: 'meanings are made on each occasion as if for the first time ... it is a confirmation of new possibilities for re-visioning this land'.<sup>148</sup>

The meeting I'm focussing on here is that between Somerville and her Aboriginal friend, Emily O'Connor. O'Connor had requested that Somerville organise a trip to visit her ancestor, Queen Maryanne Sullivan's grave overlooking Bunawanjin Mountain in northern New South Wales.



. 13 Emily O'Connor and her sister, Marie Strong, Mooki, 1993

Somerville starts by quoting O'Connor's sister explaining their need to visit the Queen's grave: 'we've gotta make it good for ourselves to go forward',<sup>149</sup> and connects that to her own need to find an embodied presence in the landscape, developing empathy, and understanding the magnitude of Aboriginal dispossession, so as not to remain an alien in Australia.<sup>150</sup> She quotes Susan Griffin: 'perhaps we are like stones; our history and the history of the world embedded in us, we hold a sorrow deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung' and asks 'How can we sing our history?'<sup>151</sup>

Queen Maryanne was a powerful woman, possibly the daughter of King Billy of the Kamilaroi tribe. She was granted land for the use of Aboriginal families and founded a settlement. Her status as *meengha*, the mother of all mothers, meant that she wore a special kangaroo cloak and had three husbands. According to custom, when she was buried sometime in the 1920s, it was on top of their bodies.<sup>152</sup>

Somerville quotes Emily O'Connor comparing a visit to the Queen's grave with her mother, and the one forty years later with Somerville:

On our walk [in 1953], they took us up to the cemetery and it was all nice and clear then and you could see the graves. Our mother and the other elders showed us which grave it was and they told us that our queen was buried there. We did the graves up and we could see clearly where they were buried but when we went back the second time, just recently, we couldn't see a thing because of the long grass. That saddened me, not being able to see where our Queen was buried, our Grandmother, Granny Maryanne Sullivan.<sup>153</sup>

O'Connor finds 'fist-sized round stones outlining the elliptical shape of each grave' but is not able to identify which is the Queen's.<sup>154</sup> However for both O'Connor and Somerville the cemetery visit is still significant, providing them with the possibility of a performative enactment of their embeddedness in place.

Later, Somerville reflects on the fact that the cemetery is now on private property and the owners don't allow visitors. O'Connor has died so they can 'no longer sit and talk together'.<sup>155</sup> Reading this section, one has the feeling of Somerville as an exemplar of Miwon Kwon's 'melancholic' artist, her art 'compensatory' behaviour for her 'sense of loss and vacancy' (see p. 10).<sup>156</sup> Somerville imagines herself and O'Connor at the cemetery:

I am now sitting on top of the mountain; I become the mountain itself.

I visit that space over and over and know there is a profound connection between Emily's performance on top of the mountain and my ability to perform myself at this point; to make sense of my bodily experience in space, to story it for myself and at the same time for you, my reader.<sup>157</sup>

I wonder if, in some sense, this is a good example of Cixous' 'uncountry' (p. 40). Imagining becoming a mountain, a woman visits a grave that is no longer recognisable as one, feels a connection with a dead woman of another culture, and shares that connection across multiple boundaries with her reader. ... I'm hoping that you are beginning to feel a connection with my 'uncountry'.



In 2011 Aboriginal writer Kim Scott won Australia's most prestigious literary award, the Miles Franklin, for his novel *That Deadman Dance*, which examines



relationships between the Noongar people of south Western Australia and the first British settlers. In an interview Scott explained that he intended his novel to function in a subtly political way, exploring empowering ways to connect an ancient heritage with contemporary life. Rather than laying to rest the 'ghosts' of 'identity, race and history', Scott advocates listening to these ghosts – 'having courageous conversations and respectful dialogues'.<sup>158</sup>

I'm particularly intrigued by two aspects of this book: Scott's use of metaphors of burial in this first contact situation; and the way he contrasts performance (particularly dance) and writing as ways of communication between Noongar people and settlers.

Early on in the story we meet the gregarious Wunyeran, who welcomes the newcomers, forming an especially close relationship with Dr Cross. When Wunyeran lies dying from the introduced disease that is decimating his people, Cross tends him closely.<sup>159</sup> Years later, Cross succumbs to the same disease and requests to be buried in Wunyeran's grave.<sup>160</sup>

Scott's novel weaves a spell of possibilities of a meeting between these two peoples that did not need to be as disastrous for the original inhabitants as it turned out to be. A literary device he uses is to move back and forth through the lifetime of Bobby, Wunyeran's nephew. In one childhood scene, Bobby imagines Wunyeran and Cross carrying him high on their shoulders and then

he rose even higher into the sky that day ... and saw future graves: Dr Cross and Wunyeran curled together, and two others curled tight too, a man and a woman: one from here, and one from the ocean horizon. ... Bobby looked into future graves, and into some people's hearts and minds, went into the hollows within them, into the very sounds they made.<sup>161</sup>

For Bobby, Wunyeran and Cross's double grave becomes a sacred site, a place where their 'spirits fus[e] in the earth'.<sup>162</sup> But as the settlement grows, not everyone knows of these two founders and Bobby 'worried for them because of all the digging for buildings and rubbish that went on'.<sup>163</sup> The growth of the town means pressure on diminishing resources. 'Men of authority' decide that the grave

of a man as important to the history of their town as Dr Cross cannot be left vulnerable and his confined body is removed to the new town cemetery where he's given a railing and engraved headstone.<sup>164</sup> But Wunyeran's skeleton, broken by the gravedigger employed to move Cross's coffin is washed down to the sea in the next flood —

Did all those bones reach the sea and join a path of whale bones across the ocean floor? Or years later become part of the foundations of the town hall and its clock with ticking faces looking north, south, east and west and, right at the very steeple top, that very great weight: a nation's fluttering flag?<sup>165</sup>

As an old man, Bobby tells tourists that the town is shamed by not having a statue honouring Wunyeran because 'he welcomed the first white people that sailed here, just like I welcome you now'.<sup>166</sup>

The deadman dance of the title is an elaboration on the true story from 1803 of explorer, Captain Matthew Flinders, commanding his marines to perform a military salute to honour the Noongar for their assistance. The dance so impressed the Noongar that they appropriated it, and a version (chest painted with white pipe clay with red crosses to mimic the 'redcoats') could be found among their traditional repertoire for at least fifty years.<sup>167</sup>

Scott imagines an early performance of this dance:

Laughing and loved, Bobby Wabalanginy never learned fear; not until he was pretty well a grown man did he ever even know it. Sure, he grew up doing the Dead Man Dance – those stiff movements, those jerking limbs ... but with him it was a dance of life, a lively dance for people to do together ...<sup>168</sup>

Scott uses the ambivalence inherent in the deadman dance as an important theme of the novel. The Noongar probably thought of the new arrivals as ghosts. But also the adoption of the dance 'may have been the "beginning of the end" of a way of life', for Bobby and his community.<sup>169</sup> In an interview, Scott stated that originally his intention was to finish the novel 'on the upbeat', but then decided that he 'wanted ambivalence', aiming for 'a way of setting up all sorts of resonances to do with possibility and loss'.<sup>170</sup>

In the last scene of the novel, Bobby sets out to convince a mainly white audience that the two peoples must live together.<sup>171</sup> He speaks proudly:

One time, with Mr Cross, he share his food and his bed with us, because he say he our guest. But not now, so we gotta do it ourselves. ... They messing up the water, cutting the earth. ... And we now strangers to our special places.<sup>172</sup>

But Bobby's real confidence lies in his skills as a dancer and singer and he soon abandons his English words (along with his English clothes) to perform his story. Initially his audience are enthralled but tragically the novel ends with their attention being drawn away by a violent attack on Bobby's relatives outside:

Suddenly [Bobby] felt not fear, but a terrible anxiety. Faces ... had turned away from him ... Figures at the periphery of Bobby's vision fell away. He heard gunshots. ...<sup>173</sup>

Contrary to many Indigenous people's experience of the value of oral tradition, and the visual presentation of culture,<sup>174</sup> it is perhaps Scott's professional bias as a novelist that leads to him wonder if writing is the appropriate form to keep stories and culture alive. The novel begins with Bobby's visceral excitement at the magic of transferring the Noongar language to written form:

*Kaya.*

Writing such a word, Bobby Wabalanginy couldn't help but smile. Nobody ever done write that before, he thought. Nobody ever writ *hello* or *yes* that way!

*Roze a wail ...*

Bobby Wabalanginy wrote with damp chalk, brittle as weak bone. Bobby wrote on a thin piece of slate. Moving between languages, Bobby wrote on stone.<sup>175</sup>

Throughout the book there are references to Bobby's attempts to document his life in his journal. Scott has said he wishes for a literary tradition 'with really strong Noongar roots'.<sup>176</sup> He feels that in relaying Noongar information to interested non-Indigenous people Bobby is playing a powerful role and that this situation 'where it's Indigenous people giving and sharing, and being valued for doing so' should be encouraged now.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, once Noongars are in a position of power, there may be the possibility of non-Indigenous people being accommodated by the local spirits of the ancestors and the place.<sup>178</sup>

I'm fascinated that he draws a comparison between the relationality of settlers and Noongar people, and the one-on-one intimacy between the reader and writer of a novel. I wonder whether Scott believes that the failure of the performed, danced aspect of Bobby's attempted communication with the Europeans is due to the fact that the Europeans do not have the knowledge or experience of traditional dance to be able to interpret what Bobby is trying to communicate. However written text is technology imported from Europe and if Bobby manages to learn this technology he will be able to communicate with others in a powerful way.

Though Scott's ending is not 'up-beat', his ambivalence does allow for a way forward. He says:

that the Noongars appropriated the dance and the fact that you can write a novel as a Noongar person, is in itself expressive of continuity, in that the resolution of that novel—the end, the last page—is not the end. There are possibilities still.<sup>179</sup>

My work involves this writing and a performance that follows. I too have struggled with the very different demands the two forms of communication make. In some ways I have prioritised text because I have asked you, my audience, to read my exegesis before coming to my performance so that what you've read will inform what you later see and hear. However my intention is also that my performance will communicate with you independently and powerfully in a physical manner that is not possible with writing.

“

After visiting Svėdasai, village of my father's father, I visited Panevėžys, home town of my mother's grandfather, Oscar Basson. Before WWII, this town was almost half Jewish,<sup>180</sup> and it was famous for its synagogues and religious schools. Now, in the back room of a former Jewish high school for boys, is the Jewish community centre,

run by Gennady Kofman, a Ukrainian who speaks a little English. When I asked him how he came to be in Panevėžys, he said, 'I used be pilot — 747. But my health — no good'. I had an image of him suddenly needing to land his plane in a small town in Lithuania that happened to need a Jewish centre coordinator.<sup>i</sup> In fact, Gennady related to me that the Jews remaining in Eastern European countries these days often have surprising stories of survival — fighting in forests with the partisans, hiding in caves, deported to Siberia and being saved from starvation by a band of efficient Jewish thieves.<sup>181</sup>

Gennady took me around Panevėžys, showing me the synagogues converted into garages and private houses.



