Transformations

 # journal # artSpace # conferences #

Issue No. 13   September 2006 — Making Badlands

Editorial

This issue of *Transformations* follows from the *Making Badlands* conference held in December 2005, and jointly hosted by *Transformations* and the *Bundaberg Media Research Group*. The conference included an exhibition space along with the theme of the conference, and an online version of this exhibition is available on the *Transformations Artspace site*.

The conference was based around the concept of the "badlands" arising from Ross Gibson's *Seven Versions of an Australian Badlands* (UQ Press, 2002) which describes the central Queensland region as haunted by a violent colonial past and fraught with troubling incidents that make it an Australian badland. This conference addressed the concept of an Australian badland — what it means to speak of a space as a badland, its relation to history, the imaginary, and to questions of regionality, representation, myth, archival authority, and the formation of narrative and discursive knowledge.

The articles comprising this issue explore these ideas of the badlands in extended contexts and environments, and in various and diverse ways. Ross Gibson's keynote address titled *Places Past Disappearance*, which is transcribed in this issue, offers us a thinking out loud about what he calls "vestige work" which is "the work we need to do with history in order to understand better how to live well in the present and future". He says

> Rummaging in Australia's aftermath cultures, I try to re-dress the disintegration in our story-systems, in our traditional knowledge caches, our landscapes and ecologies. My job is to investigate and recuperate scenes and collections of artifacts that have been torn apart somehow, torn by landgrabbing, let's say, or by accidents, or exploitation that ignores rituals of preservation and restoration.

The next three articles in this issue are loosely grouped because they are all in some way about artistic production that is central to the practices of the places under investigation, a querying of the relation of the place/space and the engagement with it. Phillip Roe in *Ghosts in the Landscape* takes up questions of photography, language, landscape and representation in relation to a particular site - the vast, million-year-old salt lake known as Lake Ballard in the heart of the Goldfields region of Western Australia. The article explores the idea of landscape in this place that is simultaneously the site of a significant art installation. The sculpted figures that now inhabit this landscape haunt not so much the landscape itself, but the very discourses that have previously articulated the means of its representation. In *Our place: in-between the primordial and the latter?*, Ashley Holmes is concerned with the specificity of a place, a beach near his home, which is the influence for and content of a new media artwork which was exhibited during the conference. In both paper and artwork he examines this place, and his own relationship to it, as both artist and inhabitant. He speculates as to its history, and to the use made of the area by its previous inhabitants, siting his speculation always in the complex and often problematic space between research and artistic practice. Saffron Newey, in *Domestic Imaginings*, uses her own artworks to explore the concept of the badlands as an uninhabited, de-peopled exterior. Newey's paintings are photo-

realistic depictions of cropped and close-up domestic space, pure interiority that invokes the outside world only as absence, as mystery. Through the tremulous boundary between inside and outside, she explores the edges of the self and its relation to home and other.

The second grouping of articles coheres in that they take a specific suburb or area to investigate the badlands idea. Sharon Thorne's *Ley Lines* investigates a peripheral space within the city of Melbourne which until the 21st century escaped the jurisdiction of any Melbourne Authority. Unfolding the repressed history of the *Dudley Flats* space from the early days of white settlement, when the Aboriginal population were shunted to this unwanted swampland, the paper examines the processes of change at work on this site over the past two centuries, as it has evolved from the periphery to the front line of the new docklands precinct. As a landscape haunted by displacement, loss and waste, the everyday lives of the women who inhabited this site during the Depression are taken up in her art practice. From the heart of the Capricornia badlands, in *Making Badlands All Over the World: Local Knowledge and Global Power* Steve Butler investigates the use of depleted uranium at the Shoalwater Bay military training area near Rockhampton. The training area's adjacence to significant enrivonmental and heritage sites prompts Butler to ask questions about the capacity of the local community to contest this burgeoning badlands, and the relations of nature and culture that underly such contestations. In *"I wish I was anywhere but here": 'Structure of address' in the badlands*, Constance Ellwood examines the riots that took place in March 2005 in the suburb of Macquarie Fields in the Western Suburbs of Sydney, New South Wales. She examines in particular the print media and talkback radio constructions of the riots and their influence over responses by police and government, ultimately arguing that the discourses of these media and organisations constitute a unidirectional "address" that leaves no room for the voices of the residents of Macquarie Fields.

Wendy Madsen's *Badlands at the Bedside: Fact or Fiction* stands alone as a unique engagement with the badlands concept. It translates the space of the badlands to the nursing bedside, examining the struggle between trained and untrained nurses in late 19th century Queensland, and how this struggle proceeded in accord with an imaginary badlands structured through cultural narrative and fiction.

All of these papers pursue badlands as spaces of multiplicities, greater than, and hence excessive to, the centres found within them - sites of boundaries, margins, peripheries, and frontiers, with contingent and transversal relations to any 'core' centre. All centres are regional, and all regions have their centres. Urban, suburban, inner and outer metropolitan, town and country, outback, bush, are all regions capable of both producing and resisting badlands as cultural imaginaries.

The *Making Badlands Conference* also examined how imaginary spaces are actively produced through technological, aesthetic, conceptual, visual, audio and other sensory engagements with the materiality of regional contexts, and sought to develop ways in which these may be contested through alternative practices of making that may lead to more progressive and empowering visions of regions. To this end, the conference also included an exhibition space where artists and artist practitioners engaged with these various senses of the badlands. The online version of this exhibition is produced here on the Transformations Artspace site.

The Editors
September 2006.

TOP

Transformations

Issue No. 13   September 2006 — Making Badlands

abstracts

Places   Past   Disappearance
By *Ross Gibson*

In this address, I think out loud about the work we need to do with history in order to understand better how to live well in the present and future. I call this process "vestige work". Rummaging in Australia's aftermath cultures, I try to re-dress the disintegration in our story-systems, in our traditional knowledge caches, our landscapes and ecologies. My job is to investigate and recuperate scenes and collections of artifacts that have been torn apart somehow, torn by landgrabbing, let's say, or by accidents, or exploitation that ignores rituals of preservation and restoration. Typically, the scenes and systems I investigate were once a good deal more coherent, but now they are ailing or out of balance. I've come to understand that most of Australia is like this, that the place we inhabit is our best evidence about our unbalanced selves and that this place has so much raggedness in it because it is patterned to the society that has used it so roughly.

Ghosts in the Landscape
By *Phillip Roe*

This paper sets out to explore the relationships between language, landscape, representation, photography and writing. It does so by taking a particular place through which these streams intersect – the vast, million-year-old salt lake known as Lake Ballard in the heart of the Goldfields region of Western Australia. What complicates this landscape and its representation is the fact that this place is also the site of a significant art installation – in 2003, British sculptor Antony Gormely developed his *Inside Australia* installation at Lake Ballard, as part of the 2003 Perth International Arts Festival. This paper invokes the notion of the ghost from Jacques Derrida as a means of exploring the way Gormely's figures haunt, not so much the landscape itself, but the very discourses that have previously articulated the means of its representation.

Our place: in-between the primordial and the latter?
By *Ashley Holmes*

In his study of Central Queensland's 'Horror Stretch' Ross Gibson elucidates the truism that a landscape is established somewhere in-between the physical geography and its cultural overlays. This paper analyses my own approach to places as a post-colonial migrant and artist. As a transient, I often get to know a place on what I perceive to be its own terms. Even as I observe vegetable, animal and human elements, the form of the geology is perceived as features, relative scales, spaces and, distances. The remnant surface litter is conveyed as patterns and textures. During these moments a fundamental sense of place is established. This may be vague or fleeting. It may be protean. If the impression is significant it may lead to a desire to linger, to return and so, an ongoing relationship with a place may ensue. Subsequently arises a desire to seek out cultural knowledge. Then genius loci becomes compound. It is difficult to deny or mitigate Gibson's tragic interpretation of the human contribution to landscape. There is certainly tragic irony in that, at this point in Earth's geological time, it may be easier to imagine a possible future Earth without life than to apprehend the primordial state.

Domestic Imaginings
By *Saffron Newey*

The movement from public to domestic space is discursive as well as physical. In my paintings I explore this transitional zone. I model this idea both in my choice of images and in the way that I work with the ambiguous relationship between

painting and photography.

Frames and borderlines are architecturally present in the structure of a home however this paper considers how these borderlines can dually exist as a metaphor for the psychological states of the public and private self.

The aesthetics of photography and painting are intertwined in my visual work to set up a tension for the viewer. The image is at once, framed and autonomous, yet like a trompe l'oeil portal, open to the projection of the viewer. The notion of a "badlands" in my image making is hauntingly implied by transient borders and undefined perspectives.

Ley Lines
By *Sharon Thorne*

This paper investigates a peripheral space within the city of Melbourne which until the 21st century escaped the jurisdiction of any Melbourne Authority. Although geographically situated at the confluence of the Maribyrnong and Yarra Rivers , and bordered by the main road to the West and the Railroad; neither the Railways, the Harbour Trust, the MMBW, the City Council, nor the Crown Lands Dept. had responsibility for this land.

Unfolding the repressed history of this space from the early days of white settlement, when the Aboriginal population were shunted to this unwanted swampland, the paper examines the processes of change at work on this site over the past two centuries, as it has evolved from the periphery to the front line of the new docklands precinct. From tip site to shantytown during the Depression, to wasteland, and now in the 21st century, to invaluable real estate, the historical and contemporary sense of Dudley Flats alters, as its identity swings from the otherness of destitution to the otherness of elitism.

As a landscape haunted by displacement, loss and waste, the everyday lives of the women who inhabited this site during the Depression are taken up in my art practice. Themes of 'making do' 'getting by' scrounging and scavenging as Aussie traditions that flourished on this site are examined in light of my own creative process.

Making Badlands All Over the World: Local Knowledge and Global Power
By *Steve Butler*

Bob Hawke's recent proposal for turning Australia's "dead heart" into the world's nuclear waste dump is a classic example of badland making and a timely reminder of the relevance of Ross Gibson's *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* (2002). Closer to my home, in Central Queensland, a controversy is raging about globally significant developments in the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area.

Australia (if not the whole world) may well be a badland in the making. The ways in which a powerful institution exploits a place is intimately related to pre-existing ideas (myths and assumptions) about that place. Ross Gibson asks us to seek "something good we can do in response to the bad in our lands" (3). One response begins by asking: is the badness in the land or does it reside elsewhere? If we analyze the discourses and practices of the various agencies and institutions governing the badland we may be able to formulate useful tactics of resistance to their strategies of domination.

"I wish I was anywhere but here": "Structure of address" in the badlands
By *Constance Ellwood*

This paper discusses an active production, as a badlands, of the suburb of Macquarie Fields, in the western region of Sydney. It draws on media representations of the riots which took place there in early 2005, on policing strategies for youth, and on government planning and policy practices. By juxtaposing these representations, strategies and practices with the long history of attempts by residents to seek change, the paper situates these riots as a meaningful act of resistance to a dominant ordering. The paper uses Judith Butler's notion of structure of address to consider the ways in which the riots amount to an address by residents. The failure by governments to take this address seriously means that the terms of a basic moral authority are not met.

Badlands at the Bedside: Fact or Fiction
By *Wendy Madsen*

Professional nurses began to emerge as an identifiable group from the late nineteenth century. Their establishment and eventual domination of nursing was characterised by separation and antagonism as they asserted themselves over untrained nurses. This paper examines the struggle for professional domination as it occurred in Australia during the early twentieth century, and particularly focuses on the accusations of unsafe practice levelled at untrained nurses. This tactic drew on public images of untrained nurses depicted by nineteenth century authors such as Charles Dickens – of gin-swilling nurses who would not wait until the patient had died before pilfering the belongings. Thus, a "badlands" concept was created in the minds of professional nurses, whereby untrained nurses at the bedside in private homes were actively endangering the lives of their patients because of lack of skill and knowledge. However, recent historical research has increasingly challenged such images, and suggests that while many nurses did not have formal training, they were not necessarily unsafe or ineffective in their practice.

TOP

Transformations

Issue No. 13   September 2006 — Making Badlands

Places   Past   Disappearance
By *Ross Gibson*

> In Stoicism everything exists in the present, even the past.
> Bernard Cache

For more than twenty years now, I've been publishing in a variety of media. But it's only recently that I've realized how the projects almost always start with caches of evidence that are in shards or disarray. It's the absences, the negative spaces, that prompt the work. For example, working with a team of collaborators I've spent several years responding to a pictorial archive. In a series of computer-activated artworks known collectively as *Life After Wartime*, viewers are encouraged to figure how to account for a salvaged batch of crime scene photographs that no longer have any official, conclusive documents attached to them. [1] Another example of this "vestige work" is my book *Seven Versions Of An Australian Badland*, which is a literary meditation on a fraught and fragmented tract of failed profiteer scrub in tropical Queensland. [2]

Always, I encounter the following kinds of questions: what's gone missing here? … how to imagine functional coherence here? … what if these dumb portions could get some eloquence?

Now, I don't expect anyone to care much about my arcane contemplations. Except, I see hundreds of other Australian artists and writers working in the same way, examining aftermaths and discontinuities, trying to re-build systematic comprehension in response to fragments. And while I dare not speak for so many others, I've been getting a hunch that it might be useful to try to understand, in public, what it means when one gets so *attached* to these untethered things, what's in this compulsion to know the negative space?

Well, here goes.

Rummaging in Australia's aftermath cultures, I try to re-dress the disintegration in our story-systems, in our traditional knowledge caches, our landscapes and ecologies. My job is to investigate and recuperate scenes and collections of artifacts that have been torn apart somehow, torn by landgrabbing, let's say, or by accidents, or exploitation that ignores rituals of preservation and restoration. Typically, the scenes and systems I investigate were once a good deal more coherent, but now they are ailing or out of balance. I've come to understand that most of Australia is like this, that the place we inhabit is our best evidence about our unbalanced selves and that this place has so much raggedness in it because it is patterned to the society that has used it so roughly.

The situation is not entirely bleak. Even in the aftermath of neglect or abuse, systems usually retain tendencies and traces from their previous cogency. These traces offer chances for re-formatting, even though it's pointless to dream of retrieving some pristine, pre-lapsarian world. Plainly such a world is a simplistic fantasy.

I think the work we have to do is a re-animation process. It's nothing mysterious. Maybe it's best to think of it as a reiterative application of meanings to places over time. Or to borrow Morris Berman's technical phrase, such work is the secular "re-enchantment of the world". [3] It's an attempt to chant some patterned significance back into places that have long been denied custodial care. It's the first step in imagining how a new, relatively cohesive present might evolve from adjustments and activations of vestiges from the past.

Our Australian part of the world is strewn with vestiges of cultural and natural systems. Consider the vulnerable skeins of indigenous dreamings; the remnants

of endemic ecologies; consider also the myriad systems of work and belief that have been refined elsewhere in the world and partially transplanted here. The good news is that in some cases, despite two hundred years of colonial disturbance, we have managed to avoid terminal damage, either by getting out of the way of resurgent nature or by applying design and labour attentively and adaptively. But in many instances our places are teetering with a minimal degree of systematic cohesion, and they will be made sensible only if we act promptly and boldly, so that our aesthetic and civic patterns might help us project our thinking across everything that's missing or ailing. In other words, we need to IMAGINE very boldly.

So here's a proposition, offered promptly if not boldly. Our parlous states need imagination. We need to propose "what if" scenarios that help us account for what has happened in our habitat so that we can then better envisage what might happen. We need to apprehend the past. Otherwise, we won't be able to align ourselves to historical momentum. Without doing this we won't be able to divine the continuous tendencies that are making us as they persist out of the past into the present. (There'll be more about this tendentious term "divination" before too long.) By synchronising ourselves to the inherent, historically configured tendencies that flow through a place in time, we stand a chance of avoiding exhaustion as we try to change the current state of things, as we try to understand how to alter the world and ourselves. To put it too simply perhaps, it's a question of understanding what's at play in our place right now, no matter how latent, and then going to work on it.

To reiterate: our parlous states need imagination. I might define imagination these ways:

> it's an ability to venture in one's mind out past
> a comfortable, known limit;

> it's an ability to discern feasible relationships where they
> are not obvious, to see how portions, clues or details might
> be put into relationships that generate forceful meanings or
> pulses of feeling;

> imagination is a readiness to incorporate the unknown,
> embodied in psychological or aesthetic form, so that we
> might be emboldened to alter, so that we might let
> ourselves
> into otherness and to let it into ourselves.

Imagination is needed when one encounters evidence that's in smithereens. I try to keep this in mind when I'm confronted with the disheveled scenes and collections that are so representative of contemporary Australia, when I'm confronted with so many systems that have vestiges of coherence but are not entire, not conclusive or composed. I try to remember not only that these are systems where imagination is needed, but also that imagination can be strengthened here, that these systems offer great opportunities.

A specific example? *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland.* The book examines a landscape where colonial landgrabbing and monocultural farming have plundered the environment to the extent that it now appears like a defiled and exhausted thing. Over the past three decades I've crossed this broken country many times, with a growing conviction it is a disintegrated scree of evidence that bears witness to the conflicting historical forces that have built it and continue to shape it. In the book, I call this stretch of country "a vast, historical crime scene". In such landscapes – and they're everywhere in Australia – we have to ask ourselves, what can be made of this place now? What can we know about its piecemeal ecology, its choppy geomorphics and scarified townscapes? How can we overhear the pertinent gossip – the attempts at truth and the self-serving lies – that buzz about it? What of the journey-patterns, the shuttling rhythms stitching it together in time, now and in the past? What can we make of the documents that have been generated in response to this country? And what of the absences – when are they meaningful, when are they nothing?

In the Central Queensland hinterland, my historically informed imagination has produced a book in which I try to make manifest some forces that are usually only latent within this somewhat systematic tract of country. In the case of *Life After Wartime*, the imaginative response is a story-engine that proffers restless, plausible patterns of speculation regarding the enigmatic scenes in the archive.

In each case I try to connect something persuasive across the partial array of evidence, to show how even these riddled things can get better integrated and can help us know more fully the forces and flows that make the world they came from.