*. 14 Former synagogue, Panevėžys. You can see where the two tablets of the ten commandments were, directly above the eight concreted little windows formerly used to house candles for the Channukah holiday.*

We didn't visit the three mass graves in the area, but the most significant site seemed to be the former Jewish cemetery founded several centuries ago, now a park. During WWII, it had been abandoned. Gennady presumes the Nazis and their Lithuanian helpers were so busy exterminating the Jews, they didn't have time to bother with graves. However under Soviet rule, state-condoned vandalism left the cemetery destroyed and in 1966 (the year of my birth) the council decided to 'liquidate the Jewish cemetery, and to replace it with a city park'.<sup>182</sup> Later that year

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<sup>i</sup> Gennady has a 'side-kick' who helps run the community centre, an older man who couldn't speak any English but insisted on plying us with instant coffee, delicious chocolate cake, powdered orange juice, cucumbers from his garden, rye bread and mountains of herring (in that order!).

a local enterprise was allowed to take the granite gravestones and use them for building materials. The several thousand gravestones are scattered all across the town. Some had their Hebrew inscriptions removed and were reused as Christian gravestones, others found another home as street rubble, others can be seen in a 'decorative' outside wall of the municipal theatre, the Hebrew fragments still showing quite clearly.<sup>183</sup>



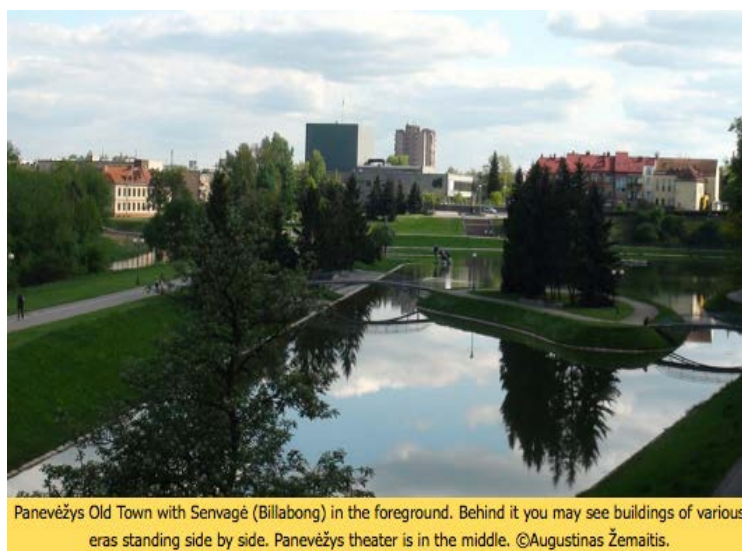
. 15



. 16

Mysterious ... I can't understand this. ... Not wasting useful flat pieces of stone, yes, but surely there's more going on than being frugal — whose decision was it? And who approved it? And who doesn't mind arriving at the theatre and being reminded that there are dead Jews about? And who *does* mind?

(There is something in all this disturbing business of discovering apparent indifference in the face of genocide that makes me smile: I love the fact that Panevėžys has its own billabong! — see below.)



. 17



I wonder if any of those civic decision makers had read British playwright, Howard Barker:

*The art of theatre* is a rehearsal for death but more, a confession of ignorance, of the limits of knowledge ...<sup>184</sup>

Death is the preoccupation of great art even where it is not the *subject* of it. When the utilitarians seized the theatre death simply stood in the foyer, as patient as a chauffeur.<sup>185</sup>

Polish theatre director Tadeusz Kantor, worked during and after WWII. He described his practice as ‘the theatre of death’,<sup>186</sup> writing, ‘it is possible to express life in art only through the absence of life, through an appeal to death’.<sup>187</sup> Karoline Gritzner notes that associations of theatre with death are longstanding in Western tradition, and that in attempting to make sense of death, ‘we rely on the powers of our imagination; enter the worlds of drama, theatre and performance’.<sup>188</sup> Dic Edwards expands on this idea: the language of death is one that we have no knowledge of and so must be imagined — ‘a language that exists in realm of the impossible’ — and the impossible is the aim of creativity. ‘Drama is about crossing boundaries. The living corpse is our agent in that endeavour’.<sup>189</sup>

For the German theatre director, Heiner Müller, too, ‘the essential thing about theatre is transformation, and the last transformation is death’.<sup>190</sup> And American theatre director, Herbert Blau, writes: ‘Of all the performing arts, the theatre stinks most of mortality’<sup>191</sup> and ‘There is in the disappearing space of performance some thing of a cemetery’.<sup>192</sup>

I very much like to walk, sit, read and nap in cemeteries. When I’m feeling fine, they’re a nice, calm place to be. When I’m feeling depressed, they can be a necessity. Their effect on my mind is similar to what I feel in a relative wilderness (see p. 28). Upon entering, I find I have a space to breathe, to rest, to allow myself

to be. I calm down, I become more neutral somehow. I can feel sad, reading of a baby's death, imagining the pain of her parents. I can enjoy the design of a very old gravestone, and think about history a little. I start to feel removed from my own *kvetching*. Time passes, the earth moves further around the sun. And I am just a body, right now, here. The division between myself and the earth on which I'm sitting or standing diminishes. I am as solid as the earth, or as potholed as the earth of a cemetery, periodically dug up to place other bodies in it. There's absolutely no doubt that I will one day be indistinguishable from the earth — and that's a good thing. Most cemeteries have a clearly defined boundary and that's a good thing. I choose to enter and I choose to leave. Never once have I not left feeling better than when I left — to put it literally, cemeteries ground me.<sup>i</sup>

Ethnographer, Deborah Bird Rose, writes of learning about the 'Beginning Law' from Northern Territory Yarralin elder, Old Tim Yilngayarri. This law shows that life is always in a process of transformation, across bodies, species and generations, so that death is a move into connectivity. Perhaps cemeteries are consoling because they're a place where I'm reminded that by accepting mortality I can find a solidarity with all others 'whose bodies arise from the only ground we will ever know, ground that is saturated with the blood of birth as well as death'.<sup>193</sup> It's also significant that cemeteries can be consoling places, whatever country I find myself in. The fact that, as a body, I will one day 'belong' in a cemetery holds true wherever the cemetery happens to be. Everyone will belong in the earth one day ...

I also feel at ease in the theatre. A favourite moment in any conventional theatre is the moment the lights start going down — the feeling of release into darkness. I wait for it so strongly that I often find myself anticipating it — feeling the lights dim before they actually have. And then they do really start to dim and I shut my eyes, just long enough so as not to miss anything, but long enough to feel engulfed in the comforting darkness. That dimming of the house lights and opening of the

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<sup>i</sup> I know that I'm not alone in enjoying visiting cemeteries. However I'm interested to note that the Panevėžys Jewish cemetery, now a pleasant park, complete with a fountain, benches and ice cream kiosk, is not a popular place for locals to spend time. Apparently memories of vandalism and dug up dead bodies are still too strong (Kofman 2007).



curtains and/or raising of stage lights is such a clear and satisfying boundary. Ideally, for the period of the show, the performers and audience share another reality, its boundaries clearly delineated from 'normal' life. And this can happen even without theatre lights. Conjuring an outdoor Greek theatre, Susan Griffin writes poetically of this mysterious communion:

Union. Participation. You are at the edge of a circle, a curving force of mystery that will sweep you into its motion and then, as you join its expanding path, enlarge you even as you recognise your own smallness. You will begin to feel yourself dissolve into this that you cannot even name as it touches and then swallows everything you see. The sloping hill, the mountain beyond, the birds that fly over the mountain, the sky, memory, all the dead, and even the unborn.<sup>194</sup>

This surely resonates with the experience of a cemetery, where one is forced to recognise our commonality. In a conventional theatre, Griffin particularly cherishes the moment of darkness at the end of a play when, 'in an aftershock of perception, the whole play ... seems to enter you more deeply. It is a moment remarkably like the one that follows a real death'.<sup>195</sup>

Cemeteries and theatres are both formalised places of transformation — from flesh to dust; the performer transforms herself. Griffin says of the theatre: 'The transubstantiation of flesh. Bodies and spirits are being traded, and by this transaction your soul is allowed a larger breadth'.<sup>196</sup> She points out that the earliest theatres were also temples.<sup>197</sup> Those who are believers recognise that a cemetery is the repository of the physical remains of the deceased but believe that the spirit of the dead person has been released from the physical world. Theatre anthropologist, Richard Schechner asserts that our contemporary custom of clapping at the end of a performance is a remnant of the time when actors were considered to be possessed by another's spirit (often that of a dead person), which must be sent back to its own realm at the end of a performance — hence the need for the sound of vigorous applause.<sup>198</sup>

If countries are peopled by living humans, a place inhabited by the dead might be an example of Cixous' 'uncountry'. And what about the possibility of some kind of universal 'theatre country'? In his book *The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre*,

renowned director, Peter Brook articulates an opposition between everyday life and the theatre:

Truth in theatre is always on the move. ... the slate is wiped clean all the time. In everyday life, "if" is a fiction, in the theatre "if" is an experiment. In everyday life, "if" is an evasion, in the theatre "if" is the truth.<sup>199</sup>

Is there a place where the theatre community shares this truth? One often hears people speak of their 'theatre family' — those people they have created theatre with over a period of time growing to feel like they are relatives. Director, Eugenio Barba emigrated from southern Italy to Norway at a time so far before globalisation that you couldn't find spaghetti north of Switzerland. None-the-less, he soon found himself firmly belonging to his renowned Odin Theatre.<sup>200</sup> In his preface, he writes that research for his book *The Paper Canoe* included 'memories of and dialogues with my [theatre] "ancestors" '.<sup>201</sup> And he writes:

There is a land-less country, a country in transition, a country which consists of time not territory, and which is confluent with the theatrical profession. In this country, the artists who work in India or Bali, my Scandinavian companions, or those from Peru, Mexico or Canada, in spite of the distance between them, work elbow to elbow. I am able to understand them even if our languages separate us.<sup>202</sup>

Hélène Cixous, in her capacity as playwright writes: 'He who goes to the Theatre grants himself the ephemeral right to hear those who are deprived of speech in the city speak: children, poets, the dead, animals, thoughts at the back of our mind, outcasts, the homeless. In that, in this giving of speech, the poetic Theatre is political'.<sup>203</sup> The ephemeral space of theatre gives voice to (among others) the dead. And this is a political act. I'm inclined to think of cemeteries as qualifying as ephemeral in some ways — a depositary of the non-living where we go to think about people who no longer exist (except as ephemera?).

I suggest that the theatre is also a manifestation of an uncountryside — theatres all over the world providing a place for the same characters to meet with each other in the moving truth of an imaginary 'if'. However as much as this world wide theatre space has its appeal, my interest for this current project is not to perform

in the relatively neutral space of a modern theatre, or even to perform in a specific place that becomes generalised by the convention that by designating it theatrical space, anything is possible. (Much like Brook did on his famous tour of *Conference of the Birds* through Africa, where theatrical space was created by the laying down of a rug.<sup>204</sup>)

Like the artists described in my introduction: Joseph Beuys, Marina Abramović, Ana Mendieta, Jill Orr and Susan Philipsz, I want to grapple with the powerful influence of a particular environment. I want that environment to impinge on my performance and on my audience's experience of my performance. I want to directly reference a historical event, Batman's treaty, by staging my performance at the site of the event. My interest is our relationship to the earth and the fact of our return to it, so performing on earth is logical. I am also exploring meeting — how a performer can meet an audience member — and the most vulnerable way for us to do this is without the protection of a foyer, auditorium, stage and stagelights. I want to forgo the satisfaction of that boundary between 'real life' and theatre, just as I want to hint at the limits of the boundary between us and the earth. I am inspired by that expert in the 'theatre of death', Tadeusz Kantor:

The actors want to enter the stage from the sides.  
BUT THERE AREN'T ANY!  
THERE IS NO PLACE FROM WHICH ONE CAN ENTER SAFELY AND WHERE  
DRAMA'S ILLUSION ... CAN FIND A COMFORTABLE HIDING PLACE.  
THERE IS NO RETREAT FROM THE STAGE. ...  
THE ACTOR ON STAGE IS AMBUSHED AS IF CAUGHT IN A TRAP  
OR AS IMMURED IN A BESIEGED FORTRESS.  
THE SAME IS TRUE FOR THE SPECTATOR.  
THE SPECTATOR HOLDS FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE  
ACT OF ENTERING THE THEATRE. ...  
THE STAGE AND THE AUDITORIUM ARE ONE!  
THE ACTORS AND THE SPECTATORS SHARE THE SAME FATE.  
THE DANGER IS EQUAL FOR BOTH PARTIES.  
In front of the stage, in the auditorium, a space has been cleared.  
It is there that the actors will perform their ritual of  
TRANSFORMATION.  
It is from there that they will enter the stage  
AS IF THEY WERE TO EMBARK ON A  
DANGEROUS EXPEDITION ...<sup>205</sup>

My expedition is a search for an understanding of belonging. Neil Leach's concept (discussed above, p. 2) is that belonging is a product of performativity. He argues

that identity associated with belonging to a particular place is created by ritualistic behaviour — communities ‘colonize’ territories by performance, ‘mak[ing] material the belongings they purport to describe’.<sup>206</sup> Meaning does not simply exist in an environment, but an environment is given meaning by collective or individual behaviour. In this sense, a performance can have a political effect.<sup>207</sup>

Some ‘performed behaviour’, such as the rituals associated with the enactment of Batman’s treaty, are carried out primarily for their political effect. Ethnic Lithuanians have had a long continuing struggle against the outside influences of Poles, Germans and Soviets to establish their own independence. Notable group ‘performances’ of collective belonging I saw in my short visit there included the hill of crosses — an ancient hill fort transformed by the placement of millions of crosses and religious statues.



. 18

The first crosses were probably placed here in the 14th century to protest the occupation by the Teutonic knights. During the Soviet era the hill was levelled three times, the crosses turned into scrap metal and the area covered with waste and sewerage. But each time, Lithuanians returned with more crosses. Since 1985 it has been left alone and is an extraordinary site.<sup>208</sup>

In Vilnius at the Gediminas Castle there is an inspiring exhibit about the 1989 'Baltic Way' — a continuous link of hands from Vilnius to Tallinn in Estonia via Riga, Latvia, protesting the Soviet occupation.



. 19

Less than 6 months later, Lithuania achieved independence.<sup>209</sup>

I'm fascinated and moved by both these Lithuanian 'performances' because they are doing something quite mysterious and paradoxical for a concrete and political aim. They aim to take control of country by 'uncountrying' it. A small hill that is repeatedly bulldozed and desecrated is repeatedly remade as a holy memorial to the death of a man from a far away time and place as a way to assert political independence. The Catholic religion the hill celebrates is global and people from all over the world have contributed to it. The powerful atmosphere of the hill seems to pull it above the farm land that surrounds it.

In the 'Baltic Way' protest, three countries demand a border between themselves and the Soviet Union by making a human chain that breaks the borders between their own countries. They radically change the way the land of a road is used by peopling it with stationary humans whose linked hands in other forms of protest would be seen to be creating a border between themselves and their opposition. Here the opposition is both outside and inside — the Soviet Union was ruled from another country, Russia, but Lithuanians were also Soviet officials. It's a powerful reminder of the ability of a people to hold onto their identity, (their imaginary

country — is that another type of uncountried?), through German, Polish and Russian occupation.

However the performed ritual of Batman's treaty operated in quite a different way. In both the Lithuanian examples, people of different nationalities are being brought together in a common understanding of a common cause. Batman's treaty brought two very different peoples together but, as will be discussed later (p. 81), their purposes were far from convergent. I suggest that the treaty enactment performed a different form of uncountried. The Wurundjeri had a detailed and intimate connection to their land that was bound to their ancestral ways of being in the world. Batman's setting aside of 500 thousand acres of it as his own would have been meaningless to them. The ensuing influx of foreigners literally uncountried the Wurundjeri from their homelands.

Many people will tell you that home is the place of their clan, even if they have never been there.<sup>210</sup> I often operate like that too — if someone asks me where I'm from, I'll mention England and South Africa, but the story will land in Lithuania. However, visiting there, I felt no feelings of being 'at home'. I recognised the dish called 'blinis' — grated potato pancakes such as my Dad's mother used to make, but the ubiquitousness of pork dishes made it obvious that this is not now a Jewish country. Though I'm normally shy about telling people I'm Jewish, I did brave it with the first Lithuanian who asked me about myself. She was the media representative for the circus festival we were working for and wanted the lowdown on this crew that had come all the way from Australia. Unfortunately I don't think she wanted to hear about my Lithuanian Jewish ancestry, looking rather blankly at me and then changing the topic. However some Lithuanian young people have been very active in insisting that their country's history of oppression should not be forgotten.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> My mother's second cousin's wife, Rose Zvi, has written a book about the WWII massacre of her family that happened in a wood outside a northern Lithuanian town, Zhager, called *Last Walk in Naryshkin Park*. When a young man from the town happened to read the book, he was shocked at this part of his history he'd never been taught about. In 2012 he organised a permanent memorial in the town square and invited my relative and other survivors to a ceremony of commemoration.

I can understand why Lithuanians would not want to remember their Jewish history — many Lithuanians were active in the mass murders.<sup>211</sup> I wonder if by transplanting Jewish gravestones to a theatre, a chief place of remembrance of national history, the message is, 'Lithuanians belong here, not Jews'? If so, the message is somewhat ambiguous. The Hebrew lettering on the gravestones can still be clearly read, acting as a remembrance to the former Jewish community, even if in general the contemporary townspeople do not want to remember. Or possibly the civic decision makers thought that a decorative wall of broken Jewish tombstones was a fitting memorial for a destroyed community? If so, they now know that the Jewish community have requested it to be dismantled. And in fact part of it was dismantled about ten years ago.<sup>212</sup> Maybe the fact that part of it remains is a fitting tribute to a fraught history.



And what about the positive value of recycling? Was it preferable to reuse the Panevėžys gravestones than to let them lie, very gradually eroding like any unhewn stone? I think of Auschwitz with its preserved rooms filled with shoes and spectacles and suitcases and clothes and human hair — all on their way to being efficiently reused before the process was interrupted by the arrival of the Allies.

And I am reminded of some works of post-WWII German artist, Anselm Kiefer — dark hair and old clothes slowly decaying on his giant canvasses.



.20 Anselm Kiefer, *Lilith's Daughters*, 1991

The above work reflects Kiefer's interest in Jewish mythology, according to which Lilith was Adam's first wife, created before Eve, at the same time and from the same earth as Adam. Lilith is a destructive character, sometimes portrayed as a night demon who destroys newborn babies.<sup>213</sup>

From 1993 – 2007, Kiefer lived and worked at an immense studio-estate in Barjac in the south of France where he was able to experiment with decay on the scale of buildings. Here he created immense concrete towers that have been installed as exhibitions in many countries. The 2004 version at Hangar Bicocca in Milan is entitled *The Seven Heavenly Palaces*, referencing an ancient Hebrew tract, *Book of Palaces*, which describes the symbolic path of spiritual initiation of those who wish to enter into the presence of God. The curator describes how in this work Kiefer projects his themes into a timeless dimension by both interpreting an 'ancient religion (Judaism)' and representing the ruins of WWII.<sup>214</sup>

In 2009 Kiefer used twelve of these towers to represent the twelve tribes of Israel as the set for an opera, *Am Anfang*, (In the Beginning), commissioned to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Opera Bastille in Paris.



. 21 *Am Anfang*, 2009

Kiefer stated: 'The title, in the beginning, means that ruins are not the end. For me, ruins are a wonderful starting point, they're a vacuum, an empty room which can be filled up with something new'.<sup>215</sup>



On the right of the above photo you can see a group of women who spend most of the performance breaking stones and cleaning bricks in the rubble. They represent the *Trümmerfrauen* who cleared the stones of Germany's destroyed cities so that they might be used again. At the end the character Lilith rolls and squirms in the dust with abandon smashing the few rows of bricks the *Trümmerfrauen* have built. In an interview about the production, Kiefer stated, 'Sometimes I think people are like stones'.<sup>216</sup>

The same towers in situ at his studio at Barjac provide the powerful final images for Sophie Fienne's documentary about Kiefer's work, *Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow*. The title of this film comes from another Kiefer quote: 'The Bible constantly says that everything will be destroyed, and grass will grow over your cities. I think that's fantastic'.<sup>217</sup>

In a much earlier example of recycling and remembering, in 1969, as a 24 year old art student, Kiefer took photos of himself giving the Hitler salute in front of monuments whilst on vacation in Italy and France.



. 22 *Occupations*, 1975

When published in 1975 as *Occupations*, the photos were considered scandalous because he was the first to tackle representations of Nazism using his own body. When the work was exhibited in 1980 at the Venice Biennale, Kiefer explained that he felt he had to 're-enact what they did just a little bit in order to understand their

madness'.<sup>218</sup> What made the images all the more provocative was their apparent neutrality, which implied ambivalence. In a later interview, Kiefer stated: 'Ambivalence is the central theme of all my work'.<sup>219</sup>

Critics assert that Kiefer's work is not a product of bad faith, but an extraordinarily personal investigation of his cultural origins and identity 'unparalleled in German contemporary art'.<sup>220</sup> Intensifying the sense of his intimacy with the subject matter, is the ubiquitous presence of his own studio — the drama is being enacted in his own private space. As in Griffin's work (see p. 5), personal and historical issues are explored in relation to each other to bring new insights.

*Occupations* could be seen as an exploration of belonging as a German in relation to Germany's history. Kiefer feels implicated in his country's history, just as I do in mine. The ambivalence he expresses is significant and parallels that of Lispector from the very beginning of this exegesis: 'Life has allowed me to belong now and then, as if to give me the measure of what I'm losing by not belonging'.<sup>221</sup> I also see the work as a brave and poetic visualisation of Cixous' 'uncountry'. By 1975 Nazi Germany was ostensibly gone, but Kiefer was performing the occupational desires of this non-existent country. The fact that in all the photos he is alone, saluting a non-existent nationalistic crowd in countries whose citizens generally hated the Nazis is a humorous comment on a painful past.

Also significant are the interpretations of the German title of *Occupations: Bestzungen*. This term primarily means military occupation, but can also mean the assumption of a role in a play. By 're-enact[ing] ... the madness', and 'practising' the role in his studio before 'performing' in public spaces, Kiefer is consciously playing an actor's role. In Freudian terminology, *Bestzungen* means cathexis, or holding fast. From the 1960's to the 1990's, Kiefer's persistent reworking of Nazi imagery, combined with his apparent disinterest in contemporary German society, can be associated with cathexis — holding fast to a lost loved one, whilst lacking interest in the outside world.<sup>222</sup> In other words, Kiefer's visual remembering is an act of mourning that allowed him 'to break out of the vicious circle of fascination and repulsion' with Germany's 20<sup>th</sup> Century history.<sup>223</sup>

Earlier, I talked about the Jewish custom of placing stones on a gravestone as a sign of mourning and the permanence of remembrance (p. 21). Kiefer's more recent work sometimes uses stone, and often incorporates earth. Kiefer has stated, 'I am an artist of the underworld'.<sup>224</sup> For Kiefer, inert rock might have consciousness and life.<sup>225</sup> This idea is particularly resonant when he uses lead — the heaviest of the stable elements.



. 23 *Sternenfall*, 2007

Kiefer's sculpture, *Sternenfall*, has been given a prime place in Hobart's MONA gallery.<sup>226</sup> One ascends a long tunnel in which a subtle soundscape reacts to your presence. Then there's a short corridor in which the visitor can create a stone rubbing, helping to memorialise the bombing of Hiroshima. A little further on is the only natural light-filled gallery in the mainly underground, MONA, a circular tower in which is housed Kiefer's huge bookcase containing lead and glass books that are gradually falling off their shelves and smashing on the ground. A low glass fence stops the dangerous pieces from hurting gallery visitors. I'm reminded of animals fenced off in a zoo. The very clear boundary provides a safe place from which to engage with the work. I kneel down in a corner and watch, both through the glass barrier and above it. While I'm there the sculpture doesn't move, or at least too subtly for me to notice. Other visitors enter. A young boy is intrigued and asks his

mother if the pieces keep falling down and she assures him that how it looks now is how the artist arranged it to look.

But Kiefer's work is consciously designed to be in a continuing state of decay. He says of *Sternenfall*:

It encompasses the birth and death of the universe, with all the stars, which are born and die every day, like people. ... when a star dies it explodes, it becomes incandescent and white, sending out all kinds of debris and dust into the universe across unimaginable distances. And then that matter is reassembled, it clusters together to form a new star, a different star. *Sternenfall* explores this universal metabolism, the metabolism of nature and the stars. The title encompasses not only our human life, but also the whole universe.<sup>227</sup>

I love the *chutzpah* of the expansiveness of this artist's statement. It reminds me of another childhood experience, lying on the beach at Cape Conran in north-eastern Victoria on a warm summer's night. The sea was calm and the sky filled with stars. Suddenly I had the very strong sensation that I was falling up into the night sky. It was wonderful and terrifying at the same time.