It's the *restlessness* that's crucial, the way the artwork – be it a book, a database, a building, a park or a garden – prompts the imagination by artful imbalances and implied possibilities for completion or patterning. So, I'm not advocating the pastiches and remnant-kitsch retrievals that characterised so much 1990s postmodernism. Rather, for me the supreme example of the aesthetic of generative incompleteness can be found in Zen temples and gardens, where the visitor experiences an environment that's "charged" with a powerful "urge", a flowing potentiality that's implied rather than shown. Or maybe the urge arises in the visitor; maybe it doesn't reside in the environment. Such ambiguity – verging on ineffability – is an essential part of a wonderfully generative aesthetic. In a Zen environment the visitor often feels an urge to imagine a pattern cohering even though such a pattern is not explicitly present in the artfully "unresolved" space. And the urge often helps one feel inseparable from the environment, attuned to some flowing integrity in it. (There's some Shinto pantheisim in this sensation, no doubt.) [4]

The literary side of Zen is instructive too. What you get from a haiku, for example, is a compulsion to imagine out from the detail, to get an inkling in the poem's intense fragment so that you can envisage a larger world connected to that intensified portion, a larger world of interconnections made instantaneously and intuitively comprehensible by the tiny shock that a good haiku produces. As Thomas Hoover has explained it so well, "the mind is struck as with a hammer, bringing the senses up short and releasing a flood of associations". [5]

Floods, flows, urges, surges, continuities: such words bring us close to what I'm seeking when exercising the historically informed imagination.

I now understand that such work is a kind of divination, which is a secular activity, something technical. For me, divination is a process whereby you help fragments adhere and integrate so that the dis-membered elements of a scene might share some sensible connection, some re-membering. With divination, there is an urge to connect. In water divining, for example, absence bullies the system – a clear channel is missing between the water and the quester. The diviner has to ponder the possible links between the self and the water, thus filling in the missing conduits of a severed circuitry and vaulting over the absences to form cogency where once there was dishevelment. In this way the diviner is a kind of 'ammeter', measuring potentiality or energy, tracking its flows and blockages and engineering ways to marshal the current back to connectivity. It's the way much indigenous traveling proceeds – figuring when and where to move according to a sense of the most amenable flow of connection in the place at the time. And it's very like the energy-sensing described by David Mowaldjarlai when he used to talk of the guiding forces that "swing" through him in the Kimberley country. [6] Also it resembles the responsive wayfinding detailed by Will Kyselka in his study of Polynesian navigation, *An Ocean in Mind*. [7]

I'm sure these are all processes requiring intuition. Intuition is a faculty that can be learned and refined. Sportspeople know this. They devote most of their training to the development of intuition. It's the same for improvising musicians and actors. When intuition ignites, sudden, holistic understanding arises. In modern parlance, it's sometimes called a "systems view". It's a little like trying to feel the sensations of a 'phantom limb': this awareness of something palpably present and convincing where the explicit matter is actually missing.

This term, "phantom", it's uncomfortably close to "fantasy". Which brings me to a cautionary moment! I want to emphasise that when responding to fragments of historical evidence, I am on the side of history. Without claiming to be an historian, I find myself in agreement with a very good one, Greg Dening, when he says that the important historical writing occurs when scholars apply imagination to the evidence. IMAGINATION, not FANTASY, he stresses. What Dening is asserting, I think, is that one needs to retain an allegiance to the evidence. A fiction writer is not obliged to do this, making a different contract with the reader. But to be historically aligned, one must bear witness to traces that have been touched by the world. [8]

This leads to the most important point as far as I'm concerned: the conditions of living and working in the aftermath-culture of Australia are such that a great deal of the vital evidence is either missing or non-textual. And the evidence that we do have is often partial, broken or sometimes obscured by denials. Which means

that conventional historiographical protocols come up short when we try to get the fullest possible comprehension of the past that has whelped our present. In Australia we need to imagine across gaps and quandaries in the evidence; we need to venture out past what is known, what is familiar, what is authorised in disciplines founded elsewhere.

I trust it's clear that I'm not declaring conventional history to be insular or useless. I'm just saying it's only partly useful. Just as imaginative speculation is only partly useful. Together, though, they might be productive, if we found ways to loosen and interlace the borders of historiography and speculation, if we found ways to narrate across everything that's missing in our modes of envisaging and understanding.

In a radio interview about *Seven Versions* a while ago, a journalist asked me: "What is this thing, this odd book? Where does it fit in our categories of culture? It doesn't have the certitude of history. So, isn't it just imaginative? Isn't it just tricky fiction?"

Responding a little absent-mindedly – a little intuitively – I had a sudden insight. "Backfill", I quipped, "basically what I do is historical backfill". Perhaps I could have said "re-enchantment", but I'm glad I didn't. As I tried to haul myself out of the sudden ditch, I realised this term "backfill" was a useful enough idea. I explained how you can uncover fragments that you know have been discarded by the world. Real evidence. You find it lying around in jagged form, as we all do every day, and you ask yourself, "how can I account for this material?" Quite literally, "what are some of the accounts I might offer so that we can make provocative sense with these fragments?"

So, "backfill" happens when you offer an historically informed set of 'maybe' propositions:

> Maybe this story accounts well for these bits of evidence that we've uncovered?

> How does this sound as a way to account for the somewhat systematic yet somewhat broken shape of the evidence?

> Maybe this version of experience can help us understand the mysterious form of our particular midden heap?

Backfill is what we have to enact when conventional historical techniques fail us, as happens often in this place that's been formed by so much purposeful disappearance and dispersal. Backfill is work performed after one has done some divination, after one has attempted to intuit feasible and defensible but admittedly inconclusive accounts connecting the fragments. Backfill is necessarily an imaginative and speculative procedure. But it needs to be authoritative as well as imaginative. And I think it's the only response, opposed to silence or denial, that helps us keep on investigating when we encounter the definitive quality of post-1788 Australian history, when we encounter the fact that despite the settlers' overwhelming attention to some types of bureaucratic minutiae, many of the truly important events of our past – particularly the cross-cultural encounters that took place on frontiers, away from the administrative centres, in situations where writing would not net what occurred – many of these crucial events have not made it into the textual archives.

Even so, traces get registered otherwise – in bodies, in family tale-telling, in songs, in landscapes, in sketches – traces that don't work so well for conventional history. For me the supreme example is the aesthetic, transformative power of Archie Roach's ballad, "Took the Children Away". To hear that song is to sense a compelling proposition about the way the past has produced the present. You sense all this in the musical patterns of the song, in the lyrics and the glissando of the voice from its palpable pain through to the exultation of survival. You sense all this and feel yourself altered by it. The song is not an anthem affirming an established creed; rather it is a three-minute transit through comprehension, a transit through structured feelings that produce a compelling effect of truth, of validity. Therefore, in situations where the textual records do not net the events, other types of representation need to arrive after the event, to accrete around the non-textual clues.

I'm convinced we can perform these other types of representation productively and responsibly, conjuring "maybe" propositions that are not history but are historically informed and might be sometimes more important than history

because of the way they make manifest an urge to account for the disconnected fragments. Such historically informed speculations are vital because they vault over silence, denial and absence. And they change hearts and minds. These speculations draw on our capability to imagine otherness, to think past the endorsed limits, to undergo alteration. And this is crucial because if we continue to close our imaginations to the aberrations and insufficiencies in our historical records, we run the risk of slipping into an insular melancholy, fearful of the power of the interpretations we refuse to consider. It's likely we won't dwell in the joy till we get real about the darkness. For the joy will always be shadowed, and the background of gloom and denial will get heavier and more worrying because we'll sense it persisting and amplifying outside of our ability to turn and face it.

But I digress a little and sermonise a bit much. I was discussing "backfill". Let me conclude with a summation.

When performing historical backfill, one needs to assay every testimony, every mark and song and clue available so that you can propose something compelling, something that is historically advised, persuasive and authoritative but admittedly speculative. Instead of being *conclusively* convincing, you have to cajole people into consulting their own faculties of judgement so they might match your proffered model of possibility against their received beliefs. You have to encourage them to wonder, "what do I know?", rather than to demand, "confirm what I know". You need to conjure a worldview that helps readers judge – yes, no or maybe – whether your proposition feels plausible, whether it helps them confront something true but previously occulted in their world. If you do this well, the reader is no longer a recipient of your supposed truths. Instead the reader becomes a forensic subject, an investigator and formulator of contentious systems of meaning. When an investigation is open like this, as opposed to foregone in its conclusions, then the investigator is an imaginer, someone who declines to accept common sense automatically.

Finally, to accept inconclusiveness is different from deciding that nothing compelling can be offered. The imaginative investigator keeps on speculating and testing, speculating and testing, always proposing possible worlds that are tethered to the actual world, the world of evidence. This can happen restlessly, skeptically, but with a venturesome spirit, not with desperation. The imaginative investigator works with evidence, vaults over absence and refuses silence. Such a quest, such imagination is our most urgent political task right now.

Ross Gibson makes books, essays and films. He also produces multimedia environments and IT systems for museums and public spaces. His published works include the books *South of the West* and *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* and the museum exhibition *Remembrance + the Moving Image*. He is Professor of New Media & Digital Culture at the University of Technology, Sydney.

Endnotes

[1] See projects by Ross Gibson and Kate Richards et al, listed at
<http://www.lifeafterwartime.com>.
[return]

[2] See *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*. Brisbane: UQP, 2002.
[return]

[3] Morris Berman, *The Re-enchantment of the World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.
[return]

[4] See for example, Norman Carver. *Form and Space of Japanese Architecture*. Tokyo: Shokokusha, 1955. Carver explains that in Zen architecture, "all

relationships are abbreviated and subtle, encouraging the exercise of the imagination in grasping the whole". p. 156.

See also Noel Burch. *To the Distant Observer: form and meaning in the Japanese cinema*. London: Scolar Press, 1979.
[return]

[5] Thomas Hoover. *Zen Culture*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978. p. 205.
[return]

[6] See Jutta Malnic and David Mowaljarlai. *Yorro Yorro: everything standing up alive*. Broome: Magabala Books, 1993.
[return]

[7] See Will Kyeselka. *An Ocean in Mind*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987.
[return]

[8] See the transcript of Greg Dening's speech to the National Library of Australia:
<http://www.nla.gov.au/events/history/papers/Greg_Dening.inc> .
[return]

TOP

Issue No. 13   September 2006 — Making Badlands

Ghosts in the Landscape
By *Phillip Roe*

Introduction

This paper emerges from a photographic trip to the Goldfields region of Western Australia in September 2005. The genesis of this work, however, lies in a longstanding interest in relationships between language, landscape, representation, photography and writing, and seeks particular sites in which to elaborate these interests.

This work in effect details the thinking and approach to the development of a new media artwork concerned with working these relationships – of language, landscape, photography etc. – within the context of a particular place. The objective for this artwork is to produce a sense of this particular landscape and this place in ways that take account of the discourses and technologies of construction and production – to develop a sense of this landscape which in some way exceeds these determining discourses, and to explore ways of expressing these within a new media form and the possibilities that such a form may offer.

The particular tract of land that is my primary interest here in terms of a sense of place and in its visual construction as a landscape is the vast, million-year-old salt lake known as Lake Ballard in the heart of the Goldfields region of Western Australia. Its more than 70 square kilometres are about 100 kilometres north of Kalgoorlie, and 50 kilometres from the nearest town, Menzies. There is a certain eeriness about this place, which renders it particularly suited to this project.

In this work I want to bring out a sense of the haunted nature of this landscape. More than this, I want to approach the haunted nature of landscape in general in Australia, and why this notion of haunting is appropriate to landscape as a figure which is central to its construction. At the same moment that (a) landscape is produced by the discourses which determine it – even before it is seen – there also exists this particular place which is beyond these determinations. The landscape is produced in some mediated space between these positions, and haunted by both – it is neither and both of these. The figure of the ghost is already in the landscape.

Jacques Derrida's notion of the ghost and spectrality provides us with a way of thinking about this sense of haunting. For Derrida, the "ghost" inhabits or haunts all concepts and, especially, this ghost maintains itself with its own ghost. Derrida's *Specters of Marx* is all about living *with* ghosts; it begins and ends with this exhortation to live with ghosts. For Derrida, the spectral is the figure of what is there by not being there, and the ghost in general consists in "autonomizing a representation and in forgetting its genesis as well as its real grounding" (*Specters* 171). I find this idea quite powerful in relation to the act of producing landscape, of what one already brings to its possibility in the sense in which Derrida says "everyone reads, acts, writes with his or her ghosts, even when one goes after the ghosts of the other" (Derrida *Specters* 139).

Lake Ballard

Lake Ballard has many faces, changes through the seasons, and depending on whether there has been rain in this parched environment. Following the rains, the salt lake can be covered with a thin film of water, a reflective glassy surface which radically transforms the images extracted from it. As the lake dries out, the salt whitens, forming a dried salt crust. In its passage from one to the other, large sections of its surface become a soft red mud in various states of hardness from place to place.

The limited selection of images provided here gesture towards a sense of this particular place. This sense is achieved almost through simple aggregation of image upon image of partial representations, each one with something else to say as though they could speak, but speak only of something specific to each and unable to encompass the lake's diversity. In many ways the Lake Ballard area is an alien landscape, its surface appears lifeless, but it is also a place in which life takes place, and death, and which also returns its forms to the earth.

I can write and speak of its simultaneous beauty and harshness, and emphasize the ambiguity of the salt lake – "salt of the earth", salt as a preserver and salt as corrosive – and all that can be extracted from such oppositions; like the pharmakon, it appears as both poison and cure. But such oppositions already inhabit discourses around land, landscape and identity in the Australian context, and would seem to be little else than an apparatus of capture that I have brought with me and which I throw around the object and assimilate back to myself. There are, of course, some such implements which already inhabit this landscape.

This is landscape in which the figure of the ghost circulates. In this landscape, I want to bring out the sense of the ghost as a means of orienting my relations and the possibility or impossibility of contact with this land.

Landscape

The problem begins with the question of landscape itself.

Sarah Hill, in "Landscape, Writing and Photography", an article attempting to come to terms with the "complicated interrelationships between writing, photography and landscape", notes that the term landscape itself is ambiguous and slippery – and whose meaning:

> "...slides between the actual and the virtual, the real and the represented. It means both the physical fact of inland scenery, and the representations of that scenery. Even this distinction between reality and representation comes into question in relation to landscape." (Hill)

She goes on to argue that representations "of landscape in visual or verbal forms, then, are in fact representations of something that is already a representation." This is because (and she quotes WJT Mitchell to this effect):

> ". . . landscape is itself a physical and multisensory medium.
> . . in which cultural meanings and values are encoded,
> whether they are *put* there by the physical transformation of
> a place in landscape gardening and architecture, or *found* in
> a place formed, as we say, by nature. . . . Landscape is
> already artifice in the moment of its beholding, long before
> it becomes the subject of pictorial representation." (Mitchell
> *Landscape and Power* 14)

Between the reality and the representation then, something is put into motion, into circulation, something that becomes "landscape". Between reality and representation; landscape is produced within that impossible gap that prescribes a non-contact – landscape as an image which splits off from this (im)possibility of contact – an artefact of the impossible. Between materiality and discursivity then, something flees the scene – without us and despite us – and becomes an autonomous spectral form. This is the sense of the spectral from Derrida in which his general specification of the ghost functions – as consisting in "autonomizing a representation and in forgetting its genesis as well as its real grounding".

Ghosting

> Landscape as a cultural medium . . . has a double role with
> respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural
> and social construction, representing an artificial world as if
> it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that

> representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site. Thus, landscape (whether urban or rural, artificial or natural) always greets us as space, as environment, as that within which "we" (figured as "the figures" in the landscape) find - or lose - ourselves. (Mitchell 1994)

Hill further argues, as others have, that precisely because the term landscape requires a viewer to be present in order for the landscape to exist, there is always already a figure in the landscape, and that this fact is generally obscured. This masking of "its status as a construction, inviting us to interpret it as a natural given" poses the central absence of landscape – the figure that is there by not being there – and it is this play of presence and absence that articulates landscape. The condition of this figure is precisely that it is there by not being there – the figure is spectral, we are already the ghost in the landscape.

When I go to photograph a landscape I am immediately confronted with the impossible disjunction in the relations between the land itself and the mediating technologies that I confront it (and myself) with – the photographic apparatus and its history and practice of representation, myself as figured within a range of discourses, and so on. And then to impose on this land the further burden of the idea of landscape, of its history of and as representation and its destiny as representation – the suffix "-scape" already determining that it is about a *particular* way of viewing. Landscape precedes representation whilst at the same time representation is its precondition.

This confrontation appears to me initially as impossible, it confounds my senses and I become lost and disoriented – I don't know my place in these shifting relations. The moment I look through the viewfinder at my "target" it has become something else. I do a mad dance which consists primarily of raising and lowering the camera to my eye, or holding the camera steady as I alternately look through the viewfinder and around the camera from various angles. My gaze alternates between the "land" and the "-scape" – how are these things so different?

Amidst the proliferation of ghosts I bring to bear through this whole set of mediating discourses and technologies including myself, all made apparent just by looking through the viewfinder – the dis-ease I experience in these initial moments is the apparent impossibility of *making contact* with something in this land which precedes, and exceeds, all of the cultural determinations of what it will be, of what it will become under the imperatives of my whole suite of apparatuses of capture.

Of course, I know it can't be otherwise, there is no pure and unmediated presence "out there" which is knowable and articulable within the modes of representation available to me – indeed it is precisely this question of representation which provokes the problem. In any case, where is this landscape, where does it take place?

Lyotard, in "Scapeland", takes this as his starting point:

> There would appear to be a landscape whenever the mind is transported from one sensible matter to another, but retains the sensorial organisation appropriate to the first, or at least a memory of it. The earth seen from the moon for a terrestrial. The countryside for the townsman, the city for the farmer. Estrangement would appear to be a pre condition for landscape. (212)

He goes on to correct this formulation, and to show that it is not estrangement which procures landscape but in fact the other way around – landscape procures estrangement. And this estrangement is not on the basis of transferring a sensorial organisation into another sensorium. Rather, this estrangement, he says, "is absolute; it is the implosion of forms themselves, and forms are mind" (217).

For Lyotard, a landscape is an erasure of a support – "an absence which stands as the sign of a horrifying presence in which the mind fails and misses its aim" (217). It is clear he says, that landscapes "do not come together to make up a history and a geography. They do not make up anything; they scarcely come

together at all" (218). He says: "When and where they happen is not signalled. They are half seen, half touched, and they blind and anaesthetise" (217).

This is the scene into which I project myself. Nonetheless, I proceed with this photographic project, trying to work with this strangeness the landscape procures for me and my first questions become how can I photograph this strangeness, this excess, without already determining and framing it? To photograph "this strangeness" in its own terms is impossible. But also, that is what I must attempt to do – not simply to return a pre-given image to its cultural form – for this would already prescribe a non-contact.

I proceed, then, to photograph according to a range of strategies, somewhere to begin. I think of time, space, textures, sequences of images, and so on – all framed within a vague notion I have which I think of as trying to recover the event in the thing. That is, in the representational reduction to the snapshot, the duration of the land as an event is lost – only to be surmised later as some kind of ghost effect that we reinsert or "re-place" in the image text. My attempt then is to pursue the eventness of the land rather than to represent the "thing" which is the land – an ultimately impossible but necessary task.

Language and Landscape

Complicating these issues are the relations of visual and verbal forms of representation. Photography, says Hill, is usually seen as "an art of surface and space, writing one of depth and time", but notes that this "does not negate the spatial elements of writing nor the narrative elements of photography". This difference between image and narrative, between showing and telling, is what Lyotard calls a genre difference. In particular this concerns the relations of time. For Lyotard, narrative activity takes a hold on time, it "makes time pass, even fly, but it also holds it back, turns it back, makes it curl into spirals, makes it escape itself and catch up with itself" (216). Whereas landscape, he says, simply seizes time. It extracts an estranged instant, but both these forms of representation struggle with their status as representation and the problem of contact with the materiality of the land.

In that moment, lost within the complex web of relations that form around me as I go to photograph – the relations to landscape, the land, the mediating presence of the camera – I cannot say precisely what it is that I am photographing – not even my language is adequate to the task. Landscape has figured large in the history and sense of identity in Australia, and it is figured as a struggle to develop or transform a relationship with the land. This struggle remains, and a residual anxiety still seems to inhabit the question of the relationships to land, landscape and identity.

Even from the first days of the colonies, the disjunction between an alien language and its capacity to know and describe, speak with, this land was problematic. There are many examples which point precisely to this from colonial beginnings onwards. In Ross Gibson's *Camera Natura*, for example, the painter-convict Thomas Watling struggles with his words and the landscape as he writes in his journal. He says: "But my language was fashioned elsewhere, and I have never seen such things before" (Gibson *Camera Natura*).

Language and discourse have a history within a land. European languages evolved within a reciprocal and relatively stable relationship with a particular land with which they have been intimately connected for many centuries. In this relationship the forms of language come to trace the contours of the land, words form themselves around specific features of the land, and the land forms insinuate themselves into the language. The visual becomes assimilated within a reciprocal relationship to a language and to ways of speaking, where the question is not simply one of the use of a translucent and neutral language to describe a landscape but rather one that raises questions of the ways in which language structures the ways of seeing, the subject position of the seeing, and hence of what it is possible to see.

It is not only the forms of the land that enter language in this way. An excellent example is that of colour and how it enters this complex world of relations between landscape and language, and the intermediary function of the visual. Colours insinuate themselves around the tongue, European green is crisp and clear with a long legitimated grammar that defines and articulates borders in the construction and consequent perception of different shades of green. More than one writer in English has been troubled by the disjunction between the available and defined colours in the English language and the perception of the non-matching colours of the Australian landscape. The use of "olive green" or that other often-used descriptor of Australian green, a "dark dirty green", for example

are attempts to find suitable linguistic descriptors for Australian colours. "Olive" arises as an approximation – it is a European colour, there were no olives in Australia prior to the invasion. The landscape is assimilated towards available subject positions of the language, mediated by a spectral visual and linguistic relation to another, European, landscape, and "olive green" comes to be smeared across the Australian landscape. For example, the Rev Wollaston, in the 1840s, wrote:

> … no tree to my taste, can be beautiful that is not deciduous. What can a painter do with one cold olive green? There is a dry harshness about the perennial leaf, that does not saviour of humanity in my eyes. There is no flesh and blood in it: it is not of us, and is nothing to us.

> … with dingy looking forest in the background. All the trees, although evergreens, want freshness: their foliage is of the most sombre uniform hue imaginable …an impervious mass everywhere presents itself of one uniform colour, a dark dirty green, over which on a hot day, the hazy, African-looking atmosphere hangs like a pestilence. (Wollaston, also quoted in Roe 25-26)

The issue of colour remains problematic, despite photography and its apparent precise and neutral rendering of colour within its technological apparatus. Film stock, however, varies widely in terms of how it renders colours, between brands for example. But film stock is also graded so that one might choose, for example, between what is termed "natural colour" (whatever that might be and however it might be determined as such) and "high colour" (as it implies, with more richly saturated colours). One could also mention digital cameras and the possibilities of adjusting colour, brightness, contrast and so on within digital manipulation software. There is no direct correspondence, no legitimated language or grammar of colour, between a landscape whose colours change variously and significantly under different conditions of light and the means within our technological apparatuses of rendering colour.

Ghosts (Figures) in/of the Landscape

What complicates this place, Lake Ballard – of its existence as landscape and of its particularity as a place – is that this place is also the site of a significant art installation. In 2003, British sculptor Antony Gormely developed his *Inside Australia* installation at Lake Ballard, as part of the 2003 Perth International Arts Festival. He made sculptures of real peoples' bodies at one-third of their original volume, but at the same height. Gormley interested about 130 local people (from around the town of Menzies) in volunteering to have their naked bodies scanned. Polystyrene patterns were made from the scans, and then 51 cast metal sculptures were made using an alloy of elements found in the area (*Age*).

The concept of his "insider" sculptures, Gormley says, is to release "the attitude" of a body, the shape that life has inscribed upon it and make it stand "more naked than a naked body" (*Age*). And in this same sense, the figures draw attention to the landscape, in a sense making it more naked, stripping it bare, barer than I would have thought possible. The landscape has to answer to

something else, something that undermines the apparent completeness of the scene.

But this stripping bare, I suggest, is on the basis that these figures haunt this landscape – refusing the possibility of its representation functioning autonomously, refusing its capacity to forget its genesis and grounding – in short, questioning the landscape's representational status precisely by drawing attention to it – they are *of* the landscape, and as such have the authority to question it. It is this sense of the contact these figures have with the landscape that I want to approach here.

For Gormely, the installation is "an experiment about who can make art, how it can be made, who can be represented by it and where it can be seen. … And maybe as an extension of that, how it can be experienced, because in many ways, the art here is not the subject. The subject is the place and the viewer's own experience of this place, through the agency of the work" (ABC).

The figures were then arranged over 10 square kilometres of Lake Ballard (*Age*). This spacing has the sense of a cartographic project, providing the landscape with a grammar that spatialises. It brings visitors to the site *into* the land as their tracks mark out an extended grid from figure to figure. This movement through the land is an engagement that narrativises (spatialises and temporalises) it through making *contact* with the land.

This, then, is the question – how to make contact with the land when the conventions of landscape militate against such contact. What it seems to take, as we have found with these figures which haunt this landscape, is that something must disrupt the comfortable formation of the "-scape" which alienates us from this contact. These figures do not haunt the land, they are of the land – but they do disrupt our formation of landscape as we extract the scape from the land. The figures haunt the landscape – the always already absence/presence of the "figure in the landscape" as intrinsic to the idea of landscape is here brought into question, as a caution perhaps, by the figure that rises from the land and will always haunt its image.

Between the land and the landscape then, the way is narrow – an impossible gap which haunts the production of every landscape. If we want to make contact with the land, I suggest, we would want to pay attention to this gap and the ways in which it haunts our productions.

Phil Roe researches in new media, and is particularly interested in the textual relations of new media. He teaches at Central Queensland University, Bundaberg campus.
p.roe@cqu.edu.au

Works Cited

Gibson, Ross. *Camera Natura*. Ronin Films, 1984. VHS

Hill, Sarah. *Deep South* v.2 n.1 (Autumn, 1996)
<http://www.otago.ac.nz/DeepSouth/vol2no1/sally.inc>

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "Scapeland" *The Lyotard Reader*. Ed. Andrew Benjamin. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 212-219.

Mitchell, W. J. T. 1987. "Going Too Far with the Sister Arts". *Space, Time, Image, Sign: Essays on Literature and the Visual Arts*. Ed. J.W.A. Heffernan. New York,

Peter Lang. 1-10.

Mitchell, W. J. T. 1994. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.

Roe, Phil. "Sybyllascape: Language and Landscape - Intervening in the Historical Space of Literary Narrative". *SPAN*, Issue 32, April 1991, Post Colonial Texts. pp. 24-31.

Wollaston, Rev. J.R. *The Picton Journal 1841-1844*. Unpublished manuscript.

The Age. "Works with "full-body" Memory". November 9, 2005. <http://www.theage.com.au/news/arts/works-with-fullbody-memory/2005/11/08/1131407628598.inc>

ABC. "Inside Australia - Antony Gormley's Desert Statues". Tuesday, 22 February 2005. <http://www.abc.net.au/goldfields/stories/s806941.htm>

TOP

Transformations

 # journal # artSpace # conferences #

Issue No. 13   September 2006 — Making Badlands

Our place: in-between the primordial and the latter?
By *Ashley Holmes*

Artistic research and subjectivity

This paper presents excerpts of documentation and theoretical reflection which account for my coming-to-terms with a specific place that became the objective of my artistic engagement for a period of approximately six months during 2005. The artwork production is itself somewhat schizophrenically situated as a hybrid of experimental creative-production and scholarship (it was Donald Schön who said that reflection-in-action is susceptible to a kind of rigour that is both like and unlike the rigour of scholarly work and controlled experimentation). From the outset it was intended that such an account as this should be presented in a research forum like the one in which we are currently situated. Indeed the intention to address the theme of the "Making Badlands" conference has influenced the predisposition of the artist and aspects of the content of the resulting artifact. The paper incorporates references to texts arising from archaeological, geological, sociological and cinematographic contexts into what is essentially a phenomenological account.

That such self-directed and self-referential practice may be considered research has in the past been a contentious principle that now has been sufficiently addressed so as to be less so (Schön, Scrivener, Holmes). In particular, Scrivener says that "a creative-production project may comprise some problem solving and may involve cultural theory, cultural history and scientific research inter alia." However, he stresses that it is inappropriate to obfuscate, in other words, to claim that one is the same as the other. Various kinds of knowledge may arise out of the process of making and exhibiting art. Scrivener points out that in creative-production projects these are by-products rather than the primary objective. Certainly, it is my opinion that Pickering's observations of experimental scientific practice as "dialectic of resistance and accommodation" apply to experimental practice outside of the field of science, where the grammars and rigors of reflective practice as described by Schön are evident (Pickering 21). In respect to the conditions of the conception, production and exhibition at the *Making Badlands* conference of the artifact entitled *In-between the Primordial and the Latter* I believe that these conditions apply. This paper further serves to situate this interactive multimedia artwork in that context.

Before proceeding to introduce the site that became the object of my intention in relation to this artwork I proffer an unashamedly appropriated definition of subjectivity that psychoanalyst/philosopher Felix Guattari proposed as commensurate with what he called the "ethico-aesthetic paradigm".

> The ensemble of conditions which render possible the
> emergence of individual and/or collective instances as self-
> referential existential Territories, adjacent, or in a
> delimiting relation, to an alterity that is itself subjective (9).

Guattari's definition extends the subjective from the necessarily individual into shared realms that may encompass the notion of world picture(s) that Heidegger described or as Elizabeth Eddy has suggested in this forum—"imaginary conflicting places". Guattari's definition also questions the idea of "a singular nature", substituting instead "multiple cultures". It does so without denying a point of view from which individual intentionality and responsibility and care for oneself may arise—and, by extension, collective responsibility and care. It does so without denying points of view from which collective responsibility and care arises—as for example, in traditional Aboriginal cultures where individuality is distinguished from Western understanding particularly in that a collective identity is pre-eminent. Guattari appends his definition and the heterogeneity is made explicit:

> The conditions of production sketched out in this redefinition thus together imply: human inter-subjective instances manifested by language; suggestive and identificatory examples from ethnology; institutional interactions of different natures; machinic apparatuses (for example, those involved in computer technology); incorporeal Universes of reference such as those relative to the plastic arts. This non-human pre-personal part of subjectivity is crucial since it is from this that heterogenesis can develop (9).

The extended definition is useful here because it offers capacity to accommodate alternative of points of view and to advance understanding of the artifact as an instrument of political intent and purpose whilst reflecting also on the implications of its technological basis.

Guattari proposes that his definition decenters "the question of subject into the question of subjectivity" (9). According him this shift calls into question the privilege of linguistic structuralism. Further I believe if one accepts this definition then the way is opened for a new emphasis on the corporeal with regard to the analysis of computer mediation. Embodied actions may render less ambiguity in respect to intentionality than the modes of semiotic analysis which prejudice in favour of visuality and/or textuality.

The Place

The site of focus is the northern end of a rocky and sandy 500 meter long discrete bay known locally as Turners Beach. It is situated at Slade Point about fifteen kilometers to the north east of Mackay. Slade Point is one of Mackay's oldest seaside settlements. Prior to its very recent transformation into a "respectable" suburb it was an area annexed from the main town and has long been associated in the minds of some longer settled European Mackay residents with squalor, high crime rate (Mallet) and low land value. It was where the "blacks" lived—the Aboriginals, the Torres Strait Islanders and the South Sea Islanders. More recently, the "Interstaters" the "Seachangers" and the bargain-hunters have moved to take advantage of the idyllic scenic aspects and the sea breezes. Land prices have soared to levels comparable with larger cities all around Australia's coastline. Mackay is a region of prosperity where it is easy for the trade qualified and the unqualified alike to find high-paying work especially in the mining hinterlands, and so these days there is little evidence of a disadvantaged underclass to be found anywhere around the area. Yet, in my experience, for many of the longer settled Mackay city residents the stigma associated with Slade point remains.

My family and I have rented a renovated beach shack at Slade Point for some eighteen months now. Soon after moving in, being an explorer by nature, I discovered for myself some tiny secluded coves in parts of the headland that are difficult to access. Reaching them involved treacherous climbs or low-tide-only clambering over slippery boulders. These places immediately endeared themselves to my sensibility and provided solitary, contemplative experiences. My exertion to reach the coves and the immense audiovisual impact and rhythm of the sea interacting with the rocks in close proximity combined to heighten my awareness. There has previously been analysis of artists' representation of nature in terms of the sublime in this forum (McLean 2-4). I acknowledge the "terrifying pleasure" that McLean refers to in that paper as an aspect of my response to the location. But this leads only partway to where I want to go with the current focus of this reflective analysis. The importance of the corporeal response to a place, rather than explaining subjectivity in predominantly visual terms should not be overlooked. A phenomenological explanation may be more appropriate.

In an archeological study of Neolithic rock-art in Northern Sweden and Scandinavia Joakim Goldhahn claims "that one's bodily experiences of a place are vital for the interpretation of the prehistoric 'mindscape' of that landscape" (41). He argues that the sites of coastal rock-art in those regions are significant because of the loud and furious sound atmosphere in the proximity and that the phenomenological experience of this contributes to the meaning conveyed in the images at those locations.

The most inaccessible coves of Slade Point are discrete and remote from the suburban outreach. No beach house overlooks them directly and no skipper would ever venture to moor in those tiny treacherous bays. Unless one takes the

trouble to climb and scramble one would not know of their existence because they are not to be seen from the craggy vantage points above them. There are three of them along the point beneath the cliffs before the coast opens to the north into the broad estuary of McCreadys Creek. They are like secret hideaways. In this sense they are wilderness-like, with little technological encroachment except for the flotsam and jetsam. Beyond the high-tide-mark jumble of foam, plastic and driftwood there is barely enough foreshore for a stand or two of pandanus before the escarpment steeply rises. There is no sand on these narrow beaches, not one of which is more than 50 meters wide. They are piled with rumbled pebbles and smooth egg-shaped rocks that *en masse* look salty gray in harsh sunlight. On closer inspection the rounded rubble on each shore is quite distinctive. When wet the stones look colourful and have a flecked texture. They are difficult to walk on because the beach slopes steeply and the stones slide and roll from under one making crunching grinding and tinkling sounds as one transfers weight from foot to foot. Ambulation is reduced to slipping, staggering, lurching movements and one tires quickly in the heat of the day.

To the south of those isolated coves beyond a particularly rugged and impassable headland lies a broader, longer stretch of beach with coarse golden coloured sand which terminates abruptly in a rocky bed running parallel to the shore in line with the low tide mark. At its southern end is another headland with an organ pipe rock feature beyond which sweeps Lamberts Beach and a stretch of sand that continues to the Mackay Harbour some ten kilometers away. This is Turners Beach.

Turners Beach at Slade Point in the mid-ground with the hidden coves beyond

It had occurred to me that each of the coves has a characteristic predominance of particular coloured stones, though this observation should not be relied upon. Indeed on Turners Beach, which is much easier to access and so has come to be visited frequently, it seemed that the predominance of certain colours would vary from day to day. Certainly the stones distributed in the coves and at the northern end of Turners Beach are unique in character and consistency compared to those found along the shores of McCreadys creek estuary only just around the point. There are hardly any stones at all to be found on the sandy shores that reach to the south of Turners Beach to Mackay Harbour.

A relationship between habit and habitat

When exploring an environment afresh the form of the geology mediates its particular features, relative scales, spaces and distances. The remnant surface litter of eons—the soil, the dust, the rocks—is conveyed as patterns and textures. I observe, collect, watch and often wonder as I wander. During these moments a fundamental sense of place is established. This may be vague or fleeting. It may be protean. If the impression is significant it may lead to desire to linger, to return and so, an ongoing relationship with a place may ensue.

Walking up to the top of the two prominent headlands and along Taylors beach between them became part of my daily exercise routine. The first slope is the heart-starter, rewarded by an ocean vista replete with tropical islands. This vantage is sustained along the ridge where at first I used to feel like a trespasser crossing in front of the unfenced yards of houses. The uneven track that descends past the concrete water tower is not well worn and I very rarely have to share this section of my habitual route. The beach stretch is recuperation before the second climb and the return home along the road where I have the company of individual joggers and pairs of walkers mostly accompanied by dogs.

It puzzled me why I hardly ever saw a person around those houses so close to the rugged part of the route, where the breeze was always blowing and the outlook uplifting. Maybe there was nobody home? Maybe when you own a slice of place you begin to take the place for granted?