I'm also reminded of Cixous' concept (see p. 37) that the forced scattering and exile of her family made her forgo the idea of belonging to one place, instead 'in an astral way' seeing 'the totality of the universe'.<sup>228</sup> Kiefer, reflecting broadly on birth and death in humans and stars, explores a 'universal metabolism', the materials of his works were made in stars and they are the same materials that constitute us. In *Sternenfall* lead and glass are evocative and highly contrasting media.

Kiefer always works on a number of levels and the broken glass could be interpreted as a reference to Kristallnacht, the 'night of broken glass', 9–10 November 1938, when coordinated attacks by SS military and civilians in Germany and Austria on Jewish owned buildings left the streets littered with glass (more on this later, p. 75).

Also the lead used in the piece is in a continuing process of degradation and discolouration due to contact with the air, as well as shifting under its own weight.

This brings associations with alchemy, whose purported esoteric aim was to convert lead to gold. According to the psycho-spiritual interpretation of alchemy, lead is the initial state present from beginning — chaos, *prima materia*, the first step in a transformation of consciousness.<sup>229</sup> But for Kiefer, the ensuing transformative possibilities are ambiguous. In his art ‘man and the world around him are held in the act of perpetual separation and fusion’.<sup>230</sup>

This idea is also explored in his series of paintings showing himself in the yoga resting position, *savasana*, pose of the corpse (and I wonder if his body is resting lightly enough on the earth to possibly float up into the stars).



. 24 *The Famous Order of the Night*, 1997

Arasse points out that here Kiefer is performing an analogous experiment to the one he made in *Occupations* when he performed the Hitler salute — testing a psychological experience in physical terms.<sup>231</sup>

A 2013 exhibition was entitled *Ungeborenen*, The Unborn. Kiefer wrote for the press release: ‘It’s the other aspect of the unborn, the desire of not wanting to be born. Cry of the prophets, the revolt of Job. It would have been better if you had never been born!’ As the curator states: ‘Through these new works, Kiefer explores the hybrid sphere of non-belonging, in which life and unborn life are an intermediate world dominated by the question of why one is and where one belongs’.<sup>232</sup>

It is significant for me that Kiefer quotes from one of my favourite books in the Old Testament, a book that is also important for Cixous.<sup>233</sup> In his extreme pain, Job asks God for death. By lying on the ground in *savasana* one is imitating death. Which is why lying directly on the earth can be so satisfying for me, (see p. 28).)

Daniel Arasse describes the rationale behind Anselm Kiefer's work in a way that could be a description of the 'compensatory' work of Kwon's 'melancholic' artist:<sup>234</sup>

A wish to be absorbed into the living unity of the world, a feeling of melancholy when faced with the sight of ruins that present history as a process of inevitable decline, a sense of exile undertaken to make the failure of art into the creator's true mission: throughout these three dimensions of Kiefer's recent artistic practice, one desire seems to be at work, a desire to 're-enchanted' the world — with 'enchantment' taken to mean both the active living presence on earth of the sacred, and all the magic and incantation that invocation of that presence may involve, in order to make the time of the sacred and the time scheme of human history converge. Kiefer's need for art may rely on the ability of a work of art, with its own time scheme and 'unique appearance of distance, no matter how close the object may be', to give shape to his quest. The material presence of a work of art is the privileged place where the threads of time, from the most remote past to the present day, come to surface in the visible world.<sup>235</sup>



. 25 *Abraham's Children*, 2010

This work from the *Ungeborenen* exhibition is entitled *Abraham's Children* and refers to a passage from the Gospel according to St. Matthew, where John the Baptist preaches repentance: 'And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham'.<sup>236</sup>



In the record of my ancestral myths, the Old Testament, Abraham's relationship with the earth is prominent. It is Abraham who is told by God:

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.<sup>237</sup>

And once he gets there:

Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.<sup>238</sup>

In the meanwhile, Abraham is living in the land of the Philistines, and the first treaty between two peoples is enacted at the Beersheba well:

And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant'.<sup>239</sup>

When Sarah, Abraham's wife dies, eighteen verses are dedicated to describing the purchase of a cave for her burial — the first Israelite land purchase in Philistine. I have quoted them all, to show the detail that this transaction is described in what is normally a very pithy document — for example Cain's murder of Abel and his punishment takes only eight verses.

Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him, Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead. And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth. And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight; hear me, and intreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar, That he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which is in the end of his field; for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me for a possession of a buryingplace amongst you. And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the

children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying, Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead. And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land. And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him, My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead. And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant. And the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city. And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan. And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a buryingplace by the sons of Heth.<sup>240</sup>

But there comes a time when there is a famine in Canaan and Abraham's grandson, Jacob, and his sons are economic refugees in Egypt. Jacob knows that he is about to die, and he gathers his twelve sons around him.

And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth.<sup>241</sup>

And his wishes are fulfilled.

A clue to why so much emphasis is placed on finding an appropriate burial place for Sarah can be found in the work of archeologist, Rachel Hallote. She discovered that the Israelites worshipped their dead ancestors, though this is hidden in the Old Testament. The ancestors were considered to be still a part of the family, and connections were kept alive by offering them food and praying to them.<sup>242</sup>

I am thinking about the importance of visiting family graves, whether one feeds the dead, asks their advice, or spends time thinking about them.<sup>i</sup> I'm thinking about

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<sup>i</sup> A 2013 production about the famous Melbourne football player, *Barassi — The Stage Show* (Tee O'Neill) has as its climax Ron Barassi's visit to his father's grave in Tobruk. His decision not to bring his father's ashes back to Australia (which was his initial intention) but to leave them with his



how this link to ancestors becomes difficult when people have immigrated. I'm thinking particularly about those Jewish mass graves throughout Eastern Europe, where, in many cases, who lies there is not known, and there are not even distant relatives left to visit them ...

The cave Abraham bought is in present day Hebron, in the West Bank. The shrine complex that now covers it was originally built by King Herod around 2000 years ago.



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During the time of the Crusaders, it was converted into a church. The cave itself was lost under the building until 1119 CE when a monk named Arnoul noticed a draught, removed some flagstones, and found a room lined with Herodian masonry. By hammering on walls and listening for a hollow sound, he discovered a narrow passage which led to caves containing dusty bones.<sup>243</sup>

About 700 years ago, the Muslim Mamelukes converted the building into a mosque and allowed Jews only onto the seventh step leading up to it. But in 1968, after the Six Day War Israeli victory, Moshe Dayan, the Defence Minister, convinced a slim (and brave!) 12 year old girl, Michal Arbel, daughter of the then head of the Shin Bet (Israel's internal security service), to climb down a narrow shaft with a camera.

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mates in Libya is significant. The play shows that it is by communing with his father at the grave site that he realises that his father would want to remain in this land where he died, among those who died with him.



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Arbel took careful measurements and sketched the tomb. Dayan needed the information as he was 'looking for a way to divide the cave in order to prevent a religious war; so that Jews could enter from below and pray there, and Muslims could enter and pray on top'.<sup>244</sup>

The politics of this arrangement are mind-boggling. But the need was, and is, real — Hebron has been the site of much inter-religious violence.<sup>245</sup> It took until 1996 before an agreement was made between Israelis and Palestinians over the division of the cave. The Wakf Muslim religious trust controls 81% of the building, and Jews are not permitted to visit the Cenotaphs of Isaac and Rebecca, aside from during ten annual Jewish holy days.<sup>246</sup>

Fairly early on in my Masters research, I went to speak to Mat Jakobi, a lecturer in Indigenous Education at Victoria University. As he welcomed me into the Moondani Balluk building, I explained that I was inspired by a panel at Melbourne's Jewish Holocaust Centre comprised of a Holocaust survivor, a Liberian former-refugee, and an Indigenous elder, to create a performance on the Merri Creek, and was trying to work out how to deal with the Indigenous significance of the spot, given my lack of authority to speak on Indigenous issues. His response was, 'How do you feel about the Palestinian struggle?' I was taken aback and silenced. But soon laughed and said, 'Well my initial reaction was that that's *irrelevant*, and my second reaction is that it's

a very relevant question to ask'. He also laughed and we went on to discuss issues of Indigenous intellectual and geographical property in Australia.



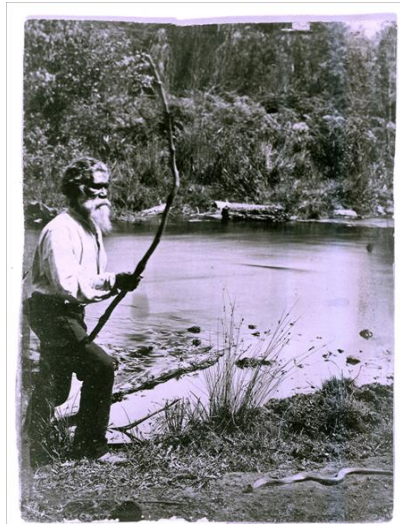
John Batman, arguably the founder of Melbourne,<sup>248</sup> was a contradictory character. Though he 'drank and whored a good deal', he also 'yearned for the rule of law' and 'feared the judgement of God', having been brought up in the Methodist Church.<sup>249</sup> In 1835, he boldly founded the Port Phillip Association, perhaps psychologically stimulated by the early effects of cerebral syphilis, perhaps spurred to action by the knowledge his health would soon deteriorate (he died four years later).<sup>250</sup>

The Association was made up of nine esteemed members of the Van Diemonian (Tasmanian) elite, including a former Attorney-General, a Postmaster General, a member of the Legislative Council and Government Superintendents — men with money and land. Batman also held a secret share for the Jewish merchant, Joseph Solomon, who could not be publicly acknowledged as he was a former convict. In its aim of founding a settlement on the 'empty' grasslands of Port Phillip, the Association was guided by two principles: that there would be no convicts, and that there would be an agreement with the Aborigines — hence the treaty.<sup>251</sup>

As someone brought up in the Church, I imagine that Batman may have seen an analogy between himself and the early Hebrews arriving in a strange land and making 'covenants' with the local tribes. He certainly was not lacking in hubris. Upon returning to Launceston (in his schooner, *Rebecca*, perhaps named after the Jewish matriarch), he proclaimed himself 'the greatest landowner in the world'.<sup>252</sup> His first biographer, James Bonwick, was steeped in Biblical narratives and promulgated the idea of Batman as heroic forerunner of a great people.<sup>253</sup>

In 1937, 102 years after the treaty signing, the Batman story featured strongly in historical re-enactments, with the willing participation of the newly formed Australian Aborigines' League.<sup>254</sup> It seems that Aboriginal people in Melbourne

were favourably disposed to Batman based on their own oral history, particularly the mythic stories passed on by William Barak, the last traditional *ngurungaeta* (elder) of the Wurundjeri-willam clan.<sup>255</sup> Barak, born on the Merri Creek, was the son of Jerum Jerum, one of the chief signatories of Batman's treaty (called Jaga Jaga in that document and contemporary elder, Ian Hunter's, great-great-great-grandfather (see p. 25)) Barak was present at the treaty signing as a young boy.



. 28 William Barak

The attitude of settler Melbournians to Barak was painfully contradictory. On the one hand, he was esteemed as an honourable and upright gentleman (he was a member of the Native Mounted Police for a short time) and an admired artist who documented his traditional culture. For a time, he was a successful negotiator for the Aboriginal mission at Coranderrk near Healesville.<sup>256</sup> But when he carried his dying son to hospital, once the boy was registered, he was sent away as the staff wanted to avoid a potential scene.<sup>257</sup> In 1890 his third marriage was sent up excruciatingly in the *Lilydale Express*, his headman status leading to him labelled 'King' and the poverty of his wedding celebration being lampooned accordingly.<sup>258</sup>

During his life, Barak would visit his father's grave at the Kew Asylum. He was right in predicting that he would die at the same time of year: 'when the wattle trees come into flower I shall be going home'. In midwinter 1903, he was buried at Coranderrk. Nearly thirty years later, his European friend Anne Bon, led a campaign to erect a marble gravestone as the old wooden slab marking his grave was 'weather-worn and charred by the flames from bush fires'.<sup>259</sup>

Responses to this campaign in *The Argus*, Melbourne's main newspaper, showed the ongoing ambivalence of European feelings towards Barak, no doubt echoing multiple ambivalences associated with white settlement of Port Phillip. A columnist going by the pseudonym, Oriel, penned these lines entitled 'The Passing Show': 'Raise a column in my honour, And carve on it — "He's a goner — He was Barak — not a white man — glory be!" '260

At the same time, an editorial from the same paper waxes lyrically portentous:

It is too late in the more populous states at least to do anything that matters for the Aborigines, and it would be mere idle sentimentalism to pretend that personally they were anything more than they were — handsome savages sometimes, perhaps, but often no doubt, 'abominably beastly' to European eyes. But it is something of a tragedy, and nationally it is scarcely to Australia's credit, that its primitive race should be allowed to approach each year a little closer to extinction with nothing to commemorate it but diminishing census returns. Its members are worth remembering, if only as some atonement for the undoubted wrongs which they suffered. There are other reasons too. Australia has little enough traditions and story, little enough of the riches of the past to call upon for colour and wonderment in the present. Is not the Aboriginal race fit subject for speculation and romance as wild and startling as the world has known? ... Their origin is dark with the mysteries of Terra Australis, the Great Southern Land. We who have been a day upon its shores can but cry, 'Hail and farewell' The Aborigines are going. It is good that monuments should be raised while there is yet time.<sup>261</sup>

The campaign was successful and Barak's tomb can still be found at the Coranderrk cemetery — one of the few physical remains of what was once a thriving Aboriginal settlement.