In a paper presenting quantitative research purporting to measure the defining characteristics of attachment to a place, Steadman hypothesises that "the best model of sense of place will be that which suggests that attributes of the environment are associated with characteristic experiences. Symbolic meanings are produced from these experiences, and these meanings in turn underpin place attachment and satisfaction" (675). Steadman's summary of the literature is comprehensive and coherent. My difficulty with his research is that ownership is one of the factors that define the sample from which he produces data relating to both attachment and satisfaction. Thus his research is preconditioned by the ownership factor and whilst it may have relevance to property developers it does little to inform the theoretical issue as he defines it.

At Turners Beach my sense of place is derived from habitual engagement and observation, from a ritualistic physical interaction with the geographical features and the daily and seasonally variant atmospheric qualities, and from fleeting interaction with encountered life-forms (human, fauna, flora). Land ownership is a virtual instrument that fundamentally alters an actual balance between all of these components, involving rights that are defined in contractual terms and which bear no relationship to the real interdependencies. I should point out that I have no ideological problem with land ownership. I have owned land in the past—beachfront property too—but presently do not. Perhaps having no current such obligation in relation to a place frees one to experience territorial alternatives?

Can it be out of habit then that place becomes habitat? Whilst walking the pebble-strewn sands of Turners Beach each morning it became my ritual to pick up a stone that caught my eye and handle it, squeezing and rolling it between my fingers and the palm of my hand, tossing it in the air and catching it occasionally, toying with it in this way and that all the way home. I apprehended smoothness, roundness, granularity and mass in an absent-minded sense that is the specialty of hands. Before long I had begun a small collection of stones in the front garden, each specimen dropped in an angular vertex formed where a pathway of pinkish concrete pavers turned toward wooden steps leading to the front door. It had been a dry and bare patch of dirt where no plants grew and had always seemed to me to need some visual softening. The gradually increasing rock collection achieved this quite satisfactorily to my mind.

At some time I became cognisant of my discernment and particularity in choosing pebbles that better matched the colour of the pathway at home. It had become a kind of game to test my colour memory and check its accuracy by direct visual comparison on my return. Variation was acceptable within a vaguely imagined tolerance. I was secretive about this habit and would check that there was no witness to the depositing of a stone. The pursuit made sense to me but I didn't expect anyone else to appreciate its rhyme or reason. After the passing of weeks that particular corner of the path had been filled to satisfaction. My engagement with the game had waxed and waned. However my fascination with the stones themselves was still on the rise.

In the abstract to an interesting article in *Transformations*, George Karpathakis writes a passage that enables me to justify my preoccupation with collecting the rocks and to take comfort that my personal ritual was not such an unusual or strange thing:

> [H]umans collect and use rocks for many purposes:
> utilitarian, economic, scientific, sacred, decorative and
> mnemonic. The collected rock acquires meaning different
> from the rock in situ. This meaning can be communal or
> personal, connected to events, real or mythic, or to place.

> The rock can act as a sign or tell a story. It can be seen as a metonym of the landscape. Or it can be viewed as a synecdoche, the part standing in for the whole, for a landscape or an experience. The meaning of the collected rock or the rock collection varies from person to person and can change over time (1).

Rocks provide records of the earth's formation, each being a kind of encapsulated clue to the origin of all Earthly things. There are deep-seated primal and anthropological aspects to the relationships between humans and rocks. Karpathakis and the authors he cites remind us not only of the primordial nature of these relationships but also of the links to our technological origins.

Over time, as Karpathakis suggests is possible, the significance of my rock collecting practice changed and so too my intent in regard to the ritual and the artifacts themselves. There were no more corners in the garden that needed softening. In addition my conscience was provoked after considering a sign adjacent to Turners Beach which reads: *Mackay City Council REMOVAL OF SAND – STONES FROM THIS AREA PROHIBITED*. Figuring that I had progressed from a casual souvenir gatherer to a habitual removalist I decided on *socio-ethico* grounds that my practice should cease.

Sign adjacent to Turners Beach

A non-linguistic taxonomy

The next phase in my growing obsession with the granites of Slade Point was an attempt to categorise them. I determined that the range of colouration is limited. There appear to be, broadly speaking, five main categories of hue: the blacks and grays; the reds; the pinks; the browns and purple-browns; and, the greens. In addition there is a range of distinctive yellow subclasses of each of those main hues. This taxonomy is according to overall visual impression. The flecking and grain of the granites introduce further significant quality variations which exhaust my linguistic ability to account for them. Handling a stone gives enhanced appreciation of its granularity for which one acquires a corporeal familiarity and memory. The colour and texture appears to be related to the form property of a type of stone. For example, the pinkish samples with largish white grains and coarse texture are more likely to be more "egg-shaped" or more evenly rounded without any noticeable angulations.

Being barely drilled and unskilled in the natural sciences my classification is most abstract. Indeed, beyond the "base" prototype of *rock* and the "subordinate" *granite*, I cannot be more concrete (Rosch 27-48). My learned options for textual description run out.

Unsorted stones on Turners Beach

According to Stevan Harnard discerning subtlety of hue, brightness and saturation involves "categorical perception." This "innate" faculty results from what he calls an "invariance extracting mechanism" in the case of our colour perception. It accounts for the separation of colours interspersed by neutral zones as we see them in a rainbow. Rather than create piles of stones in my yard at home, I decided that I would undertake a photographic documentation *in situ* on the beach in my attempt to qualitatively categorise the granites. I wonder if, in deciding what stone was similar

enough to which and so to be placed within my framing device and recorded, I was using this faculty that Harnard describes? Certainly, at times I experienced what I thought of as a paradox of identifying difference amongst similar things. Yet I was forcing a decision based on grammars that I was dynamically establishing in real time. Perhaps Harnard explains experience such as this when he writes:

> ...living in the world requires the capacity to detect
> recurrences, and...that in turn requires the capacity to
> forget or at least ignore what makes every instant unique,
> and hence incapable of exactly recurring.

In other words, in my attempt to photograph stones according to dominant colour grouping, and faced with what appeared to be overwhelming subtle variance, my best strategy was to selectively look for invariance.

Photos of the palette of five primary hue categories established according to a visual grammar highlight variance as much as consistency

Bear in mind that in the case of my preoccupation I was aware of no specific cultural precedent and that I had at that time no clearly defined intent other than the visual investigation in its own right. I was not looking for gold or other mineral commodity, though it had crossed my mind that one could produce attractive kitchen bench top laminate in the form of terrazzo either from the stones themselves or from images of them.

Subsequently I began to research the topic and found limited sources on granites in general and a little data specific to the granites of the region. Granger & Jones say, "Late Devonian to Early Carboniferous volcanic rocks of the Campwyn Beds (age about 350 million years before present) crop out in coastal headlands in northern parts of the study area such as Slade Point and Shoal Point" (13). According to Murray:

> The northern New England Orogen (NNEO) extends from the sedimentary cover of the Clarence-Moreton Basin in the south to the Bowen area, and west to the Bowen Basin. It contains granites of 4 main age groups: Middle to Late Devonian; mid- Carboniferous to Early Permian; Late Permian to Late Triassic; and Early Cretaceous. Common features shared by all of the granites include:
>
> - They are overwhelmingly high temperature I-type granites with no relict zircon;
> - They have low ISr ratios indicating that old continental crust was not involved in their formation; and
> - They are associated with Cu-Mo-Au mineralisation (101).

Given the essentially phenomenological nature of my study this sort of information has little relevance. My objective had by this time become to collect many photographs of the stones classified according to colour so that the images could be used as a kind of palette derived essentially from the place that had become the focus of my attention. I still had no clear idea what the palette would be used for. Was I looking for a story?

When photographing the granites I made use of a picture frame to cluster them into a composition with relatively straight edges that could then be cropped without slicing through whole stone shapes

Getting our stories straight

Celebrated film maker Wim Wenders, talking about *sense of place* and how it is portrayed in contemporary (American) movies, makes a distinction between "telling a place" and "telling a story". He laments that "cities and landscapes are *background, locations* found by the *location manager.* They are no longer heroes…" He continues, "In my book, the loss of place is a lost quality in movies. It comes with a loss of reality, a loss of identity." Wenders says his thesis is "[t]hat places find stories and make them happen. Not that stories happen anyway, and just need *locations* to *take place in.*"

What name would the pre-colonial inhabitants have given this place where these wonderful stones are to be found? I call it Turners Beach only because I saw that name inscribed on a location map in a promotional leaflet for local bed and breakfast accommodation. I have not seen or heard the name attributed in any other context. The more official local place maps and directories leave the beach location un-named referring to the area as Slade Point and the larger beach to the south as Lamberts Beach. Slade Point received its title upon the inscription of passer-by Captain James Cook (Kennedy).

According to Chalmers' historical account of John Mackay's settlement enterprise in 1860 an early encounter in the area between the local Aboriginals and the colonials ended in bloodshed:

> By April supplies had considerably diminished, and the end of May found them without tobacco, salt or sugar. Their supplies should have arrived by steamer from Rockhampton in March but it was June 29th before the cutter "Presto" moored in the river. It appears that the vessel had come north at the appointed time, but passed the mouth of the river and anchored near Slade Point where, in a skirmish with the blacks, one of the crew and a passenger named Roberts were killed on the beach. The vessel thereupon returned to Rockhampton.

There is today a proud and active ATSI community in the Slade Point area. One focus for this pride is the connection with Olympic athlete, Cathy Freeman, who grew up in the community. The local sports oval has been renamed after her. Whilst the Yuibera People are celebrated and respected in official proceedings as the traditional custodians the Wiri and the Birri Indigenous clan groups also have association with the Mackay region. These people and their descendents have suffered and endured the displacement of colonialism and waves of social,

political and economic upheaval associated with State and Federal administrative regimes since that time, and as Veracini points out, "[t]he centrality of Aboriginal participation in the pastoral frontier, and thus in the context of the whole of Australian history, may need to be thoroughly reassessed". The focus for these people now, as it is for the South Sea Island communities in the area, is on proudly upholding their traditions and creating opportunities to share those aspects of these that are suitable for sharing, together with their sense of responsibility for the land, with the wider community. The stories of how these people have endured and survived the trials of times such as those documented in Gibson's Badland tales are theirs to tell should they wish.

These matters are raised in this context because there *is* an abstraction of a story woven into the artwork that I intend to relate to these themes. It is not an appropriation of anyone else's story that may exist in relation to the Turners Beach site—indeed I have not come across any besides the one cited above (Chalmers). Rather it is a story of personal significance that I have carried with me to this place and resurrect here in the artwork inspired by the place and produced using its ancient material.

During the 1990s I was a managing director of an Adelaide-based design and production house that in 1995 was appointed preferred supplier of services to the Office of Reconciliation which was at that time run out of Prime Minister Keating's office. This status was not conferred without some considerable justification and in our case it was on account of a record of mentoring and fostering the development of Indigenous talent. Those were exciting and heady times during which I had the pleasure of working alongside such celebrated personalities as: documentary photographer, Ricky Maynard; journalist and former chair of Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Katrina Power; and contemporary artist, Max Mansell, during their formative and emergent periods.
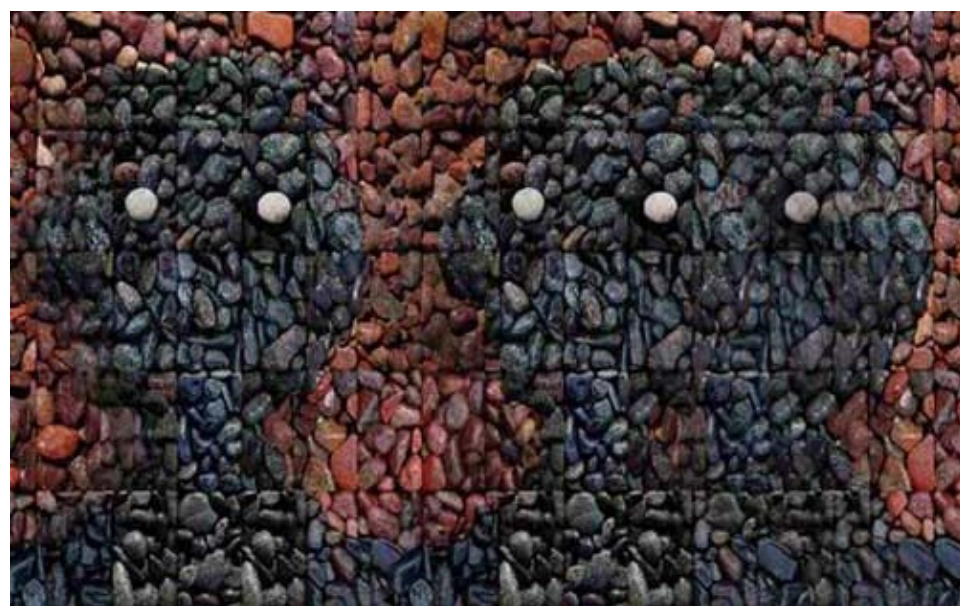
A still from "In-between the Primordial and the Latter"

Around this time I also had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of a quiet, unassuming and intelligent artist who from his earliest exposure to specialist "desert" art dealers had developed an international following. This man had grown up adopted into a 'European' family in Adelaide and when I met him had recently rediscovered family connections in Yalata. Yalata is a coastal mission town at the head of the Spencer Gulf to where inhabitants of the Maralinga region of South Australia were removed when the atomic tests were conducted there by the British government in the 1952. In fact, from conversation with him, I gathered that he had learned that his people were among those desert nomads who had not been warned of one imminent blast, and who experienced a thick and sickly black radioactive cloud descending on them.

This knowledge seemed to transform his life. The huge paintings that resulted were exhibited at Tandaya during the 1996 Adelaide Festival of Arts in an exhibition called *Native Titled Now*. He had devised a method of affixing a thick coating of sand to the canvas and in a collection of such works entitled *Maralinga Nullius* had made use of white ocre, brown and black coloured sands from his home country to depict traditional trail and circular community motifs. However

the traditional motifs were dramatically fractured. I will always remember the official opening of this exhibition because in an adjacent annex on a giant screen was displayed a video documenting how the Maralinga badlands had been restored by digging huge trenches and burying the contaminated soil. Premier Olsen who opened the exhibition took the opportunity to grandstand the success of this operation. Watching the video you would have gotten the idea that the clean-up operation had been so successful and the restoration of the landscape so complete that it would soon be offered as a tourist destination. The Premier barely mentioned the art. I recall that the contrast between the paintings and the propaganda was so stark that I felt appalled and incensed. I remember I couldn't understand how 'Kunmanara' Brown could have remained so calm. He had a serene composure and looked as if he had expected nothing else but what had taken place. Kunmanara is not his real name. It is a term of respect that his people use for one who is deceased. On September 11 1997, little more than a year later, at the age of 36 he passed away after losing a painful battle with liver cancer.

An invocation of the foregoing story has been infused into the artwork "In-between the Primordial and the Latter" in the form of time-based and interactive image and sound sequences. These are looped and may be encountered by the audience in a non-sequential manner. Grid patterns established in one sector as a palette of granite colours and textures have in another sector been assembled to form humanoid shapes. These are used as metaphorical icons for Colonial and Indigenous cultures and embedded in certain paths of the interactive for the discovery and apprehension of an exhibition audience. Parallel paths lead to interactive sequences intended to evoke a sense of deep geological time.

Conclusion

At the "Making Badlands" conference exhibition, Bundaberg, December 2005, the interactive multimedia artwork "In between the primordial and the latter" was premiered. The work is one of a series of three, collectively entitled "Inverse Blink", and produced with the assistance of funding from Central Queensland University's Regional Centre of the Arts (RCotA).

Via a CameraMouse™ interface, exhibition-goers navigate layered movie content on an LCD screen using body movements. This motion is monitored using a mini-cam connected to the audiovisual processor. The operative instructions are: to dig deeper into the content one should stand still; to skip to another narrative sequence one should shift around. Thus the viewer experience may be of a kind of dance.

Hands-free interaction at the "Making Badlands" conference exhibition

The dance is a metaphor used by Andrew Pickering to describe how, in his observation; certain scientists have temporally tuned their goals in response to resistance and accommodation from non-human agency. Surely this account is also apt for creative endeavour where ever professional grammar, rigour and

goal-oriented engagement leads to innovative expression?

The "Inverse Blink" experimental project is intimately bound with technological and sociological concerns. The aesthetic arises from interdisciplinary practice. Felix Guattari's extended definition of subjectivity is inclusive of diverse human and non-human contexts and takes account of the actuality of engagement with technology and media. The orthodox objective/subjective duality is challenged.

The aim of this reflective article has been to focus on some of the connections that have informed the understanding of *place* represented in the work. Corporeal notions: habit; the cognitive processes by which one begins to make sense of environmental data; how the present embodies the past; are some of the themes that have been explored.

In the context of the presentation of the paper in association with the inauguration of the artwork this is appropriate. However there is much yet to be done with regard to observing how audiences engage with the unusual interface and narrative design of the work. Analysis of the navigational and structural design of the interface and the content and how this marries with the "hands-free" technology to provide corporeal and audiovisual experience is a topic for future reflective review.

Ashley Holmes is an academic, researcher and experimental artist. He has a PhD in visual art studio practice from the University of South Australia and teaches in the Bachelor of Digital Innovation program at Central Queensland University. He is currently based in Mackay. a.holmes@cqu.edu.au

Works Cited:

Chalmers, Robert. "The Discovery of Mackay, Queensland." 1996. 12 Sept. 2006 <http://www.zeta.org.au/~zmz/david/jmackay.htm>

Eddy, Elizabeth. "Conflicting Imaginary Places in a Local Environmental Dispute." *Transformations* 9 (2005). 12 Sept. 2006 <http://transformations.cqu.edu.au/journal/issue_09/article_01.shtml>

Gibson, Ross. *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002.

Goldhahn, Joakim. "Roaring Rocks: An Audio-Visual Perspective on Hunter-Gatherer Engravings in Northern Sweden and Scandinavia." *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 35.1 (2002): 29-61.

Granger, Ken., & Jones, Trevor. "The Mackay Setting." *Community Risk in Mackay, a multi-hazard risk assessment*. Eds. Miriam Middlemann and Ken Granger. Cities Project, Australian Geological Survey Organisation, 2000. 12 Sept. 2006 <http://www.ga.gov.au/image_cache/GA4177.pdf>

Guattari, Felix. *Chaosmosis, an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*. Trans. Bains, P., & Pefanis, J. Power Publications, 1995.