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The above photograph is of founding members of the Australian Aborigines League at the 1934 opening in Northcote, near where I live.<sup>262</sup> Northcote has always had a strong Aboriginal presence, and is the site for the Lady Gladys Nicholls Hostel where playwright and director, Andrea James, stayed when she first came to Melbourne as a student in 1989.

Andrea is one of the people I consider to be a member of my 'theatre family' (see p. 52).<sup>i</sup> Though I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to consider her ancestors as my own, my connection to her does affect the strength of my emotional response when I hear stories about her forbears. Her great-great-granduncle, William Cooper (in the middle of the photo) was of Yorta Yorta descent and spent most of his life at another Victorian mission, Cummeragunja, on the Murray River. In 1933, at 72 years old, he moved to Melbourne to be eligible for an old age pension, and a



i Incidentally, the original Scottish owners of the house I rent called it *Blackness*. When Andrea James came to stay in October 2013 she posted this photo on facebook with the caption 'Feeling quite at home ☺'.

year later was instrumental in forming the Australian Aborigines' League, just in time to be invited to participate in the 100 year anniversary commemoration of Batman's treaty. Presumably, the League approved of the speech of one of the organisers, Isaac Selby, who emphasised that Batman had wanted to compensate the original owners for the loss of their land. But they were appalled at the speech of G R Holland, chief president of the so-called 'Australian Natives Association',<sup>i</sup> who proclaimed the value of commemorating the treaty as a foundation for the White Australia Policy.<sup>263</sup>

A few days later, Cooper sent a letter of protest to Selby in which he said: '[W]hat is a memorial of the coming of the whites is a memorial of death for us'.<sup>264</sup> Selby sent the letter on to Melbourne's *Herald* newspaper, which generated much interest. Cooper was grateful for the publicity which led to Selby asking him to participate in another event, this time a concert, commemorating Melbourne's founding. Cooper organised an Aboriginal choir whose finale number was 'Burra Phara', an African American spiritual based on a story from the Book of Exodus, translated into Yorta Yorta<sup>ii</sup>.<sup>265</sup>

Historian, Bain Attwood, argues that in singing this spiritual, the Aboriginal choir members were identifying with the Jews and hoping that they too would one day be restored to their homeland. Furthermore, he asserts that Aboriginal people like Cooper

had a predictive or prophetic view of history that was derived from the Old Testament. They imagined the relationship between past, present and history as a long trajectory marked by epochs and days of Judgement and Restitution,

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<sup>i</sup> Not long after writing this sentence, I was leaving Victoria University's city library and looked up at a lovely art deco building on Elizabeth St decorated with sheep heads and the native insignia of kangaroo and emu to discover the inscription: 'Australian Natives' Association'. The Association was founded in 1871 as a friendly society for Australian-born white males. By 1948 it had expanded into an Australia-wide insurance company, and is now the health insurance company, Australian Unity ("Friendly Society History": Acc. 1/11/2012). Presumably all Australians are welcome to pay their fees and be duly insured. Ironically, their former offices now house the Royal Gurkhas Institute of Technology which primarily caters to foreign students.

<sup>ii</sup> This song is the first to feature in the 2012 movie, *The Sapphires*, about four young women from Cumeraginja who travel to Vietnam in the 1960's to sing for American troops. In the movie, it is reprised on the night when Martin Luther King is murdered as a backing track to his final speech: 'I look over and I see the Promised Land. I may not get there with you but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy tonight, I'm not worried about anything, I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord' (Blair).

Mourning and Hope, at the end of which there would be deliverance from the suffering that was the lot of the Aboriginal people, just as it was for the Jews.<sup>266</sup>

Certainly, it's almost eerie how the following quote from Cooper, talking of his own people to a *Herald* journalist later in the year of the commemoration ceremony, could easily come from the mouth of a Jew (and, of course, unfortunately many other suffering peoples), 'They have a horror and fear of extermination. It is in the blood, the racial memory, which recalls the terrible things done to them in years gone by'.<sup>267</sup>

I imagine that it is this sensibility which led Cooper to be so affected by Kristallnacht, that in 1938 he organised the Australian Aborigines' League to march to the German Consulate in Melbourne to hand over a petition which protested the 'cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi government of Germany'. This was the only private protest in the world against the Germans following Kristallnacht.<sup>268</sup>



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Cooper's grave at Cummeragunja was unmarked until one of his great granddaughters mounted a plaque in 1995.<sup>269</sup> He has been remembered in other ways including the William Cooper Cup, an annual trophy awarded to the winner of an Australian rules football match between the Aboriginal All-Stars and Victoria Police.<sup>270</sup> Israel has been particularly active in honouring his memory.<sup>271</sup>



In 2009, Cooper's descendents were invited to Israel to attend a tree planting ceremony to commemorate the march against Kristallnacht.<sup>272</sup> I asked Cooper's great grandson, Kevin Russell, who has visited Israel twice to attend honouring ceremonies, if he had had contact with Palestinian activists fighting for rights to their land and what his opinion was of their struggle. His response was that he felt compassionate towards both Palestinians and Israelis and to the 'damage that is going on'.<sup>273</sup> However, he felt that he didn't have a clear enough understanding of the history to make definite pronouncements — 'like you need protocol to talk about Aboriginal issues. ... If William Cooper was around now, he'd be getting people to talk. Whoever's right or wrong, it's not a matter of taking sides'.<sup>274</sup>

## 8

And so, back to Batman's treaty, an extraordinary meeting of two very different peoples that occurred round the corner from where I live.



. 32 John Wesley Burt, *Batman's Treaty with the Aborigines at Merri Creek, 6th June 1835, c. 1892*

Trees played an important part in this ceremony on the banks of the Merri Creek. As far as Batman and his legal counsel were concerned, the ritual being enacted on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1835 was one of *feoffment*, a feudal form of conveyancing already described in Batman's time as 'after the ancient manner'.<sup>275</sup> It required that the

vendor pass the vendee a twig, some grass, a lump of soil, or some other small part of the property regarded as symbolic of the whole. Secondly, the land needed to be perambulated, and physical objects on the boundaries described. Marked trees were used for this purpose, though the veracity of Batman's account of this is highly questionable as it would have entailed walking further than is possible in one day. Finally, a deed needed to be 'signed, sealed and delivered'.<sup>276</sup>

Batman took pains in his diary to show that all these requirements had been fulfilled. On Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> May (from the State Library of Victoria transcription, which preserves the spelling and grammar mistakes intact) he wrote:

I never saw any thing equal to the Land in my Life - I walked over a considerable extent - and all of the same discription the Land was as good as Land could be - the whole appeared like land layed out in farms for some 100 years back and every tree transplanted ... and to my joy and dilight we saw at some distance the Natives fire I intend to go off to them early in the morning - and get if possible on a friendly footing with them, in order to purchase Land &c from them - from what I have seen I am quite delighted with Port Phillip we walked about 20 miles ...<sup>277</sup>

You can almost feel him salivating over someone else's land, a land for which his rival for the title, 'founder of Melbourne', John Pascoe Fawkner used the Biblical phrase: 'a land flowing with milk & honey'.<sup>278</sup> The thick grass and few trees, so valuable for sheep farming was, unknown to Batman, a product of eons of Aboriginal fire stick farming.<sup>279</sup>

After a week of failing to make contact with the locals, despite seeing much evidence of their existence, on 6<sup>th</sup> June:

... I found Eight Chiefs amongst them who possessed the whole of the Country near Port Phillip - three Brothers, all of the same name are the Principal Chiefs, and two of them men of six feet high and verry good looking the other not so tall but stoughter, the other 5 Chiefs were fine men — and after a full explanation of what my object was, I purchased two large tracks of Land from them ... the Parchment the Eight Chiefs signed this afternoon, delivering to me some of the soil Each of them, as giving me full possession of the tracks of Land, this took place along side of a beautifull stream of water, and from whence my Land commences - and when a tree is marked 4 way's to know the

corner Boundry ... My Natives<sup>i</sup> gave the Chiefs and there Tribe a Grand Croberrow to Night. they seemed quite delighted with it ...<sup>280</sup>

The stream of water is believed to be the Merri Creek, and the scarred tree to be the one pictured on the left, photographed in 2007:



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At this time an urgent plea was made by a local Northcote historian to save the tree, but to no avail. Today the site is as pictured above in the middle. The monumental tree is remembered by the hole in the concrete. Note that the aged hills hoist, a most ubiquitous symbol (perhaps monument?) of Australian suburbia, is still standing. On the right is the one in my backyard, around the corner<sup>ii</sup>.

Tim Ingold observes that both trees and churches (and hills hoists?) possess the attributes of what Mikhail Bakhtin terms a 'chronotype' — a place where temporality is palpable, 'veritable monuments to the passage of time'. As he states it, 'the tree buries its roots in the ground, so also people's ancestors are buried in the graveyard beside the church, and both sets of roots may reach to approximately the same temporal depth'.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> These 'Natives' are the seven Sydney Aboriginal men that had worked for Batman in Van Diemen's Land. They no doubt significantly helped in this cross-cultural transaction (Boyce: 63).

<sup>ii</sup> The tree behind my hoist is also significant as it's a jacaranda, a native of South America, but ubiquitous in Johannesburg, hometown of my mother's mother, and her favourite tree. Consequently, I have used this tree as the focus of personal rituals, (and at its base there is a resilient crop of the annoying weed, wandering jew).

Here Batman explains how he got the chiefs' signatures. On 7<sup>th</sup> June:

I had no trouble to find out their sacred marks. One of my Natives / Bungitt / went to a tree out of sight of the Women, and made the Sydney Natives mark, after this was done I took, with two or three of my Natives, the Principal Chief, and shewed the mark, on the tree this He New immediately and pointed to the Knocking out of the teeth, this mark is always made when the ceremony of Knocking out the tooth in the front however after this I desired through my Natives, for Him to make his mark, which after looking about for some time, and hesitating some few minutes, He took the Tomahawk, and cut out in the Bark of the Tree his mark - which is attached to the Deed, and is the signature of their Country, and Tribe.<sup>282</sup>

It has been pointed out that the fact that Australia's first Governor, Phillip, was missing a front tooth, like all the initiated Indigenous men that he first met, inclined them favourably towards him.<sup>283</sup> In a parallel way, anthropologist Diane Barwick pointed out the similarities between the ritual of *feoffment* and the Indigenous ceremony of *Tanderrum*, which was performed when foreign tribes were welcomed into an area. These similarities may have enabled Batman's party and the Wurundjeri headmen to feel like they were in agreement.<sup>284</sup>

A *Tanderrum* ceremony was described by William Thomas, one of the first 'Protectors of the Aborigines' appointed at the Melbourne settlement, in 1839:

There is not, perhaps, a more pleasing sight in a native encampment than when strange blacks arrive who have never been in the country before. Each comes with a fire in hand (always bark), which is supposed to purify the air. ... They are ushered in generally by some of the intermediate tribe, who are friends of both parties ... the aged are brought forward and introduced.

The ceremony of *Tanderrum* is commenced; the tribe visited may be seen lopping boughs from one tree and another, as varied as possible of each tree with leaves; each family has a separate seat, raised about 8 or 10 inches from the ground. ... Two fires are made, one for the males and the other for the females. The visitors are attended on the first day by those whose country they are come to visit, and are not allowed to do anything for themselves; water is brought them which is carefully stirred by the attendant with a reed, and then given them to drink (males attend males and females female); victuals are then brought and laid before them, consisting of as great a variety as the bush in the new country affords ... during this ceremony the greatest silence prevails. ... You may sometimes perceive an aged man seated, the tear of gratitude stealing down his murky wrinkled face. At night their mia-mias [huts] are made for them; conversation, &c. ensue. The meaning of this is a hearty welcome. As the boughs on which they sit are from various trees, so

they are welcome to every tree in the forest. The water stirred with a reed means that no weapon shall ever be raised against them.<sup>285</sup>

I find the delicacy of feeling with which Thomas writes of this ceremony very moving. I find the delicacy of feeling of the ceremony itself very moving. The meeting of people is delicate.

In his diary, Batman writes of the fact that besides surveying the land of Port Phillip, his prime aim is to get local tribes to sign over their land. In order to do that, he needs to meet some Aboriginal people. But he is initially thwarted in this desire, despite seeing native fires in the distance. When he walks into a camp that shows signs of recent occupancy, he finds it has suddenly been vacated. This is a common experience reported by explorers in many parts of Australia.<sup>286</sup> Using ethnohistorian, Sylvia Hallam's work, we can now surmise that local people were cleverly avoiding contact until they decided it was appropriate.

Hallam, analyses a meeting between two tribes near Alice Springs as reported by Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen in 1901 and extracts a number of critical features that are common to other such meetings, such as the one reported above by Thomas. These include that the meeting is at least partially pre-arranged; that the visitors initially sit quietly at a distance, ignored by their hosts; and that the proceedings are formalised, ritualised and ceremonious. The purpose is to avoid conflict and enable the possibility of reciprocal obligations.<sup>287</sup>

Following Hallam's analysis of early contact between Europeans and Aboriginal groups in Western Australia, we can see that the Wurundjeri in Port Phillip were trying to find a way of interacting with Batman in a way that was appropriate to their customs. They did not allow him to barge into their camps by 'disappearing' themselves before he arrived.<sup>288</sup> Eventually Batman's party came across an old woman with no toes on one foot<sup>289</sup> — presumably she wasn't able to get out of their way — and then a group of heavily laden women and their children with whom they exchanged presents. Indigenous academic, Tony Birch, suggests that the way the women insisted on giving Batman's party valuable gifts of baskets, spears, and a *tarnook* (wooden bucket), shows how empowered they were.<sup>290</sup>

On the day when Batman purportedly enacted that deed that left him 'the greatest landowner in the world',<sup>291</sup> he met with a nuclear family that morning and gave the 'chief' presents.

He took us on, saying He would take us to His Tribe and mentioned the Names of Chief's - we walked about 8 miles, when to our great surprise we heard several voices calling after us on looking back we saw 8 men all armed with spears &c &c &c - when we stopped they threw aside their weapons and came verry friendly up to us, after shaking hands and my giving them Tomahawks, Knives &c - they took us with them about a mile back where we found Huts, Women and Children, after sometime and full explanation, I found Eight Chiefs amongst them who possessed the whole of the Country near Port Phillip.<sup>292</sup>

The local people took some pains to try and ensure a modicum of proper process in the way Batman approached the elders of the tribe, and this (and the presence of the 'Sydney Natives') may have contributed to the fact that there was some mutual understanding between the two groups. However the idea that the Wurundjeri had actually sold their land was ludicrous, probably even to Batman, who had had considerable previous contact with Indigenous people in Sydney and Tasmania.<sup>i</sup>

In 1802, after escaping from a settlement at Sorrento (then called Sullivan's Cove) that was an earlier attempt to settle Port Phillip, William Buckley lived with Wauthaurong people on the west side of the bay for 32 years. He wrote in his memoirs:

... they had seen several of the native chiefs, with whom, as they said, they had exchanged all sorts of things for land; but that I knew could not have been, because unlike other savage communities, or people, they have no chiefs claiming or possessing any superior right over the soil: theirs only being as the heads of families. ... I therefore looked upon the land dealing spoken of as another hoax of the white man, to possess the inheritance of the uncivilised natives.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> To quote James Boyce: 'Batman and his negotiating team, who had been exposed to similar customs elsewhere, were too experienced in cross-cultural contact to have been in any doubt that the ceremony only concerned land *access*. ... Furthermore, Batman did not envisage the uncontrolled invasion of white people that was soon to follow — indeed his express purpose was to exclude other Britons from making land claims. Batman only sought permission for a comparatively small party of Europeans to live on Aboriginal land. He didn't expect the Aborigines to leave the land, or imagine his possession would end theirs; he was hoping for a profitable co-existence, and maybe, after forty years of raids and forays (as well as the benefits brought by the visitors), the Kulin were too' (Boyce: 68).

Though there was certainly some hoaxing involved, there is also reason to believe that some level of mutual benefit was also being attempted. As the influential anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner pointed out: 'It can at least be said for Batman that he acknowledged that the land *had* possessors; he also treated with them as principals'.<sup>294</sup> After 1835 the idea of gaining Aboriginal consent for the transfer of land 'was buried at the very centre of the cult of disremembering'.<sup>295</sup> Boyce highlights that the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip already had some knowledge of European colonisers — earlier abandoned settlements, as well as independent groups of sealers, whalers and wattle-bark collectors. They knew to be fearful of firearms and recognised the value of flour, mirrors, beads, and metal tools.<sup>296</sup> Batman's purpose in concluding the treaty was to exclude other Europeans and he didn't expect the original inhabitants to leave.<sup>297</sup> Given this, the Wurundjeri would probably have had a much better deal if Batman's treaty had been accepted by the colonial government compared to what did ensue.

In 1836, the colonial Government, holding that the land was not occupied by a settled people and was therefore *terra nullius*, (a Latin term meaning 'empty land' or nobody's land'<sup>298</sup>) passed an Act that repudiated any purported treaties with the natives, such as that of Batman. Instead, the Government held public auctions, and the Wurundjeri did not receive any compensation.<sup>299</sup> Batman's 'vow' was overturned.



One of the most well known sections of liturgy in Judaism is the *Kol Nidre*, meaning 'All Vows' in Aramaic, the vernacular of the time after the destruction of the second Temple when Jews were banished from Israel, 70 CE – 500 CE. At that time, the tendency to make rash vows was so strong that people had a strong desire for dispensation from the responsibility of some obligations.<sup>300</sup>

It's not actually a prayer, but a statement of annulment of seven different kinds of oaths. It's sung to a beautifully haunting melody in synagogue at the beginning of the most solemn of Jewish holydays, *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. It falls ten days after the Jewish New Year and is the occasion to ask forgiveness for a year of sinning.

One of the sins may have been the breaking of a vow and the *Kol Nidre* ends with the paradoxical: 'our vows are not our vows; our prohibitions are not our prohibitions; and our oaths are not our oaths'. This poses an ethical problem by calling into question the serious binding power of vows if they can be renounced so easily. This problem had already been noted in the first record of *Kol Nidre*, a late ninth century compendium of Jewish liturgical laws, which concludes that the rabbis have decided 'that this is a foolish custom and that it is forbidden to do this'.<sup>301</sup>

However the custom of reciting the *Kol Nidre* has prevailed, even though rabbis throughout the ages have been against the practice, not wanting it easier for their congregation to make thoughtless vows, and uncomfortable with the implication that Jews were untrustworthy. Even though they stipulated that the vows in question are only those made to God,<sup>302</sup> in the Middle Ages the feeling that Jews would not take responsibility for their vows led European courts to introduce special vows for Jews which included elements of torture such as being forced to stand on a sow's skin and having thorn branches being pulled between their legs. The text of such oaths included statements like 'And may your dust never join other dust, and your earth never join other earth in the bosom of Master Abraham if what you say is not true and right'.<sup>303</sup> Even now, a quick internet scan uncovers a 2011 blog that quotes the *Kol Nidre* to ask 'Can any person or people with this mentality be trusted?'<sup>304</sup>

Many scholars have pondered on the endurance of the *Kol Nidre* considering the arguments against it. Some argue that its value lies in the way it sets the scene for the performance of ritual purification it prefigures.<sup>305</sup>



Eric Selinger looks at the invocation which precedes the *Kol Nidre*:

By authority of the court on high  
and by the authority of this court below,  
with divine consent and with the consent of this congregation we hereby  
declare that it is permitted to pray  
with those who have transgressed.

He argues that this conjuring of two courts to create a place of permission puts us in 'the world of make-believe, of performance', and that consequently the *Kol Nidre* is actually 'an incantation: a set of words that make things happen'.<sup>306</sup> He maintains that the incantation is aiming to reconcile the petitioner to a paradox inherent in human life: the impulse to 'do better' and the shame that recognises that that is unlikely.<sup>307</sup>

Monash University academic, Tamara Prosic, analyses the *Kol Nidre* in terms of its 'semantic and psychological meta-language' to attempt to understand its 'paradoxical superficialities'.<sup>308</sup> She argues that the vow stems from a sublimation of the early Israelite's trauma at having abandoning Azazel, the god of death, who they also worshipped before submitting to an exclusive covenant with Yahweh. The paradox that Prosic finds in the *Kol Nidre* is that it expresses atonement both for the sin of having worshiped another god, and for the sin of breaking ties with this other god. She concludes 'trauma is always a wound that cries out, that addresses us, in the attempt to tell us of a reality or a truth that is not otherwise available'.<sup>309</sup>

I don't wish to insinuate that there are direct parallels between a Jewish practice of annulling all vows at the beginning of a holy day of repentance of sins, and the fact that the only instance of a treaty between European settlers and Aboriginal people was soon after annulled. However the uncomfortable ambivalences associated with both scenarios place them in a similar zone of human behaviour.

I also think it's relevant that contemporary calls for a treaty acknowledge the importance of the ceremonial words that form the basis for our culture. On 12<sup>th</sup> November 2013 *The Wheeler Centre* will hold a debate at the Melbourne Town Hall, 'True Reconciliation Requires a Treaty', with the byline, 'you can't heal a

wound without treating it'. Interestingly, both Peter Sutton (see p. 7) and Tony Birch (p. 8) will argue against a treaty.<sup>310</sup>



. 36 Al Jolson



. 37 Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*, 1927

The first 'talking film' was *The Jazz Singer*, made in 1927. It's great fun to watch as a journey into Hollywood history. I was particularly struck by the fact that most of the film preserves the older way of creating film dialogue — printed words shown on the screen that alternate with silent moving images of the characters talking — so that when we do hear words synced with the picture it has quite an impact (though not as much as for those 1927 movie-goers!).