Harnad, Stevan. "Cognition is Categorization." *Cogprints Cognitive Sciences Eprint Archive*, 2003. 12 Sept. 2006 <http://cogprints.org/3027/01/catconf.inc>

Heidegger, Martin. "The Age of the World Picture." *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Tr. Hofstader, A. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Holmes, Ashley. "Reconciling experimentum and experientia: Ontology for Reflective Practice Research in New Media." *Speculation and Innovation – New Perspectives in Practice-led Research in the Creative Industries*. Queensland University of Technology, 2005. 12 Sept. 2006 <http://www.speculation2005.net/papers/Holmes.pdf>

Karpathakis, George. "Rocks in Their Heads: The 'Landscape and You' Experience." *Transformations* 5 (2002). 12 Sept. 2006 <http://transformations.cqu.edu.au/journal/issue_05/pdf/georgekarpathakis.pdf>

Kennedy, Kett. *Mackay Revisited*. Mackay City Council and State Library of Queensland, 2002.

Mallet, John. "Preventing crime through employment – a community project.". 12 Sept. 2006 <http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/criminality/mallet.pdf>

Maclean, Ian. "Sublime Futures: eco-art and the return of the real in Peter Dombrovskis, John Wolseley and Andy Goldsworthy." *Transformations* 5 (2002). 12 Sept. 2006
<http://transformations.cqu.edu.au/journal/issue_05/pdf/ianmclean.pdf>

Murray, Cec. "Granites of the Northern New England Orogen." *Geoscience Australia* 2004. 12 Sept. 2006
<http://www.ga.gov.au/image_cache/GA3700.pdf>

Pickering, Andrew. *The Mangle of Practice, Time, Agency and Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Rosch, Eleanor. "Principles of Categorization." *Cognition and Categorization*. Eds. Eleanor Rosch and Barbara B. Lloyd. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1978. pp. 27-48.

Scrivener, Stephen. "Characterising creative-production doctoral projects in art and design." *International Journal of Design Sciences and Technology* 10.2 (2004): 25-44.

Schön, Donald. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Basic Books Inc., 1983.

Steadman, Richard. "Is it Really Just a Social Construction?: The Contribution of the Physical Environment to Sense of Place." *Society and Natural Resources* 16.8 (2003): 671-685.

Veracini, Lorenzo. "Towards a Further Redescription of the Australian Pastoral Frontier." *Journal of Australian Studies* 72 (2002). 12 Sept. 2006 <http://www.api-network.com/articles/index.php?jas72_veracini>

Wenders, Wim. "A Sense of Place." 12 Sept. 2006 <http://www.wim-wenders.com/news_reel/2001/0103princeton.htm>

TOP

Transformations

Issue No. 13   September 2006 — Making Badlands

Domestic Imaginings
By *Saffron Newey*

Let us consider the topography of a badland as *without* fixed edges – one that shifts and distorts, an infinite variable, and a site for imagination. This paper seeks to explore badlands as a psychological phenomenon; a projection, a phantom and frameless imaginary. This notion will be paralleled with a discussion of my own visual work, which conversely considers the "boundaries" of the home or domestic environment. Throughout the paper are visual examples of my own paintings, which direct and inform my discussion.

We could consider inhabitable space as a frame, one that serves to distinguish selfhood from the nebulous *out there.* Our memories, belongings and ephemera cornice this domestic boundary and could be said to reinforce a sense of self and identity for the inhabitant. The home punctuates the transience that the self experiences as it traverses private and public spaces. As a stopping-point in our daily coming and going, the home has a measuredness and surety. It's arguable that this is a direct counterpart to the public space, which morphs and sprawls, like a frameless and ubiquitous variable. In my work, I position the public zone as an imaginary space. My paintings of domestic interiors depict only unclear glimpses of the *outside* through blurred windowpanes and cropped doorframes. Its sketchy description and barricaded presence has the potential to imbue the exterior space with mystique. Its nebulous and haunting presence has the characteristics of a badland; uninhabited, mythical and limitless.

What I would like to argue however is that this dichotomy between inside (shelter) and outside (badland) cannot be so succinctly drawn. The imaginary "outside' that I have recreated in my paintings, which peers through half open doors and blurred windows could also be seen as a welcome exit point from the claustrophobic intensity of the interiors depicted. In addition, the photographically realistic technique employed in the paintings only serves to amplify the psychological intensity of the interior. The absence of figures leaves the viewer *alone* as they project into the space of the images. The paintings are scaled with the human body in mind so that this projection can further exacerbate this notion of continuity with the scenes depicted. I would like to explore with further reference to my paintings the shift in tension that occurs between inside and outside the home space. I have chosen to support my analysis of these visual works with the writings of photographic theorists Barthes and Sontag among others because my paper is primarily concerned with visual representation. Photographic images, culturally and in my own practice help identify a sense of place, memory, ownership and boundary setting. They aid in our perception of self-as-individual and also as a public self. I am interested in the photograph's ability to "frame" and the parallels that emerge with the framed home space.

Kierkegaard described imagination as the "medium of infinitisation" (Davidson 59). There is a foreboding quality to the infinite – an endless space without edges. Topographically, a badland is characterised in a similar way; as sprawling and unpredictable. The imagined badland is a metaphor for this infinitisation. Spatially, my paintings play with architectural edges and borders as devices to direct the viewer's gaze. These visual frames and cues also touch on the metaphor of the badland as the unseen or imagined. In *Meadow Street Morning* (fig. 1), the frosted window gives us a hazy impression of the outside, leaving the viewer to invent and imagine what lies beyond. In addition, the illuminated window in cinema theory has been known to represent death. With this in mind, the window in *Meadow Street Morning* has a theoretical potency as portal to a "badland". However, the composition of the image possesses other nuances that suggest alternative readings. The foreground interior presents something potentially more unnerving than the view through the window. The foreground darkness in which the photographer/viewer stands is even less descriptive of tangible space. The frame which could potentially describe the space

conclusively, instead darkly bleeds off to the edge. A vase and transistor radio are oddly coupled with bathroom products in a curious still life that celebrates the mundane. Again, the photographic realism of the image gives it a resonating stillness and detachedness that repels the viewer. In this image, the interior space is itself, limitless. The inside and outside of the image are interchangeable and implicated in each other.

Figure 1

Meadow Street, morning

Oil on Canvas
100cm x 75cm
2003

It is worth exploring how the aesthetics of photography contribute to the tangible and the infinite in my work. Roland Barthes' text *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography* meditates on the idea of the photograph and its *essence*. Throughout the text Barthes provides a vivid account of his frustration - not so much to establish a memory of place per se, but rather in seeking the essence of his late mother in photographs that he has kept. His fruitless searching prompts him to profess the inability of photographs to properly document memory and its particularities. As his discussion on this popular topic unfolds however, his position appears less conclusive. The essence or, as Barthes terms it: the "punctum" that eludes his search through photographs of his late mother is eventually found, somewhat unexpectedly, in an image of her as a child – when, naturally, he would not have known her (Barthes 26).

Barthes' account eloquently ties together many themes regarding memory and representation. The emotion in the voice of the author in the text alludes to his deep desire for photographs to represent something that is mournfully lost, to fill in the gaping hole of his mother's absence. It is as if the punctum encapsulates something that lies beneath the known, the familiar, and that it possesses something of a deeper truth than that which representation could ever deliver. Perhaps, in this light, the recognition of a punctum has to be subjective. This subjectivity is pivotal to the interpretation of all images. However the reading we bring to *personal* photographs is especially so, because we compare representation with our memories. In this sense, if the photograph records anything, it may be the very elusiveness of memory.

> All the photographs of my mother which I was looking
> through were a little like so many masks; at the last,
> suddenly, the mask vanished: there remained a soul, ageless
> but not timeless, since this air was the person I used to see,
> consubstantial with her face, each day of her long life.
> (Barthes 10)

Figure 2

Meadow Street, morning 2

Oil on Canvas
100cm x 75cm
2003

The paintings featured throughout this paper depict my own living space. The compositions are initially made through the static lens of a camera, therefore dictating a way of seeing and reading space that differs quite significantly from natural perception. In addition to this perceptual anomaly, *my* initial interpretation of this space via photographs is loaded and led by experiences, that is memories, narratives and emotions that occurred in my real life. Ultimately, my own subjective experience of my home clouds my ability to gauge the image's impact or *essence*. That very indefinite *which-ness* or *thing-ness* (or *punctum*) is what seems so hard to ascertain from something so familiar, like a word repeated over and over until it becomes abstract. *Meadow Street Morning 2* (fig. 2) is the second in a series of 4 paintings of the same theme. Its distorted colour scheme captures something akin to this notion of the abstract anomaly.

A strange phenomenon occurs however, when I translate my photographs into paintings. By copying, retranslating and re-telling the story of the image, it morphs, ever so slightly. The original photographic *evidence* gives way to interpretation and imagination. It adopts some of the qualities of the infinite. Even though my technique is such that I am formally faithful to the photograph, the images ultimately resonate somewhere between fact and fiction. Each painting is indeed the product of a quite measured and even traditional process, arguably lending itself to the formality of "painting by numbers". Despite this however, in the "making" there exists an intangible and idiosyncratic quality that resists such conclusions. This is in part a product of the ongoing dialogue (or the argument) between photography and painting.

What paintings and photographs have in common is their common role as "a vehicle that indicates what is not there, that which is absent" (Procaccini 35). These words, spoken by Renaissance humanist and artist, Leone Battista Alberti in the fifteenth century refer to the developments in Renaissance painting at the time. At the birth of true naturalism in painting, in the High Renaissance, the new mimetic phenomenon of realism was one met with a curious wonderment – one that captured intense feelings ofengagement with representation. Photographs possess a similar kind of "istoria". [1] The painted image and the photograph both emerge from a frame that separates the image from the *real world*. They point the viewer to the imaginary, a portal to another place. What confuses this notion of the imaginary *other* however, is the transparency of the photographic aesthetic.

Photographic realism in painting lacks the obvious gesture of the paintbrush, that evidence of human intervention with the image. Absence of this intervention imbues the painting with the same "documentary" status that photographs possess. Susan Sontag discusses how this aesthetic "certifies" an image.

> Photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past
> that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of
> space in which they are insecure...a way of certifying
> experience. (Sontag 9)

The framed sanctuary of the domestic interior in these paintings is in a sense, *certified* by the photographic aesthetic – in attempt to make real something that is absent, remembered.

The *outside*, in images such as *Painting with servery* (fig. 3), represent certainty's counterpart. Looking through various cornices, doorways and

architectural references in the paintings beckon as a portal to elsewhere, an invitation to imagine.

Figure 3

Painting with servery

Oil on Canvas
50cm x 75cm
2005

The public space outside the home can represent a vast array of possibilities that could threaten to disrupt a sense of self. In her 2002 text *Phobic Geographies, the phenomenology and spatiality of identity*, Joyce Davidson discusses, with reference to psychoanalytic theory, the condition of agoraphobia as "not only a geography of exclusion that confines people (mostly women) to their homes but as a form of anxiety that can be expressed in spatial terminology" (Davidson 57). Agoraphobia is described as not only a condition that physically separates a person from the public arena but as a metaphor for the tension that resonates between inside and outside. Agoraphobia is defined as a condition of "non-locatable fear, an anxiety not of anything, an inherently intangible something-is-in-the-air" (Davidson 58). Davidson locates the subjective space of home as locatable, a site of ontological security. It is as if social space threatens to corrode the self, or at very least dilute it to become part of the ubiquitous mass. The home, in this sense would act as an architectural aid to reconstructing one's self-identity by providing a tangible grasp, both ontologically and essentially to a sense of reality as opposed to the badlands of infinitisation that the public space may threaten.

Davidson draws strong parallels between psychoanalytic theories of agoraphobia and the existential definition of anxiety. She sites the writings of Kierkegaard, who asserted that existential anxiety results from standing in the face of nothingness. He defines this moment as *The Fall,* the paradoxical situation in which we are, at once, fully self-aware yet with this, a comprehension that we will one day cease to exist. In this sense, The Fall is twofold; it presents the possibilities of freedom and knowledge but conversely, anxiety of the infinite.

> A person whose emotions have become fantastic...becomes infinitised...he loses himself more and more (Davidson 59).

In various examples the paintings I have made capture something of this anxiety. The outside world does not feature in the work except as undefined perspectives. The outside exists only as a projection, an imagined other. But there is a duality to the images that cannot be ignored. My obvious fixation on this topic of the domestic interior, its quietness and the absence of figures could also be said to capture something of a narcissistic subjectivity. As if it were a skewed form of self-portraiture but one that assimilates identity with objects and space rather than figuration. As Barthes seeks his mother through photographic ephemera, these paintings too seek to make a shrine of sorts, to cast in stone, some brand of self-essence. In this light, the painted interiors are defensive and anxious spaces rather than sanctuaries.

The concept of actuality and delusion on a more cultural scale – a more xenophobic "loss of self" features in Ross Gibson's *Seven Versions of an Australian badlands* in the final chapter, *Melancholy State.* His position is that to fear the unknown or unfamiliar is a symptom of narcissistic infantilism. He speaks of colonialism in this light, as the infant, that "might attain maturity only when it learns to include an array of ethnic; psychological and political differences in its constitution" (Gibson 163). In some respects a fixation with the sanctity of home could be seen as a microcosm of this sheltered, infantile colonialism, the subject being unable to engage with the concept of the other, the outside. "The maturing subject need no longer feel compelled to shelter from actuality in delusion, or denial, or selfish intransigence whenever the world does not conform to all selfish needs and desires" (Gibson 161).

Figure 4

Painting with drapery

Oil on Canvas
60cm x 75cm
2005

I aim to capture in my work, a frozen frame that by its absence, only alludes to the outside, a greater whole. Precisely why I feel so compelled to record and re-record these *frames* may point to a broader cultural phenomenon. The images become a collection of memories, albeit manufactured and reconfigured, that nonetheless behave as relics and souvenirs for what could, without documentation, threaten to disappear. In Susan Sontag's celebrated text *On Photography*, she argues that as a culture we are obsessed with recording experience and what we see, via photography. "In modern society, a discontent with reality expresses itself forcefully and most hauntingly by the longing to reproduce this one." (Sontag 80) It is as if we are surrounded by transience and it is our cultural anxiety to capture the moment, the *augenblick* (blink of the eye), before it disappears. Ironically however, by trying to preserve life in the form of the photographic document, the photograph only serves to reinforce our perception of life flashing before our eyes. This anxiety to freeze the moment, to hold onto one's own history in bits and fragmentary pieces has an air of the infantile fantasy that Gibson speaks of. This infantile dream of wholeness is indeed nostalgic and regressive, one that hoards the past in stagnant melancholy. What precisely then, is at stake when we let go of our familiar keepsakes, the frames and borders of home? Perhaps it is a fear of losing a grasp on our own life's narrative, an ownership of experience and memory.

Photographs and the photographic aesthetic in painting have the illusionary power to materialise absence. This notion forms a large body of Sontag's discourse in *On Photography*. In her argument she states there is an anxiety in our culture to repossess a "vanishing connectedness" with the real (Sontag 8). She asserts that taking photographs is a convenient way doing this, of limiting experience into a series of pocket-sized portions, as if they were quotations or short summaries that act as a tangible reference to experience. The photograph, the "paper phantom", easily replaces memorabilia or real objects that possess patina. (Sontag 10) Photographs act as a convenient device by which we can edit and store experience and memory: they can, at once, provide accessibility to, as well as a safe distance from, the past. "Reality is summed up in an array of causal fragments - an endlessly alluring, poignantly reductive way of dealing with the world". (Sontag 80)

Painting with Drapery (fig. 4) has a flatness that discourages the viewer from psychologically entering into the space depicted. It is one of many paintings I have made that depicts other paintings (that I have made). This is a clearly repeatable gesture that brings to mind the *hall of mirrors* theme. The act itself has elements of an infantile obsession to record and re-record for the sake of preservation. In this particular case however, I am more concerned with the visual effect it creates in the reading of the image. At times it is as if the featured (copied) painting acts as a secondary portal into another space and at other times, the featured painting has the appearance of being more real than the surrounding environment. In *Painting with Drapery* however, the space of the composition is almost equally divided into real space (tablecloth, tabletop) and represented space (painting of blue glass). It presents dual fictions that ask the viewer's gaze to dart back and forth between real and represented. The painting

plays with Sontag's notion of "vanishing connectedness" in some ways. Real space and represented (imagined) space are composed with almost equal measure. Both parts of the painting are interchangeable; they are both tangible and intangible. The anxiety that emanates from this visual tension is what interests me as an artist. The idea contributes to the concepts of reality and illusion being at the core of what a badland could be, of inconclusiveness and infinitisation.

Figure 5

Bedroom view

Oil on Canvas
150cm x 100cm
2005

This discussion has focused on the notion of the badlands being defined by limitlessness; the horrors that may lurk around boundless imaginaries. I have positioned the interior and exterior as a metaphor for the real and the imagined and discussed ways in which these notions interchange with one another. The home as a sacred site of ontological security and an attachment to ones self-narrative is at times questionable. The interior space as represented in my paintings can indeed "frame" comfort's counterpart and be characterised as a badlands. The *Number 17* sequence featured below represents a new direction that employs a gestural and slightly painterly quality that has been absent from my image making for some time. It also coincides with my "stepping outside" the home. Standing on the opposite side of the threshold, looking in, locates the viewer in the transient and timeless space of in-between. These are territories in question; "...unrevealed yet manifest, having that absence-as-presence which constitutes the lure and fascination of the sirens" (Barthes 106).

Figure 6

Number 17, 1

Oil on Canvas
200cm x 150cm
2005

Figure 7

Number 17, 2

Oil on Canvas
200cm x 150cm
2005

Saffron Newey is an artist who lives in Melbourne and lectures in the Bachelor of Design (Visual Communication) in the Faculty of Art & Design at Monash University. For the past ten years she has been exhibiting in various artist run and commercial galleries in Melbourne and overseas. She is due to complete a Master of Fine Art by Research at Monash University in 2007 on "The Photographic Aesthetic."
Saffron.Newey@Artdes.monash.edu.au

Endnotes

[1] "To define *istoria*…means essentially to form a frame, which like a frame around a painting, serves the double role of distinguishing the story (fiction) from history (reality out there), as well as insuring the autonomy of the story itself precisely because it is fiction and therefore an end in itself." (Procaccini 34).
 [return]

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 1993.

Batchen, Geoffrey. *Burning with Desire*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997.

Davidson, Joyce. *Phobic Geographies: The Phenomenology of Spatiality and Identity* Ashgate Publishing Ltd. England, USA, 2002.

Gibson, Ross. *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, Queensland, 2002.

Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. London: University of California Press Ltd, 1993.

Lury, Celia. *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, memory and identity*. London, New

York: Routledge, 1998.

Procaccini, Alfonso. "Alberti and the "Framing" of Perspective". *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 40, no.1 (Fall 1981): 29-39.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London, New York: Penguin Books, 1977.

Zizek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jaques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1991.

TOP

Transformations

Issue No. 13   September 2006 — Making Badlands

Ley Lines
By *Sharon Thorne*

From the time of European settlement in Australia, a series of cultural and historical displacements have precipitated the creation of wastelands nationwide. The existence of these wastelands has had major implications in the formation of the identities of cities and the attitudes of populations. Melbourne is a case in point, with respect to its western suburbs. This paper investigates these displacements and the need for wasteland, or a dumping ground for all that is considered in excess, or superfluous in the formation of Melbourne's identity as a city.

Our perception of what is, or is not waste, or a wasteland is tied to our cultural perception of the use-value of land, goods and people. In the developing stages of any city there are valuations put in place between what is ordered, structured and formed, and the residue, the peripheral, the unwanted. Among these remnants of civilization falls the wasteland. From Melbourne's formation colonisation brought with it new sets of values that deemed the swamplands to the west of the city as undesirable, although these marshes had been a valuable and abundant food resource for the Aboriginal population.

Individual and national identity is affected by these processes of classification. What we do with the land and how we live on it, whether with respect or disdain, has an impact not only on who we are, but on what we leave behind. In *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* Ross Gibson discusses the use-value of Badlands to an Australian mythology (15). In Gibson's argument, the central Queensland coast is positioned as other to the norm. This landscape then becomes the dumping ground for the thoughts, memories and harsh realities that contemporary Australians would rather forget. Since the time of white settlement, Melbourne has also had its own Badland. Where the inhabitants turn to face the setting sun, the marshes and tidal estuary of the Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers formed a natural physical boundary to access to the west. This geographical depression, known as Batman's Swamp, created a barrier which has enhanced the cultural imaginary of darkness and undesirability that has always permeated Melbournians' thinking of the western suburbs. It is the displacements that occurred on a particular section of this in-between zone that this paper investigates.

West Melbourne itself no longer exists as a proper suburb, but more as a series of landmarks that remain to map out a territory. Ley lines drawn between these edifices mark the borders of an almost extinct suburb. Festival Hall and the Football Stadium are dotted along Dudley Street, which runs the length of West Melbourne as it heads for the river, and the new Docklands Development. Swallowed up in this new development is the history of a no-man's land that exists at the periphery of West Melbourne. Dudley Flats, as this remnant of Batman's Swamp has been known until the 21st century, is bounded by the rail, the main road to the west and the rivers. Rather than the history of violence along the Queensland coast, attested to in *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland,* Dudley Flats has a long history as a wasteland and a space of displacement. This site has been Melbourne's dumping ground for its excess since early colonial times.
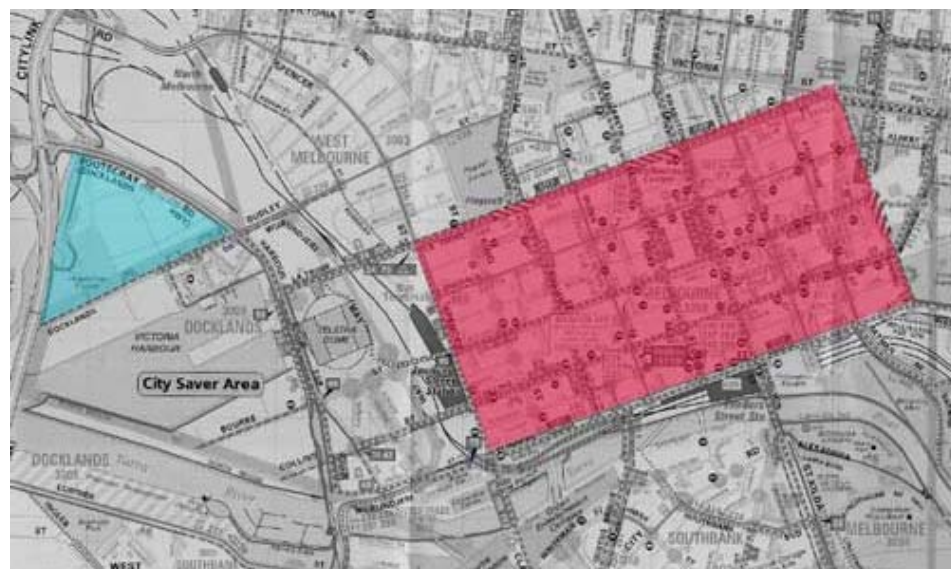
Melbourne CBD (red) Dudley Flats (blue)

What has contributed to the domination and marginalisation of this site, and the various human inhabitants who have been forced by circumstance to reside there? Gibson asserts that "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" (68). This then, is an attempt to activate the story of Dudley Flats by examining the history of displacements that occurred at this site after European settlement. Displacement functions differently at various periods in this history, which can be divided into four phases: the early colonial period of the 19th century: the era of wars and depressions that characterised the late 19th and early 20th centuries: the post-war years: and the contemporary attempt to develop Melbourne as a global city, which began in the 1990s.

The displacements which occurred on the site at these various periods in history are very much interwoven, as the City of Melbourne from its inception has attempted to control and contain its excesses and unwanted elements. These historic eras correspond to the use of Dudley Flats as the dumping ground for those elements of humanity considered other or in excess to the needs of the mainstream culture; the dumping ground for material waste; the degradation and displacement of the natural habitat; and the current erasure of the history of the site. Displacement functions differently in each of these periods, but its one commonality is that it always functions as an exclusionary force.

At the time of colonial settlement the swamps, marshes and mud flats of the tidal estuaries of the Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers were shunned by the colonists, who wanted grazing lands and considered the marshes as useless swamps. A series of displacements of the perceived useless is the history of Dudley Flats from the time of European settlement. Throughout this period the history of Dudley Flats has been a history of the displacement of unwanted people and materials to the site, while the natural environment was gradually displaced from the site.

Batman's Swamp or the Blue Lagoon, as it was known colloquially, took in an area the size of the grid of the City of Melbourne. The Moonee Ponds Creek was originally a series of waterholes or billabongs that emptied into the lagoon (Otto 67). For the local Wurundjeri tribes, the system of Yarra billabongs which kept the river healthy, formed a cluster of riverside sacred sites, and were the defining elements of Kulin Woirurung land. A colonist remembers the lagoon in the early days of colonial settlement:

> On the waters of the large marsh or swamp lying between
> North Melbourne and the Saltwater River graceful swans,
> pelicans, geese, black, brown, and grey ducks, teal, (sic)
> cormorants, water-hens, sea-gulls and other aquatic birds
> disported themselves: while curlews, spur-winged plover,
> cranes, snipe, sand-pipers and dottrels either waded in its
> shallows (sic) or ran along its margin; and quail and stone
> plover, particularly the former, were very plentiful on its
> higher banks... Eels, trout, a small species of perch... and
> almost innumerable green frogs inhabited its waters, and the

last named on warm nights held a regular serenade that could be heard over the greater part of town. ("West Melbourne")

Few visual images exist of this area; tip sites are not a popular subject with either photographers or painters. However one painting by A. Sandford captures something of the beauty of the lagoon. Even though *Dudley Flats to Port Melbourne* was painted in 1930, Sandford's romanticized landscape depicts something of its former splendour. Carefully avoiding the tip site and squatters huts, he has given us a view of an unspoiled natural environment, looking towards the Docklands.

Dudley Flats to Port Melbourne, A. Sandford 1930

Despite the lagoon being abundant with wildlife and a plentiful food supply, the area was not to stay in this pristine state for long. From the 1840s onward there was a steady erosion of the Wurundjeri lifestyle, as the appropriation of Melbourne's waterways pushed the Kulin people further and further east up the lower reaches of the Yarra. They were gradually excluded from their traditional hunting grounds, and their sacred sites erased from the landscape. George Macrae writes in 1912:

> You may search for it in vain today among the mud, scrap iron, broken bottles, and all sorts of red-rusty railway debris … yet, once, it was there; a real lake, intensely blue, nearly oval, and full of the clearest salt water … fringed gaily all round by … pigface … in full bloom, it seemed in the broad sunshine as though girdled about with a belt of magenta fire … the whole air heavy with the … odours of the golden Myrniong flowers … (Otto 67)

What occurred on this site between the 1830s and 1912 to turn the heady scent of wildflowers to the stench of rotting carcasses and waste? The site had become the dumping ground for rubbish and the drain for the city's effluence from the time of colonisation. From the 1860s the Melbourne City Council and the Railways Department established several rubbish tips on the site, while the Harbour Trust deposited the silt dredged from the river and docks in the attempt to keep the waterways deep enough for shipping.

The displacement of the marshland itself and its flora and fauna was well under way by the time the Coal Canal was dug in 1885 to connect the Yarra River with Moonee Ponds Creek. The dumping of silt and the creation of rubbish dumps elevated the land level, drained the land somewhat, and obliterated the original saltmarsh vegetation.

European habitation on the site reached its zenith during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The land at the end of Dudley Street and along the Moonee Ponds Creek became the site of a tent city; where impoverished families scrounged for hessian, scrap iron, tin and old drums from the tip site to build makeshift shelters. Over 60 humpies had been erected by the mid thirties. They remained there until the advent of World War II because of the indifference of local authorities. This no-man's land fell outside the jurisdiction of local authorities. Neither the Melbourne City Council, the Harbour Trust, the Railways Department, nor the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works took responsibility for this wasteland ("Dudley Flats").

A Charity Worker (right) inspects a dwelling at Dudley Flats

It has been asserted that the recycling programs of the war years forced people to move, as any valuable trash ceased to be dumped. This could be the case, for the war put an end to the Depression in other ways too. For many the enticement of a steady job and regular pay was enough incentive to join the army. There are accounts that suggest this land was vacated in the early 1940s, and that the war waste recovery program eliminated tip scrounging ("West Melbourne"). However there are numerous oral accounts that contest this view: "even when the war finished … people were living under bits of tin at … Dudley Flats" (Hadfield).

Bureaucracy has a vested interest in putting forward its own view and the ideological underpinnings of official historical accounts must be taken into consideration when assessing the relevance of such reports. Dudley Flats was, after all, different from other tent cities which sprang up all over the country in the thirties. This difference lay in its continual habitation by the displaced and dispossessed from the time of colonisation. Camps such as Happy Valley at La Perouse in Sydney and the camps in South Australia came into existence as a result of the Depression, and after the height of the Depression in 1934 the incumbents were moved elsewhere. In contrast Dudley Flats had been continually inhabited from the time of colonisation by the dispossessed and destitute. Although after the Depression the poor at Dudley Flats may have become a little less visible, it was the only tent city in Australia not razed to the ground as soon as possible once the worst of the Depression was over.

Sister Maude Ellis, Superintendent and founder of the Bethesda Aborigines' Mission in Coburg, reports that Combo George, an elderly Wurundjeri, went to live at Dudley Flats, sleeping under scraps of iron, when he was last released from prison around the late forties. She visited him there on several occasions before he died (Ellis). There is evidence to suggest that people were still living on the site in the fifties and sixties. In 1952 Betty Osborn wrote a report for the Argus, on the itinerants who lived on this site, scrounging a living from the tip. And although the paper's official photographers couldn't find anyone to

photograph at the 'Flats', Betty had no trouble obtaining her own photographs with the assistance of her mother's box brownie (Osborn).

The myth in Australian culture that the lucky country is the heritage of all is a myth politicians, bureaucrats and media barons are unable to perpetuate without this interment of the darker side of our history. There are no plaques erected to the heroism of people who were sacrificed for the common wealth. No memorials, no edifices, no monuments, no significant buildings or statues have been erected to honour their struggles and their endurances in the fight for survival in their everyday lives. These people were in excess or superfluous to the working system of capitalism during the Depression. These processes of displacement hide the failure of capitalism to live up to its utopian promise of work and well-being for all. At the same time an attempt is made to bury the history, but the notoriety of Dudley Flats was such that it lives on in the communal memory of those who lived in Melbourne through this era. Our other side is hard to repress and such well known, but diverse Melbournians as Sir Robert Menzies, Barry Jones and Barry Humphries have referred to Dudley Flats and its gigantic rats, disease, pestilence and undesirability in interviews and cabinet minutes from the conclusion of World War II to the present day. For example it is in the Cabinet Minutes of 1951, when the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, on a return from a visit to London and India states; "I went through New Delhi and Karachi ... I can't understand why they have not had incredible pestilences – Karachi is just like Dudley Flats" (Nat. Archives Aust. 3).

This statement highlights three significant aspects of life at Dudley Flats. The first is the notoriety of Dudley Flats; Sir Robert, although born and bred in Melbourne, was speaking to a group of cabinet ministers who presumably understood the allusion. The second is the suffering that this poverty engendered, and the hard and bitter struggle for life on the site, in comparison to the romanticized view put forward by artists. And finally, the statement gives some idea of how much this area had altered in the time of colonial settlement.

The national President of the Labour Party, Barry Jones, referring to the Depression in an interview in 2000, remembers as a small child "seeing absolutely horrific things down at places like Dudley Flats... seeing rats the size of Airedales down there" ("Barry Jones" 14). Such memories are quietly displacing current attempts to squash and sanitise the history of the site. From these two reports it would seem that Dudley Flats was not quite the romantic stereotype Hal Porter sees from William Dargie's studio at Williamstown:

> At night the twinkling fires of a raffish encampment can be seen inland from Fisherman's Bend – Dudley Flats, a squalid Alsatia of shelters made from packing-cases, fish-crates, oil drums and corrugated iron in which the more gypsified and degenerate victims of the Depression and their own weaknesses re-enact Gin Lane, swigging methylated spirits from triangular bottles, gnawing Cornish pasties and shark-and-chips, and consuming goatish amours in nests of newspapers and sugar-bags. (Otto 205-6)

Nor does this over simplified and poetic view of the Depression inhabitants of Dudley Flats tally with the accounts of Barbara Waurm whose family lived near the Flagstaff Gardens, a short walk from the Flats. Any man from the flats who knocked on her mother's door was sat on the verandah with a sandwich and a pot of tea (Lowenstein, 118). This is hardly an action a respectable woman would take with gin-soaked gypsies. However, Hal Porter's account does pinpoint the place those who lived in this illicit zone performed as the function of Melbourne's imaginary other, assuring Melbournians of their own good breeding and civilized habits.

In 2005 Barry Humphries, another well known Melbournian noted for his ironic take on life in suburban Melbourne, refers to Dudley Flats as a site everyone knew about, but no respectable person would want to visit, particularly not his own parents who were ensconced in their comfortable eastern suburb of Camberwell (Humphries).

Issues of inclusion and exclusion have been predominant from the early days of European settlement in this country. The British colony not only came into being as a society divided by class, but as a settlement which chose to ignore the existence of the previous occupants as rightful owners to the land. We are a nation of squatters, who pushed the Aboriginal inhabitants to the fringes of our settlements as the primitive element in what we found to be a harsh

environment. The ideological function of displacement is to exclude from the mainstream.

It's not surprising that a site on the periphery of Melbourne's central business district has such a history. Colonial history within Australia is itself the history of the dual displacement of both the indigenous inhabitants and the unwanted human waste Britain dumped on the shores of a country they saw as useless for any other form of exploitation at that time. Displacement is a process or form of genocide resulting in dispossession; a loss of sovereignty, cultural stigma and the erasure of an individual's autonomy and identity.

What do these processes of displacement cover over and who do they benefit? They create a non-space, a void where the history of peoples' lives has been obliterated. Dudley Flats was an embarrassment to those in power. Governments are traditionally embarrassed by lack of ability to contain their citizens so no lack or residue spills over from their control. The ideological function of history as it is constructed by the dominant ideology comes into play by re-writing the history of our colonial past and ignoring the history of this area. The history of this area remains invisible today precisely because it is of little use to those in power. The historical aspects of Dudley Flats have been alienated from the mainstream as not so much a rewriting of history, but a denial and burial of the seamy side of our past. A form of mythologising evolves as we are in denial about where we have come from. The lucky country perhaps, but it can never be acknowledged that the luck is not all-inclusive.

Today the native reeds, sedges, succulents and water plants indigenous to the area have re-established themselves from further along the creek ("Dudley Flats"). However Dudley Flats remains a no-man's land, a refuge for the dispossessed. In 2005 there is certainly evidence of human habitation on the banks of the Moonee Ponds Creek, even in the midst of redevelopment. Tarpaulins, cardboard wine casks and other rubbish is scattered among the trees, and litter the banks of the creek. The toxicity of the water at this site is carefully monitored. The itinerants who now sleep on the banks of the Moonee Ponds Creek must provide their own drinking water. There is a midden of plastic water bottles in the residue of habitation evident in the bush along the creek. Although the water is now unusable – as a basic necessity useless – it is being touted as an attraction to entice the global elite to Melbourne. This site has been reclassified in this century in an attempt to obliterate its previous notoriety, and present it as sanitised and desirable. The end of Dudley Street has been renamed Docklands Drive as the trendy address of the new film studios and luxury apartments recently constructed there. This space is now to become the outer projection of the powerful, where once it was the outer projection of the powerless. Waterfront properties and a marina are the drawcards to lure the rich and powerful to Melbourne. In the 21st century the displacement of the site is almost complete as its past history is buried under film studios (ironically tin sheds) and expensive apartments, as it is developed as part of the Docklands Precinct.

Dudley Flats, film studios on horizon, 2005

The issue of boundaries and border protection is still important today as we attempt to patrol thousands of kilometres of coastline in an effort to purify and contain our culture from pollution. Our excess today is no longer seen in economic terms. Our perception has shifted and the threat today is no longer seen as from within. Waste threatens the urban map, whether it is waste product, wasteland or waste people. The city then is in a constant battle to eliminate waste and to contain its non-spaces, to reintegrate what is seen as its non-productive space, and to render invisible the itinerant and the homeless. The society of use produces a multitude of remainders with no use-value and no nominal exchange-value within the mainstream culture. In the 21st century the city as a capitalist enterprise aims to devour all negative space – is it the fear of terrorism that makes us imagine that the other may be lurking in these spaces or simply the pressures of a social system based on accumulation and greed?