The first words that appear printed on the screen are 'Tonight Jakie is to sing Kol Nidre, he should be here!' Jakie is the son of Cantor Rabinowitz whose family has sung prayers in the synagogue for four generations. But Jakie disappoints his father, who that very day finds him singing ragtime in a saloon and whips him. Jakie runs away from home and eventually becomes a star singing jazz in blackface. The climax of the film is the opening night of his first Broadway show which happens to coincide with the eve of *Yom Kippur*. His mother arrives backstage to beg him to come and sing *Kol Nidre* as his father is too ill. Agonising over what to do Jakie, tears running down his blackface makeup, stares into a mirror and sees a vision of his father singing in synagogue (and watching the film on my laptop I saw superimposed again the image of my own teary face!).<sup>311</sup>

Jakie was played to enormous critical acclaim by the most popular entertainer of the time, the son of a cantor, Al Jolson, born in Srednik, a small Jewish village in Lithuania. By 1927, Jolson had already been singing in blackface for 23 years. When he first wore it, it gave him a new sense of freedom and spontaneity and boosted his career. In 1916, Jolson starred in the Broadway musical, *Robinson Crusoe, Jr.* as Friday. Seeing the show, playwright Samson Raphaelson, 'had an epiphany: "My God, this isn't a jazz singer. This is a cantor!" ' and used this image in the story which led to *The Jazz Singer*.<sup>312</sup>

At the time, Jolson in blackface seems to have garnered only praise. A film reviewer wrote:

Is there any incongruity in this Jewish boy with his face painted like a Southern Negro singing in the Negro dialect? No, there is not. Indeed, I detected again and again the minor key of Jewish music, the wail of the *Chazan*, the cry of anguish of a people who had suffered. The son of a line of rabbis well knows how to sing the songs of the most cruelly wronged people in the world's history.<sup>313</sup>

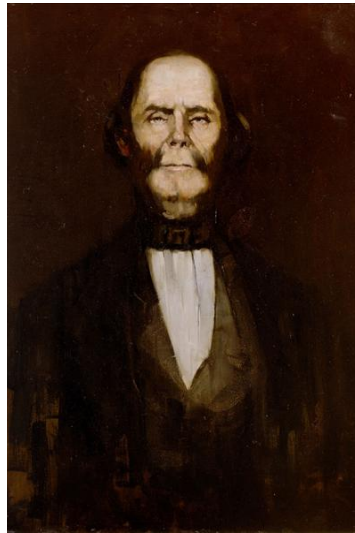
Harlem's newspaper, *Amsterdam News*, wrote of Jolson 'Every colored performer is proud of him'.<sup>314</sup>

Jolson is credited as almost single-handedly introducing African-American music to white audiences and paved the way for many black performers. He actively fought against anti-black discrimination on Broadway and at his funeral black actors lined the way.<sup>315</sup>



I'll return to the earlier meetings of blacks and whites in Australia. William Buckley had escaped with four other convicts, one of whom was shot by guards and the other two had decided to walk back to the settlement from the other side of the Heads — what is now called Point Lonsdale. Full of despair at being alone, starving and weak, Buckley took a spear from a tree grave to use as crutch. Soon after he was found by Wauthaurong women who fed him grubs and then began wailing and

cutting themselves. At a corroboree that evening, Buckley expected to be thrown into flames. But he was well looked after. Once he learnt their language, he found that the corroboree had been to welcome him home. It was a dance of where he'd been — by carrying the spear of a dead man, the Wauthaurong could recognise him as their relative's spirit, returned from the dead.<sup>316</sup>



. 38 William Buckley



. 39 Buckley as 'noble savage'

A story is told that Batman resembled a Wurundjeri man who had died, and consequently the man's younger brother had a great deal of affection for him, believing Batman to be the spirit of his brother.<sup>317</sup>

In my introduction (p. 9), I quoted the Western Australian explorer, Sir George Grey, reporting a similar 'recognition' in 1838. Here is a fuller version of Grey's description:

An old man now came up, who could not be induced to allow me to approach him, appearing to regard me with a sort of stupid amazement; neither horses or any other of those things, which powerfully excited the curiosity of the others, had the least charm for him, but his eyes were always focused on me, with a look of eagerness and anxiety which I was unable to account for. ... [He] went off for the purpose of collecting the women, whilst we proceeded to our place of halt.

The setting was impressive ... After we had tethered the horses, and made ourselves tolerably comfortable, we heard loud voices from the hills above us: the effect was fine, - for they really almost appeared to float in the air; ... the wild cries of the women, who knew not our exact position, came by upon the wind ... Our guides shouted in return, and gradually the approaching cries came nearer and nearer. ... A sort of procession came up, headed by two

women, down whose cheeks tears were streaming. The eldest of these came up to me, and looking for a moment at me, said, - "Gwa, gwa, bundo bal," - "Yes, yes, in truth it is him;" and then ... throwing her arms round me, cried bitterly, her head resting on my breast; and although I was totally ignorant of what their meaning was, from mere motives of compassion, I offered no resistance to her caresses, however disagreeable they might be, for she was old, ugly and filthily dirty<sup>i</sup>; the other younger one knelt at my feet, also crying. At last the old lady, emboldened by my submission, deliberately kissed me on each cheek, just in the manner a French woman would have done; she then cried a little more, and at length relieving me, assured me that I was the ghost of her son, who had some time before been killed by a spear-wound in his breast. The younger female was my sister; but she ... did not think proper to kiss me. My new mother expressed almost as much delight at my return to my family, as my real mother would have done ... As soon as she left me, my brothers, and father (the old man who had previously been so frightened), came up and embraced me after their manner, - that is, they threw their arms round my waist, placed their right knee against my right knee, and their breast against my breast, holding me in this way for several minutes. During the time that the ceremony lasted, I, according to the native custom, preserved a grave and mournful expression of countenance ... The men next proceeded to embrace their relation, Jen-na, in the same manner they had before done me; and this part of the ceremony was now concluded.<sup>318</sup>

Grey's perhaps rather sanguine way of accepting these extraordinary attentions can be explained by the fact he had a command of the local language and had spent some years with Aboriginal people. He felt that he had a clear understanding of what was going on: the locals,

themselves never having an idea of quitting their own land, cannot imagine others doing it; - and thus, when they see white people suddenly appear in their country, and settling themselves down in particular spots, they imagine that they must have formed an attachment for this land in some other state of existence; and hence conclude the settlers were at one period black men, and their own relations.<sup>319</sup>

Because there are no detailed records of what the Indigenous people of this era actually thought of the white people who suddenly appeared, it's difficult to judge

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<sup>i</sup> It interests me that when Hallam quotes this description of their encounter, she omits the section from 'and although I was totally ignorant' to 'she was old, ugly and filthily dirty'. Grey's confession of ignorance does contradict his analysis which follows, but I would guess that the analysis came after the event. Her omission of Grey's description of his 'mother's' ugliness could be explained by the fact that she is intending to emphasise Grey's sympathetic feelings for the 'natives'. However in reading the whole journal from which these quotes are extracted, I was very much struck by the radical shifts in attitude that Grey expresses, from whole-hearted admiration (for example of Aboriginal tracking expertise (Grey: 297)) to horror (for example using controlled violence to settle disputes (305)). This kind of ambivalence can be found in many first settlers' attitudes to the original inhabitants, including Batman, who murdered Aborigines in Tasmania with seeming almost indifference (Nicholson), but also seemed to have formed a close relationship with the 'Sydney Natives' who accompanied him to Melbourne (Billot: 273).

the veracity of Grey's analysis. However the fact that whites were seen as returned deceased ancestors is widely reported from different parts of Australia.<sup>320</sup> I will be inspired by Grey's explanation in my performance because I find it to be poetic and powerful — a visceral perspective on the question of belonging. I find it particularly moving because in a practical sense it provides a way for local people to integrate and welcome 'strangers' into their country, and this is such a stark contrast to how strangers can be treated.<sup>i</sup> If the stranger is given this kind of treatment, Cixous' 'uncountry' and Kiefer's 'non-belonging' take on another level of meaning.

In *Stranger to Ourselves*, the French/Bulgarian linguist and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva, traces a concise history of humanity's relationship to the foreigner from ancient Greek times, through the Old Testament, early Christianity, the Renaissance, Enlightenment, touching briefly on the potential dangers of nationalism (e.g. Nazi ideology), and concluding with an analysis of our fear of the foreigner within us. She believes that the fragile boundaries within an uncertain self are the result of the combined need for, and fear of, identification with the other.<sup>321</sup> Kristeva asks: 'Can the "foreigner", who was the "enemy" in primitive societies, disappear from modern societies?'.<sup>322</sup> She points out that due to increased travel, many of us will literally feel foreign at some time. But we can also feel foreign at home, uncomfortable with our sexual, national, political and professional identity, which results in some identification with the other. However

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<sup>i</sup> For example, in Australia's federal election held on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2013, asylum seeker policy was a central issue ("Election Pressure Drives Rudd to Hard Line on Refugees": Acc. 15/9/2013). In 2002 and 2003 the Australian Government passed laws against the unauthorized arrival of people claiming refugee status. Bill Leak's Australia Day 2004 cartoon questions who in Australia has the right to see who as a stranger (National Museum of Australia):



this identification, though intense, is sporadic.<sup>323</sup> Kristeva points out that if our 'consciousness of [our] unconscious' allows us to recognise that '[t]he foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners', then there is no one external to attack. This would allow the formation of a 'paradoxical community' of individuals reconciled to their 'radical strangeness',<sup>324</sup> all aware of their 'non-belonging' to an 'uncountry'.

But perhaps the attitude of Indigenous Australians at first contact according to Grey's analysis is more appealing: we are in a place only because we have a particular attachment to it, and that attachment is ancestral. All people who are in a particular place therefore have ancestral connections and should be welcomed accordingly. You are connected to the land right through to the ancestors who created the land and its forms. And you are connected to the animals and plants that also live here and whose ancestors also helped create the land forms. Of course, it is only possible for the original inhabitants to maintain this kind of attitude to the newcomers, if those newcomers (for example, William Buckley) demonstrate a respect for their philosophy.<sup>i</sup>

Tony Swain's elucidation of traditional Aboriginal beliefs concerning conception deepens an understanding of this relationship:

The mother does not contribute to the ontological substance of the child, but rather 'carries' a life whose essence belongs, and belongs alone, to a site. The child's core identity is determined by his or her place of derivation. ... Life is annexation of place.<sup>325</sup>

Deborah Bird Rose lived with the Yarralin people in the north western Northern Territory and conducted in depth research into their beliefs. According to the Yarralin, the earth is female and her 'holes and caves are analogous to wombs —

<sup>i</sup> The image of the first settlers as 'boat people' has inspired many cartoonists:



Dean Alston, 2010



Reuben Brand, 2012

the places of origin for all life'.<sup>326</sup> Rose quotes Yarralin elders, Hobbles Danayarri: 'Everything come up out of ground — language, people, emu, kangaroo, grass. That's law',<sup>327</sup> and Old Tim Yilngayarri, who said that his mother 'been come out from the ground, underneath, from the ground inside, been come out'.<sup>328</sup> Rose describes Aboriginal Australia as a multitude of promised lands, each with its own 'chosen people',<sup>329</sup> where '[e]very person has a place in the world in which they are needed, and in which they are "healthy" '.<sup>330</sup> The sad corollary to this is that removal from the country to which an Aboriginal person belongs can lead to sickness and death.<sup>331</sup>

By 1839, just four years after Batman landed in Melbourne, force was being extensively used to remove Aboriginal people from Melbourne. On the day when they were being evicted, William Thomas, the assistant protector, wrote in his diary:

From sunrise to sunset spent in arguing, reasoning, and persuading the natives — They declare that they will not remove. They had camped on private property ... I tell them again that they make *willums* [lean-to dwellings] on White Man's ground, and cut down trees and cut off bark, make White man sulky — They say no White Man's ground Black Man's.<sup>332</sup>

In October 1835, Derrimut, a headman of the Boonwurrung tribe (easterly neighbours of the Wurundjeri), warned European settlers of an impending attack from 'up-country tribes' and so averted it. His extreme disillusionment with what the settlement soon became is poetically expressed in his words:

Why me have lubra? Why me have piccaninny? You have all this place. No good have children, no good have lubra, me tumble down and die very soon now.<sup>333</sup>

One can only wonder what he would have thought of the new western Melbourne suburb named after him, booming with housing and industrial estates.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> The Derrimut electoral district is notable in Victoria for having the highest percentage of voters born outside of Australia ("District Rank by Born Overseas": Acc. 4/5/2013).