Where it was once enough to exclude socially by dispossession, today our spatial politics becomes an architecture of repression. Based on fear and centring around fencing, barricades, detention centres and an elimination of all possible non-places, especially on the fringes of the city, a policy of the eradication of all negative space is put into practice; spaces occupied by the homeless, the aberrant, the other are cleared. In the attempt to purify and exclude this other the plight of the displaced person has shifted from the tent city to the detention centre. Difference cannot be tolerated, we have learnt to control and contain the world's excess who land on our shores.

Melbourne still looks to the West as its dumping ground and exclusionary zone for those considered undesirable. Although Dudley Flats has now been appropriated by the centre, it won't be fully integrated until 2015, and as yet very little has been done on the site. In spite of all the hype surrounding the Docklands Development, city maps still stop at the old rectangular grid to the north and west, while having extended south over the river. One more recent map has extended the grid to include the Football Stadium, but none so far go beyond the railyards. Our attitudes to the West seem much slower to change than our ability to reconstruct our environment architecturally. We are still incarcerating our unwanted other. The abscess that once putrefied at Dudley Flats has simply shifted geographic position a few kilometres upstream, where the Maribyrnong Detention Centre nestles invisibly near the banks of the Maribyrnong River, just as the Kulin nation were displaced further and further up the lower reaches of the Yarra until they were so safely out of sight that we could appropriate the title of their people as the name for the new freeway extension. In the final irony, Wurundjeri Way exists at the very site of this dispossession.

In Aboriginal culture Badlands don't exist. The earth/landscape is regarded as a sentient being to be nurtured and cherished. In the case of unacceptable cultural practices, atonement must be made in the form of appropriate healing rituals to re-enchant and restore the land. Dudley Flats will undergo an epiphany when it is eventually incorporated into the mainstream, after more than 150 years as the receptacle for all that Melbournians found valueless or undesirable. This space has played the role of our collective burial ground where we dumped unwanted goods and people. When the bulldozers move in what will be excavated and brought to the surface and what interred? The luxury flats to be erected here will bury a heritage which is already partially interred, already an absence which will surely come back to haunt us.

To date Dudley Flats is still lying benign; it is a land in waiting. Waiting for the economic climate to be right; waiting for the disposal of the toxic waste from the site; waiting for the bulldozers; waiting for re-enchantment. It seems the time is ripe for the artwork, the realm of the imaginary, myth and dreams to take on the role of the alchemist. The redemption and re-enchantment of Dudley Flats is now in the hands of the artist and the storyteller.

Sharon Thorne is a sculptor investigating the creative practices of the displaced and marginalised urban poor during the Great Depression. She is currently undertaking PhD research at the Victoria College of the Arts focusing on the tip site and slum settlement at Dudley Flats in Melbourne, and the mechanisms adopted for everyday

survival by those who camped on this site.
halimatou@optusnet.com.au
www1.wooloo.org/sharonthorne/

Works Cited

"Dudley Flats." *Melbourne's living museum of the west inc.* 4 Dec, 2004. <http://www.livingmuseum.org.au/anrep/dudley.inc>

Ellis, Sister Maude. "Aborigines I Have Met." *Our Roving Cameraman 1960*. 23 Oct, 2005. <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/lbry/dig-prgm/dawn/pdfs/v9-s7/v9-s7-p6-11-wapdf> DOCUMENT NO LONGER AVAILABLE.

Gibson, Ross. *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*: St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002.

Hadfield, Molly. "Housing." *Women's Web*. 4 Dec. 2004. <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~womenweb/actions/Housing.htm>

Humphries, Barry. "Return of a Passionate Pilgrim." *The Age*. October 7 2005. 4 Nov.   2005.   <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/a-passionate-pilgrim/2005/ 10/06/1128562941049.inc>

Lowenstein, Wendy. *Weevils in the Flour*. Melbourne, Hyland House, 1979.

National Archives of Australia Transcript. "Cabinet Notebook 1/11." 1951 Reference: NAA: A11099. 24 Oct. 2005. <http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/ItemDetail.asp?M=0&B=4786869>

Osborn, Betty. "Betty Osborn – 'Girl Reporter.'" *The Fifth Estate*. Dec. 2001. 24 Oct, 2005. <http://fifth.estate.rmit.edu.au/December01/osborn/osborn.htm>

Otto, Kristin. *Yarra a diverting history of Melbourne's Murky River*. Melbourne, Australia: The Text Publishing Company, 2005.

"Barry Jones." *The National Interest*. 6th August 2000. 19 Oct, 2005. <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/natint/stories/s159469.htm>

"West Melbourne, Victoria." *Australian Places*. 19 Oct, 2005 <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/ncas/multimedia/gazetteer/list/westmelbourne.inc> DOCUMENT NO LONGER AVAILABLE.

TOP

Transformations

Issue No. 13   September 2006 — Making Badlands

Making Badlands All Over the World: Local Knowledge and Global Power
By *Steve Butler*

> "And so a remote backwater on the Central Queensland
> coast finds itself in the sights of the Pentagon's new global
> strategy" (*Dirty War*).

In *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* Ross Gibson suggests that badlands are constitutive of community, a necessary evil enabling good to flourish elsewhere. Bob Hawke's recent proposal for turning Australia's "dead heart" into the world's nuclear waste dump (AM. ABC. 27 Sept. 2005) is a classic example of badland making and a timely reminder of the relevance of Gibson's book. Closer to my home, on the Capricorn Coast of Central Queensland, several controversies are brewing about the uses to which our lands are put. [1] According to Gibson "Life in Central Queensland is a *direct continuation* of the systems that formed a new society during the frontier era" (54). He argues: "conflict, coercion and dissimulation defined the 'community' . . . rather than the integration and stewardship of the land" (106). The more things change, the more they stay the same: several examples of neo-colonialism threatening to turn more of the Capricorn region into a badland will be cited in this essay to show how "the past produces the present" (2-3). I intend to engage with some of the environmental issues facing the region through a prism of texts circulating in the local culture: films, newspaper articles, letters to the editor, web sites and journal articles, in an attempt to foreground the way that social realities are discursively constructed.

Ross Gibson's identification of the Capricorn region as a badland is both an epilogue and an inauguration. On one hand, the book's historical focus allows us to reconcile with the horrors of the past; on the other, the explanatory power of its central principles enables people to intervene effectively in contemporary politics. Gibson describes a badland as "a place where evil can be banished so that goodness can be credited, by contrast, in the regions all around" (17). This is a powerful concept but not without political implications. It is especially problematic for people who live in and around the area designated a badland because it implies they must sacrifice themselves and their natural environment for the greater good of the nation. My initial approach to the badlands project was to write about the mythical resonances of the Capricorn region: Rockhampton, where the city lights spell "Hell" and place names like River Styx and Mount Parnassus evoke old world connotations in a strange sub-tropical landscape. [2] I related this to the use of generic figures of speech such as "horror stretch" and "no-go area" (173) in *Seven Versions* and somewhat recklessly hoped to exploit that text's potential as a site for exploring the fascinating and contentious relationship between the real, the imaginary and the symbolic and specifically what Ross Gibson refers to as a "system of physical and metaphysical interdependence" (63). However, my literary and theoretical interests were soon displaced by a realization that a figurative badland is in danger of becoming a literal one. In terms of academic fields this marks a shift from literary and cultural studies into what Hochman and others describe as Green Cultural Studies: a discipline whose raison d'être is

> to examine nature through words, image, and model for the
> purpose of foregrounding potential effects representation
> might have on cultural attitudes and social practices which,
> in turn, affect nature itself. (Coupe 187)

A short list of recent environmental crises represented in the local media (not counting controversies surrounding beachfront high-rise developments and water

supply issues) includes: the development of a Joint Combined Training Centre (JCTC) in the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area (SBMTA); a proposed coalmine in a Capricorn Coast rainforest/water-catchment area [3]; the expansion of existing DPI forestry plantations into the Hedlow Basin wetland [4]; a shire council's use of S.6 herbicides on roadsides and creek crossings. [5] Despite the importance of all these issues and their clear relation to the making of badlands, I intend to focus on Shoalwater Bay - the global significance of developments in that space cannot be understated. [6] Shoalwater Bay has been described by the Commonwealth Government of Australia(1994 p. xxviii) as "the largest coastal area with high wilderness values between Cooktown and southern New South Wales." (Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry p. xxviii). In Alan Carter's recent film *Dirty War*, a local resident describes it as a "huge jewel on the coast of Australia" and points out its proximity to World Heritage listed areas of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. [7] With a 300 km coastline, Shoalwater Bay is the largest coastal and aquatic wilderness area with large undisturbed habitat areas in Queensland. Its landforms, flora and fauna include: mountain ranges, rainforest, dry open forest, melaleuca woodland, vine thickets, creeks, wetlands, lagoons, parabolic sand dunes, perched lakes, peat swamps, mudflats, mangroves and sea grass beds. The estuarine and marine environments provide a home to dolphins, whales, crocodiles, endangered sea turtles and dugongs and 445 species of fish. Shoalwater Bay's location between tropical and temperate climate zones gives it a high biodiversity value with many animals and plants reaching their northern or southern limits in the area. Over 1000 plant species are found in the area including five nationally threatened species. The area is home to almost 50% of Australia's bird species and offers a sanctuary to large numbers of bats and gliders (Commonwealth; EPA). In short, Shoalwater Bay is a place of great environmental value — "Queensland's Kakadu" is how it is sometimes described in local circles. If such a pristine area of a supposedly enlightened Western democracy can be threatened in the ways I will go on to describe, the world is in trouble — a veritable global badland is in the making.

Films, Film Makers and the SBMTA

Aside from environmental considerations, some people in the local community fear that the SBMTA is becoming (in the guise of the JCTC) an American base. Others suspect that weapons containing depleted uranium (DU) have been or will be used in training exercises. A Federal Government inquiry into the proposed JCTC recently gave it the "green light". Public submissions to the inquiry were invited but strictly limited and the Rockhampton hearing was only advertised in Brisbane and Townsville newspapers. Peter Murray of the Shoalwater Wilderness Awareness Group described the hearing as "a whitewash" (*Capricorn Coast Mirror* 9 Aug. 2006). Given that submissions from local people were actively discouraged in an underhand way, his description may not be inaccurate. In the same article a spokesperson for Friends of the Earth said "Recent incidents in the region show that the community is being kept out of the loop as far as military activity is concerned — sometimes with frightening consequences" (*Capricorn Coast Mirror* 26 July 2006). These comments reflect broader concerns in Australia about new sedition laws and their effect on freedom of speech and right of assembly. Clive Hamilton in *The Age* makes the point that

> The Howard Government's willingness to smother dissent poses a threat to the democratic process in Australia. Like individual citizens, community groups are being worn down and are increasingly reluctant to engage in the democratic process because they no longer believe that they can make a difference. (*The Age* 9 June 2004)

Concerns about the use of Shoalwater Bay and the legitimacy of the West's "war on terror" are highlighted in *Dirty War* and David Bradbury's *Blowin' in the Wind*. According to an ABC news report cited by Bradbury "Australia announced in July [2004] it would build a Joint Combined Training Centre for use with United States troops." Shoalwater Bay is the favoured site for the centre but America's track record with overseas military bases is not encouraging local people to welcome the development. In *Dirty War* environmental attorney Harry Kelso is cited as saying "the contamination on US military reservations, the closed ones, is the uncosted legacy of the twentieth century." Given his estimate that there are around "two thousand US bases in 140 countries world wide" it seems not unreasonable to question the necessity and desirability of the American armed forces setting up in a highly valuable Australian wilderness area. The US military's use of weapons containing depleted uranium is part of the problem, especially as allied forces such as Australia have been encouraged to use it.

According to Hansard (February 2003) "From 1981 to 1990 the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] expended 43,000 DU rounds at sea during training … sourced from the US Navy." Predictably, the Department of Defence will neither confirm nor deny whether this training occurred at Shoalwater Bay but local knowledge suggests that the Raymond and Townsend Island bombing ranges were likely targets. [8] Hansard also records that "There was no ammunition left in the inventory after 1990." A recent statement by the Department of Defence rather significantly makes no reference to whether DU weapons have been used in the past, only that they are not being used now. Either way, it makes little difference. According to Leuren Moret, a nuclear weapons scientist turned whistle-blower interviewed in *Blowin' in the Wind*: "DU particles are so fine that they behave like a gas. Anyone downwind or within a thousand miles of where this is being used will be exposed." The damage may have already been done. In Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere the damage has most certainly been done. [9]

Blowin' in the Wind, featuring a number of local people, premiered in what Bradbury describes as the "sleepy little coastal town" of Yeppoon shortly after stage one of joint military operation Talisman Sabre was held at Shoalwater Bay in mid 2005. [10] The film and attendant publicity helped mobilize the local community to seek answers from the Federal Government on the DU issue but so far nothing has been clarified. When stage two of Talisman Sabre begins in 2007, approximately thirty thousand military personnel will arrive in the area. According to a *Morning Bulletin* [local newspaper] report: "Shoalwater Bay resident Keith Jaffray believes protesters will outnumber troops at next year's Australia-United States training exercise" (MB 28 July 06). Meanwhile local interest in the SBMTA has shifted to the impending development of the JCTC featuring an "urban warfare training zone". The fact that the Americans will also use Shoalwater Bay to test laser-guided weapons (the so-called "smart bombs") is also causing concern. Without denying the need for a national defence force, recent developments in Shoalwater Bay involving agreements with other nations can be legitimately contested. Little or no consultation with local people and the broader Australian community has taken place on these important issues. Professor Ross Babbage, a defence consultant says (without a trace of irony) "There should be no concern on the part of the public at all" (*Blowin' in the Wind*).

David Bradbury, like Ross Gibson, has a longstanding interest in the Capricorn region. Perhaps in the way that Ross Gibson sees the place as epitomizing colonial evils and foundational myths, David Bradbury sees it as a frontline in the fight against the creeping fascism of a new world order. Bradbury first came to the attention of the local community back in 1992 when the "fight" was against the sandmining of water-laden dunes in Byfield and Shoalwater Bay. His film *Shoalwater Up for Grabs* featured prominent rock singer and environmental activist Peter Garret as narrator and helped ensure a positive outcome for the environment at the Federally instituted Commission of Enquiry. The sand miners subsequently took their money elsewhere and many people at the time thought the Department of Defence would do the right thing by the environment – they certainly made all the right noises gaining the support of the Capricorn Conservation Council which pragmatically accepted the ADF as an unlikely "white knight" (Commonwealth 141).

Goodwill between environmentalists and the ADF is rapidly evaporating with the recent Government announcement documented in *Blowin' in the Wind* of a Memorandum of Understanding "outlining future Australian participation in the US missile defence system – otherwise known as Son of Star Wars." The memorandum includes as part of its fine print the provision that no "Environmental Impact Study will be required before or after a military training exercise." David Bradbury observes that "This decision by the Australian government was made two weeks after the deal with Washington" (*Blowin' in the Wind*). Ross Gibson describes the Capricorn badlands as "a 'no-go' area for White Australia, a tract which like the dead centre could be cordoned off from sociability and everyday consciousness; a tract of Australia which was paradoxically and usefully not Australia" (169-170). In light of the recent Memorandum of Understanding and Australia's increasingly close ties with the US, Gibson's statement seems a particularly apt description of Shoalwater Bay. Pine Gap in the "dead centre" is another place with a similarly problematic sovereign status. Recent statements made about the purpose these "bases" serve have been unnervingly frank. US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeldt says: "We don't want to be in a static defence mode, we want to be in a more agile arrangement." Australian Minister Defence Robert Hill agrees: "If there are ways we can assist then we want to" (*Dirty War*). Professor Babbage says "The fact that the United States can access Australia in a crunch, in a crisis, if there were a major crisis in the Indian Ocean for instance then it can swing its forces through this area; that's a useful, very useful thing. (*Dirty War*)

The tenor of this discourse is "we own the game, take it or leave it". Elsewhere Professor Babbage says of the JCTC: "Frankly, what it is going to do is send a signal to anyone who wants to look, is that the ADF is going to be formidable and basically, don't mess with us" (*Blowin in the Wind*). Sounds like he is putting an Australian spin on Uncle Sam's old motto of "Don't tread on me". Babbage's statements dovetail neatly with George W. Bush's 2001 ultimatum: "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make; either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" (*Dirty War*). But that is not a decision, it's a threat. Everything in this political climate is presented as a fait accompli. Acquiescence is reflected in a statement made by a local Shire Mayor "It's got to be in someone's backyard, it just happens to be ours" (*Dirty War*). Media reports show that not everyone agrees; they might say, it doesn't *have* to be in "our backyard" or anyone else's. A recent letter to the *Morning Bulletin* (15 Aug. 2006) endorsing the military, describes peace activists as "B.A.N.A.N.A.s (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything)" but this overlooks the fact that Shoalwater Bay is no ordinary backyard; the letter conspicuously makes no reference to the training area's environmental values. As for the US responding to major crises in the Indian Ocean, they did nothing when East Timor needed help or when the "Boxing Day" tsunami of 2004 struck. Despite growing suspicion about the militarisation of Australian culture, *Dirty War* represents Capricorn Coast people as focused on the positives. The mayor of Livingstone Shire, understating the implications of what he calls "military tourism" says: "once every two years for six weeks, troops come to visit, we get to see them, there's some social interchanges, they go home. You know, they certainly do put money into the economy." This puts a rather benign face on the mightiest war machine of all time. And while there are good grounds for an alliance between the USA and Australia, there is nothing to suggest that the US military will respect Australian territory more than any of the other countries it has stationed forces (and let's not forget that DU sourced from the US Navy has been used in Australian territory). The Philippines, Puerto Rico and South Korea are experiencing enormous environmental, social and health problems created by US bases. According to one writer: "The U.S. military is refusing to clean up pollution at bases set to be closed in South Korea, the country's Defense Ministry said Tuesday, in a dispute stalling Washington's handover of the land back to South Korean control" (AP). In a Declaration of Ultimatum to the United States Navy, the people of Puerto Rico "accuse the U.S. Navy of polluting our air, water and land and contributing significantly to the high level of cancer and other diseases related to the degradation of the environment that affect our population" (Vieques Libre).