Jeff Malpas reminds us that the idea of a tie between place and identity is also widespread in contemporary culture, where it appears as a preoccupation with genealogy as well as our common sense of loss or dislocation.<sup>334</sup> He goes so far to say that 'the very structure of the mind is intrinsically tied to locality and spatiality'.<sup>335</sup> Because memories are inextricably linked to particular places, our identities are place bound. Therefore, to have a sense of one's own past means understanding one's own story in a place in relation to other stories that have happened in that place.<sup>336</sup>

A particularly striking example of the way cultural memory and identity is tied to the environment, is the way in which for Aboriginal people, the landscape is sung into being.<sup>337</sup> The Australian continent is covered by a network of songlines or dreaming tracks, stories of ancestor beings who created the land and its landmarks. But in ritual performance when these songs are performed now, landforms, water, plants, animals and people are sung into being in particular places anew.<sup>338</sup>

Malpas looks at the contour of the poet Wordsworth's, changing obsessions from 'croft and cottage', to his awareness of the fragility of such 'stone built dwellings' and desire for the immutability of the grave, to a late phase where even the tomb is too transient and the church becomes his image of a heavenly abode. Malpas insists that by coming to terms with our embeddedness in place, we can recognize the reality of our finitude and mortality. Our searching arises out of a sense of loss that can only be resolved by a better understanding of the places and people which constitute life.<sup>339</sup>

Only thus — in the concreteness of an embodied, located, bounded existence can we come to understand that in which the value and significance of a life is to be found. And, as every such life is a life lived amidst a richness that cannot be protected from vulnerability and loss, so every such life is defined by the

experience of both the wonder and the fragility of place — by the experience of place lost and regained, by the experience of place as indeed 'humanized and humanizing'.<sup>340</sup>

So how does one create 'the concreteness of an embodied, located, bounded existence'? Often art strives to do just this.

Bruce Wilshire decries the emptiness of our modern rites of passage, quoting Philippe Ariès: 'death has grown wild ... it is less than human'. And so we need art to feel 'united by what we do not understand'.<sup>341</sup>

Theatre displays before us fragments of premonitory symbols, indications of transcendence: new sorts of engulfments, dissolutions, and as yet unpredictable achievements of individuation. We struggle and hope that the abyss of our lives and the possibilities that it holds will resound in authorization and empowerment. We strive for an art, and for an art of life, that will break through to new and difficult identifications.<sup>342</sup>

Here are some stills from a piece of 1961 theatre — the re-enactment of Batman's treaty in Oldis Gardens on the Merri Creek, just downstream from the signing site.



. 40

According to an observer, the re-enactment had a profound impact on the fifteen Aboriginal performers — '[t]hey felt proud, they stood straighter'.<sup>343</sup>

Included in the re-enactment was a scene reported in Batman's diary: 'the Eight Chiefs ... delivering to me some of the soil Each of them, as giving me full possession of the tracks of Land'.<sup>344</sup> The symbolic significance of this act was recognised by Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam's consultant, HC (Nugget) Coombs when he recommended repeating the gesture in reverse with leader, Vincent Lingiari, at the historic 1975 return of some Gurindji land in the Northern Territory. Whitlam declared: 'I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof in Australian law that these lands belong to the Gurindji people and I put into your

hands this piece of the earth itself as a sign that we restore them to you and your children forever'<sup>i</sup>.<sup>345</sup>



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In his book, *Living in New Country*, Carter discusses how in contact events between two peoples where there is no linguistic or cultural framework in common, the miming of each others' sounds and actions becomes the method of communication.<sup>346</sup> I find Whitlam and Lingiari's miming of an action over a distance of over 3000km and, more importantly, 140 years, to be movingly poetic.

Carter argues that, like a poem, contact events reveal their meaning internally through the creation of verbal and spatial interplays that open up a symbolic space where communication might occur.<sup>347</sup> However, unlike a poem that once written maintains its form, contact events, like the corroborees that were often part of them, are theatrical, or rather improvised rehearsals that exist only once. They are a type of self-conscious play where the rules of the game are not known but where the stakes are high — the outcome could be the difference between life and death.<sup>348</sup> Carter goes so far as to suggest that in order for these events to be

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<sup>i</sup> This act was immortalised in the popular Paul Kelly song, *From little things big things grow*: 'Eight years went by, eight long years of waiting/ Till one day a tall stranger appeared in the land/ And he came with lawyers and he came with great ceremony/ And through Vincent's fingers poured a handful of sand' (Kelly 1991).

truthfully made part of our contemporary consciousness, 'historians should abandon their word-processors and take to the stage'.<sup>349</sup>

During my research for this Masters, I have mostly abandoned the stage for the word-processor, and have enjoyed feeling like a historian. But once the exegesis is completed, I will not return to the stage, rather I'll return to my home — or very near my home. In my desire to 'strive for an art ... that will break through to new and difficult identifications',<sup>350</sup> to '“re-enchant” the world',<sup>351</sup> and to 'experience of both the wonder and the fragility of place ... as indeed “humanized and humanizing” ',<sup>352</sup> I invite you to meet me at the spot on the Merri Creek where I will be staging my performance. We will 'SHARE THE SAME FATE. THE DANGER IS EQUAL FOR BOTH PARTIES'.<sup>353</sup>

Here, we will be living and dying at the same time, engaged in the process of making/witnessing the ephemeral act of theatre. Like a cemetery built to memorialise the dead that inevitably falls into ruin itself, this spot on the creek is continually changing in response to changing water levels; the impact of fallen trees after storms; the effect on vegetation and animals of the seasons; and incursions by dogs ripping up the muddy creek banks, teenagers periodically refreshing their graffiti ...



Finally, I need to establish what became of John Batman's grave. When he died of syphilis in 1839 at the age of thirty-eight his funeral was well attended and included the Aboriginal men that had accompanied him from Sydney.<sup>354</sup> He was buried at the 'Old Cemetery', now the site of the Queen Victoria market in Melbourne's CBD.<sup>355</sup> By 1880 a group of Melbourne intellectuals (including treaty commemoration organiser, Isaac Selby and actor, George Coppin) were decrying the fact that Batman had not been sufficiently recognised and organised a

subscription fund to erect a memorial in his honour above his grave.<sup>356</sup> Its form is that of a classical obelisk, used by Egyptian pharaohs to proclaim victory over their enemies.<sup>357</sup>

As the city expanded, the land the cemetery stood on became needed for other purposes. The first parts of the cemetery to go were the Aboriginal and Jewish sections.<sup>358</sup> In 1922 the Melbourne City Council decided to remove all the remaining bodies to a new northern cemetery, named after Batman's historical rival, John Fawkner. After much controversy, it was decided that Batman's memorial would be relocated to a site on Batman Avenue, about five kilometres from the city centre. Later that same year, what were presumed to be Batman's remains were interred in a special pioneer's section of the Fawkner cemetery and a replica of the memorial now on Batman Avenue was built above them.<sup>359</sup>

In 1992, the Melbourne City Council celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and decided to return the original Batman memorial to its original site, now a corner of the Queen Victoria market's carpark:



. 42

At the same time it recognised the need to correct the original inscription which states that Batman had founded a settlement 'on the site of Melbourne then unoccupied' (strangely ignoring the reason for his treaty). A corrective plaque was

attached that read: 'When the monument was erected in 1881 the colony considered that the Aboriginal people did not occupy land. It is now clear that prior to colonisation of Victoria the land was inhabited and used by the Aboriginal people'. However after four years of consultation, including with the Council's Indigenous Arts Advisory Committee, in 2004 the new plaque was removed and a newer one added that reads: 'The City of Melbourne acknowledges that the historical events and perceptions referred to by this memorial are inaccurate. An apology is made to Indigenous people and to the traditional owners of this land for the wrong beliefs of the past and the personal upset caused'. Since then, vandals have removed the plaque and the current one (with the same wording) was installed in 2012.<sup>360</sup>

In the same Port Phillip newspapers that reported Batman's death in 1839 there appeared articles about the massive destruction that introduced disease was inflicting on the Aboriginal population. Aboriginal communities were so broken that people lay dead and dying around the town. A generation after Batman's arrival the Aboriginal population of Port Phillip had been reduced to about 2000 people.<sup>361</sup>



I started this essay with my visit to the mass grave at my father's father's village in Lithuania. I know that some of my ancestors are buried there, but not only are there no individual grave sites to identify, I don't know who those ancestors are.

Some Victorian Aboriginal burial sites occurred in rock shelters,<sup>362</sup> and I wonder if my performance site on the Merri Creek ever housed a Wurundjeri person's remains. I often think of the many, many bodies interred in the land that Batman 'bought'.

As Deborah Bird Rose draws her book, *Dingo Makes us Human*, to a close, she

writes, 'Rather than many promised lands, each with its own chosen people, the earth is becoming a series of graveyards, each with its own irreplaceable losses'.<sup>363</sup> But she also encourages us all to share and listen to each other's stories as a way to learn how to take responsible care of the earth.<sup>364</sup>

I have been sharing my own stories, the stories of my ancestors, and stories of the place where I live, endeavouring to make connections between bodies that have all eventually returned to the earth and those that will return to the earth. In our connection to the earth we are all inherently connected.

My skin is sticking to my bones, the flesh sucked out. My face still alive, eyes wide open. I'm disintegrating into sand.

I hear language. The man is Aboriginal. Maybe he's calling to someone to come and see what he's found. He wouldn't be sure what I am, certainly human-like, but not for much longer. I'm disappearing, a strong wind and I'd be gone. But today is calm, the horizon gentle. Grey sky, grey sea. Sand pale, like my skin. The Aboriginal man is dark but dusty.

Another man has arrived. They're talking about me. It feels too real to be my imagination. I am lying near large old middens, maybe I shouldn't be so surprised.

They bend down towards me. I think they're touching me but I feel nothing. They notice me following them with my eyes. They come round to my head and say something. I'd like to respond and try to grunt. My mouth opens slightly and they notice, excited. But no sounds come out. I had nearly stopped breathing when they arrived. There is not enough air left in my lungs to make a sound. Their demands are too much. It's time for them to go.

But they don't go. They sit down, one on either side of me. They start to chant. I can only see them with my peripheral vision. It's tiring so I close my eyes. Immediately my world changes. I am carried by the sound. I feel myself becoming stronger, my flesh returning. I'm not sure I want my flesh to return. I had gone a long way to letting go, to releasing into the earth. Now these chanting men are bringing me back.

But my reluctance is limited. My mind is more taken with the sensation of strength returning. Of blood moving again. Of fat and muscle encasing bone. Of connections reforming.

There is movement. I feel that the men are dancing as they chant. I don't open my eyes, but I can hear their voices moving around me, one way and then the other. I feel the vibrations of the earth as they jump. My body is growing sensitive again. There is a distinction between my skin and the sand, where before they were becoming one. As they dance they flick sand on my body and I feel it. My foot falls slightly into an indentation, finding another position of rest. I feel the wind on it.

Their dance is slowing, also the chant. I feel them sitting again, one on either side of me. I feel the warmth of their bodies. And the sun on my eyelids. I'm reluctant to open my eyes, scared of the brightness, scared to accept the life that has been given back to me. My reluctance is frustrating. The frustration is an energy. I move my fingers, slowly opening and closing my hands. There's a pleasure in it.



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. 2	Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania, <a href="http://holocaustatlas.lt/EN/#a_atlas/search//page//item/195/">http://holocaustatlas.lt/EN/#a_atlas/search//page//item/195/</a> , Acc. 1/8/2012.....	20
. 3	Photo: David Joseph.....	21
. 4	Photo: David Joseph.....	21
. 5	Photo: Unknown.....	21
. 6	Photo: David Joseph.....	21
. 7	State Library of Victoria, <a href="http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/node/851">http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/node/851</a> , Acc. 4/5/2012.....	23
. 8	Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register Form, Woiwurrung - Batman Treaty Signing Site, 2012 .....	25
. 9	Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register Form, Woiwurrung - Batman Treaty Signing Site, 2012 .....	26
. 10	National Portrait Gallery, <a href="http://www.portrait.gov.au/site/search.php">http://www.portrait.gov.au/site/search.php</a> , Acc. 3/3/2013.....	26
. 11	Photo: Karen Berger.....	28
. 12	Google Maps, <a href="https://maps.google.com.au/">https://maps.google.com.au/</a> , Acc. 20/5/2013.....	31
. 13	<i>Body/Landscape Journals</i> , p 77, Photo: Margaret Somerville.....	41
. 14	Photo: David Joseph.....	47
. 15	Photo: David Joseph.....	48
. 16	Photo: David Joseph.....	48
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. 18	Photo: Katie Aune, <a href="http://katiegoingglobal.smugmug.com/Travel/RTW-Trip/Vilnius/i-MK8Tw6d/0/M/SAM_5747-M.jpg">http://katiegoingglobal.smugmug.com/Travel/RTW-Trip/Vilnius/i-MK8Tw6d/0/M/SAM_5747-M.jpg</a> , Acc. 2/7/2013.....	55
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. 35	Photo: Karen Berger.....	78
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