Not even the environmental integrity of the continental USA is respected by its armed forces. According to John Heilprin of AAP

> Thirty-four military bases shut down since 1988 are on the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund list of worst toxic waste sites – most of them for at least 15 years – and not one is completely cleaned up ... Hard-to-remove contaminants include trichloroethylene, a cleaning solvent linked to cancer, as well as asbestos-tainted soil, radioactive materials and leaded paint. (Helpirin)

A recent letter to the editor of the *Capricorn Coast Mirror* sums up local opposition to ongoing events at the Shoalwater Bay. The writer mentions (in addition to the DU issue) "A stray military phosphorous bomb washed up on a Cap Coast beach; live firing (that) causes extensive wild fires in the bush [and] a large area of mangroves totally dead, apparently burnt." The writer also cites a recent survey (http://aussa.anu.edu.au/) that assigned the Australian Defence Force "number one ranking for trustworthiness" but the Minister of Defence said the mangrove burnout was "due to the drought." Local knowledge suggests otherwise and few people on the Capricorn Coast would place much credence in the Government's cover story about the weather.

Depleted Uranium: "the nuclear war you have, when you're not having a nuclear war"

But not everybody is so suspicious of the military. One critic of *Blowin' in the Wind* is Dr John Whitehall whose article "Depleted Uranium and Media Hysteria" appeared in a recent issue of *Quadrant*. Responding to allegations made about DU in the film and elsewhere, Dr Whitehall acts as an apologist for the US military's use of nuclear waste as a weapon. Ignoring overwhelming evidence from Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo that DU is more dangerous than your

average ammunition, Whitehall chooses to launch a counter-attack on David Bradbury, the ABC and Al Jazeera for daring to publicize the issue. He cites a good deal of scientific literature but by the end of his essay is denouncing abortion and radiophobia.

Whitehall sums up his views in the following way: "First, there are grounds to argue that the taxpayer might expect a national media outlet to seek truth, especially on so-called 'science' shows." (20) It's significant that he puts quotation marks around science but not truth. There is no truth in suggesting DU weapons cause no harm. According to the Department of Defence: "The Navy ceased using the ammunition due to occupational health and safety considerations" (Hansard). If as Whitehead believes, DU is harmless, the ADF would have no grounds to stop using it for reasons of occupational health and safety. A study by epidemiologists Hindin, Brugge and Panikkar reveals a number of health risks associated with DU "In aggregate the human epidemiological evidence is consistent with increased risk of birth defects in offspring of persons exposed to DU." The authors believe there are "Indications that DU passes into humans more easily than previously thought after battlefield use." They also observe, "DU can disperse into the air and water," and cite a UNEP study that states "The most important concern is the potential for future groundwater contamination by corroding penetrators (ammunition tips made out of DU)" (Hinden, Brugge and Panikker).

Given that perched lakes, parabolic sand dunes and creeks within the SBMTA contribute to Yeppoon's water supply, the concern of local people is understandable. Perhaps fear that the water is contaminated by DU and other pollutants is one reason for the Livingstone Shire's decision to build a 50 km pipeline to the Fitzroy River. It wouldn't be the first time a military installation has poisoned a water supply. According to A.P.

> In 2000, the U.S. military apologized after admitting a one-time release of 20 gallons (75.7 litres) of the hazardous chemical formaldehyde into a drain that leads to the Han River, a main source of drinking water for Seoul's 12 million people. (AP)

Whitehall's second conclusion is that "deformed babies should not be recruited for political ends. It is sufficient that normal ones be kissed for elections" (20). Perhaps he should be more worried about the health implications of politicians kissing babies in the first place. Furthermore, he is clearly using "deformed babies" for his own political ends and the implication that we should ignore an epidemic of deformed babies in Iraq – or attribute it to "consanguinity" – is morally abhorrent (16). Whitehall continues: "Third, if there is any truth in the dangers of global warming, not to mention the dangers of remaining dependent on Middle East oil, it is time for reasoned consideration of nuclear energy. Allegations of deformations distort debate" (20). A rather tasteless pun is used to draw attention away from the fact that DU is not nuclear energy, it is nuclear waste. Even if there are some virtues to nuclear energy, it doesn't mean that DU weapons are a proper use of it.

Whitehall's fourth conclusion is as follows:

> Fourth, we are at war with terrorists and we have troops in Iraq. The opinions of men and women in the streets of the Middle East are of importance. Is it in our interests to have them believe the West is deforming their babies and clouding their world with toxic gas? (20)

This rhetorical question begs a direct answer: yes. In an increasingly interconnected world, the interests of others are also our own. If the USA placed other interests before its own military and economic dominance, the world might now be safe from terrorism. According to Harry Kelso the US Department of Defence owns thirty billion acres of land around the world and the US military's annual operating budget is $450 billion, effectively making it the largest industrial corporation in the world (*Dirty War*). A small percentage of this wealth would make a huge difference to global poverty as high profile activists like Bono and Bob Geldof routinely point out. In an address to President Bush, Bono (asking for an increase in American foreign aid) said "America gives less than 1% now. We're asking for an extra 1% to change the world, to transform millions of lives … 1% is national security, enlightened self interest, and a better, safer world rolled into one" (Vox). Whitehall pushes the envelope of credulity by claiming,

"radiophobia, the unrealistic fear of radiation is, itself, a weapon of mass destruction" (20). Here he invokes something essentially imaginary in order to draw attention away from something clearly destructive and real. He cites some very rubbery figures to shift the blame for the effects of the Chernobyl disaster onto the victims:

> Though some thirty-one individuals died from the acute
> effects of the explosion in Chernobyl, over 1000 workers in
> the initial response are believed to have committed suicide
> for fear of the effects. Or because of the effects. Worse, up
> to 200,000 otherwise healthy pregnancies are believed to
> have been aborted in Europe because their parents suffered
> unwarranted fears. (20)

But Whitehall doesn't know the fears were "unwarranted" or that the pregnancies were "otherwise healthy;" no sources are cited to support the claims. His next overstatement is "Radiophobia kills, and by promoting the idea that depleted uranium in Shoalwater Bay is a threat to the health of infants in surrounding towns, the ABC is promoting radiophobia" (20). Perhaps Whitehall should simply call ABC journalists "killers" instead of "environmentalists and peaceniks" (19) as he does elsewhere in the essay. Maybe radiophobia really means "fear of hearing something on the radio you don't like". Perhaps he's hoping that people will stop listening to the ABC – he certainly wouldn't be the first conservative critic or politician to want that. However, the local ABC can hardly be expected to ignore issues and events in the area. If the Department of Defence made an unequivocal statement about the use of DU in Shoalwater Bay the matter would be resolved. Until then the ABC and people in general are justified in pursuing the matter. People's ability to remain silent in the interests of national security has limits. When Whitehall disparages the "peaceniks on the ABC," (19) he reveals a mindset that should have disappeared with the cold war. Discrediting the anti-DU lobby with insulting epithets does not hurt the peace movement, detract from the evils of war or help the war on terror.

For a spokesperson like Whitehall to seize the opportunity to defend DU weaponry on scientific grounds ironically shows how desperate the so-called "coalition of the willing" is for legitimacy. Whitehall's final conclusion is the most outrageous of all:

> To allow the claim to be made that the deformations of a
> dead infant near Rockhampton could represent Australia's
> first DU baby is an unscientific and cruel intrusion into its
> and other parents' minds which could result in the
> unnecessary termination of pregnancies. (20)

The likelihood of anyone in the Capricorn region aborting a baby for fear of DU is remote to say the least – more badlands myth making. And even if they did, the ultimate responsibility would lie with armament manufacturers and the Department of Defence, not peace activists and the local ABC.

Conclusion

Whether weapons containing depleted uranium have been used in Shoalwater Bay may never be known, but the "smoking gun" in this case will continue to smoulder for 4.5 billion years. In the meantime, the Department of Defence should at least confirm or deny the claims, as residents shouldn't be kept ignorant about the use of nuclear waste in their area. But the people of the Capricorn region aren't holding their collective breath. When you live in the badlands you get used to being treated badly – it goes with the territory. Yet, if the region's land were truly bad, governments and big business would not own so much of it. In a Baudrillardian sense, the scandal of the badland as a "historical crime scene" (Gibson 1) obscures or dissimulates the existence of a greater scandal: the way the land continues to be used and abused. But in a social and political climate where to speak out against the government and military might constitute an act of sedition, most people are likely to remain silent about the use of DU weapons and the construction of joint training facilities for the war against terror. It looks increasingly like governments and military can do anything they want all over the world *and* in our own backyards. Perhaps the most bizarre, if not frightening aspect of this issue is that it all revolves around simulation and what Jean Baudrillard calls the "hyperreal". [11] In effect, the SBMTA is a hyperreal military Disneyland, a miniature theatre of war simultaneously crystallizing and dissimulating the militarisation of the world and

Australian culture. The fact that war games are played out (from now on without an EIS) in such close proximity to the World Heritage areas of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is a clear sign that the ADF has reneged on its responsibility to ensure that environmental and defence priorities within the area are given equal weight.

There is no hegemony without contestation, however, and in a democracy no decision is ever final. The JCTC is presented as a fait accompli and Talisman Sabre 2007 (the proposed military manoeuvres) will probably go ahead as planned, but a groundswell of awareness and resistance is emerging in the Capricorn area as reflected in the local media. A *Capricorn Coast Mirror* article entitled "Military Under Fire" begins the following way: "Low flying helicopters with armed men visible inside, military devices washed up on shore, it all sounds like scenes from some movie. However, this is no movie – it is happening in our own backyard." The pop culture tenor of the article is significant; it means that anti-war sentiments are gaining currency. Politicians and the media are like weather vanes, they go which way the wind blows and if enough people don't want the World Heritage standard SBMTA developed or degraded further, they can prevail. The future is not predestined despite what (the increasingly influential) religious fundamentalists would have us believe.

Just as culture is a work in progress, so too is nature. As Ross Gibson describes it: the Capricorn hinterland behaves like a live thing, naturally present and always evolving – a creature animated by its own powers" (177). If culture is dynamic and nature is dynamic, it stands to reason that sites where culture and nature intersect in dramatic ways will be doubly dynamic. Shoalwater Bay on the Capricorn Coast of Central Queensland is one such place and it may only be a matter of time before the forces of nature return like the repressed and wreak havoc on our increasingly militaristic culture's best-laid plans. The challenge for people who live in the Capricorn region is to use their local knowledge to contest the prevailing perception of their living space and engage with policymaking and the practices that derive from it. The size of the region, the nature of the landscape, its relative isolation and lack of population represent a temptation to exploitation and abuse that government, military and big business apparently can't resist. In a submission to the 1994 Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry, Shoalwater Bay, Jon McCabe observed:

> There is a perception, I think, in Brisbane and Canberra, that Central Queensland is, in the words of one of our ex-politicians, "the Ruhr valley of Australia." It is the place where we extract resources and ship them out of Gladstone. And I think there is the perception that the residents of this region accept that and do not seek for the quality of life issues that other people seek. (Commonwealth of Australia 230)

Much has changed in the Capricorn region since these comments were made. Local residents are not as complacent as they once might have been and dominant institutions can no longer rely on their silent consent. The making of badlands continues apace. Ross Gibson asks us to seek "something good we can do in response to the bad in our lands" (3). One response begins by asking is the badness in the land or does it reside elsewhere? If we analyse the discourses and practices of the various agencies and institutions governing the badland, it may enable us to formulate effective tactics of resistance to their strategies of domination.

Steve Butler is a performing artist, writer and academic with a longstanding interest in the mythical resonances of the Capricorn region. He teaches Literary and Cultural Studies at CQU. s.butler@cqu.edu.au

Endnotes

[1]

The local region: hinterland of the Capricorn Coast of Central Queensland, Australia. (Image courtesy of Google Earth)

[return]

[2]

Front page of the *Morning Bulletin* 26 March 2003

[return]

[3]

Notice of Proposed grant of exploration permits the *Morning Bulletin* 8 Feb. 2006

[return]

[4]

A letter to the *Capricorn Coast Mirror* summarizing environmental concerns with the Department of Primary Industry's Hedlow Basin wetland forestry development.

Draining the Hedlow Basin Wetlands

[return]

[5]

The *Morning Bulletin* 29 June 2006

[return]

[6] I mention these other environmental issues as examples to support the basic thesis that the identification of the Capricorn region as a badland has a real affect on land use. Space does not permit consideration of these problems here, but in a sense they are all related (for example, the herbicide in question possesses the militaristic name "Task Force" implying a war against nature. As Donna Harraway puts it: "global technology appears to denature everything, to make everything a malleable matter of strategic decisions and mobile production and reproduction processes." (qtd. in Coupe 188)

[return]

[7]

Shoalwater Bay (Film still from *Blowin' in the Wind* courtesy of B Sharp productions)

[return]

[8]

Raymond and Townsend Island: a World Heritage bombing range. "Offshore Islands are not surveyed as part of the NWI (National

Wilderness Inventory), but Townsend Island is likely to be of moderate wilderness value" ("Commonwealth of Australia" 119). To see a larger view of this image click on the following link.
www.geocities.com/ peaceconvergence/ postcard.inc

[return]

[9] A cursory search of the Internet will reveal hundreds of web sites dedicated to exposing the reality of DU. The link below will take you to a site with very graphic and disturbing images.
http://www.mindfully.org/Nucs/2003/DU-Baby2003.htm
[return]

[10] *Dirty War* describes Yeppoon in similar terms as "sleepy sea change kind of town."
[return]

[11] 9/11 and the "war on terror" have been exhaustively analysed by Baudrillard and other critics in terms of simulation, spectacle and the mass media: a selection of articles is listed here:
www.egs.edu/faculty/baudrillard/baudrillard-the-spirit-of-terrorism.inc; and
www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2_1/kellnerpf.htm
[return]

Works Cited

About the Film :: BSharp Productions :: *Blowin' in the Wind* 18 Aug. 2006
<http://www.bsharp.net.au/htm/the-film.htm>

AP. "U.S., South Korea in dispute over pollution at U.S. bases set for closure" Planetsave.com. 24 Jan. 2006. 17 Aug 2006.
<http://www.planetsave.com/ps_mambo/index.php?option= com_content&task=view&id=6567&Itemid=33>

Australia. Commonwealth of Australia. Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry Shoalwater Bay, Capricorn Coast, Queensland Interim Report, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1994.

Australia. Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES 2002-2003 Answers to Questions on notice from Department of Defence. 18 Aug. 2006 <http://www.google.com/search? hl=en&lr=&q=Hansard+ Depleted+uranium+43,000&btnG=Search>

The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes. (AuSSA) 2005. 18 Aug. 2006
<http://aussa.anu.edu.au/>

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Blowin' in the Wind. Dir. David Bradbury. Frontline Films, 2005.

Capricorn Coast Mirror [Rockhampton]

"Chemical use a problem: residents" *The Morning Bulletin* Rockhampton: APN News & Media, 29/06/06.

Dirty War. Dir. Alan Carter. Alley Kat Productions, 2005.

Environmental Protection Agency. "Shoalwater and Corio Bays" 18 Aug. 2006
<http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/nature_conservation/habitats/wetlands/wetland_

management_profiles/saltmarsh_wetlands/national_conservation_status/>

Gibson, Ross. *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002.

Hamilton, Clive. "Peter Costello should practise what he preaches" *The Age* 9 June 2004. 17 Aug. 2006. <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/06/08/1086460293197.inc?oneclick=true>

"HELL-OH!" *The Morning Bulletin* Rockhampton: APN News & Media, 26/03/03.

Helpirin, John. "Dozens of closed military bases on EPA list of worst toxic sites" 18 Aug 2006
<http://www.nctimes.com/articles/2005/05/12/military/brac/51205122014.txt>

Hindin, Rita, Doug Brugge, and Bindu Panikkar. "Teratogenicity of Depleted Uranium Aerosols: A Review from an Epidemiological Perspective", *Environmental Health: A Global Access Science Source* 4 (2005). Amherst: University of Massachusetts School of Public Health and Health Sciences, 2005. 18 Aug. 2006. <http://www.ehjournal.net/content/4/1/17>

Hochman, Jhan. "Green Cultural Studies." *The Green Studies Reader*. Ed. Laurence Coupe. New York: Routledge, 2000: 187-192

"Huge Protest expected at joint exercise" *The Morning Bulletin* Rockhampton: APN News & Media, 28/07/06.

"Letter to the Editor" *Capricorn Coast Mirror* Rockhampton: APN News & Media, 07/06/06.

"Letter to the editor" *The Morning Bulletin* Rockhampton: APN News & Media, 15/08/06.

"Military Under Fire" *Capricorn Coast Mirror* Rockhampton: APN News & Media, 26/07/06.

Morning Bulletin [Rockhampton]

Queensland Government. "Notice of Proposed Grant of Exploration Permit" *Morning Bulletin* [Rockhampton] 8 Feb. 2006.

Shoalwater Up for Grabs. Dir. David Bradbury. Frontline Films. 1994.

&lsdquo;Swag fears 'realized' through expansion" *Capricorn Coast Mirror* Rockhampton: APN News & Media, 09/08/06.

Vincent, Michael. "Hawke nominates Australia as world's nuclear waste dump." *AM*. ABC, Sydney: 27 Sept. 2006. 18 Aug. 2006
<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2005/s1469140.htm>

Vieques Libre. "Declaration of ULTIMATUM of the People of Vieques to the Unites States Navy." 2006. 17 Aug. 2006. <http://www.viequeslibre.org/>

Vox, Bono. 'Bono's Remarks to the National Prayer Breakfast' 02.02.06 18 Aug. 2006. <http://www.data.org/archives/000774.php>

"Wetlands Concern" *Capricorn Coast Mirror* Rockhampton: APN News & Media, 09/11/05.

Whitehall, John. "Depleted Uranium and Media Hysteria." *Quadrant Magazine*. 49.9 (2005). 18 Aug. 2006
<http://www.quadrant.org.au/php/archive_details_list.php?article_id=1198>

Vieques Libre. *Declaration of ULTIMATUM of the People of Vieques to the Unites States Navy*. 2006. 17 Aug. 2006. <http://www.viequeslibre.org/>

TOP

Transformations

Issue No. 13   September 2006 — Making Badlands

"I wish I was anywhere but here": "Structure of address" in the badlands

By *Constance Ellwood*

> *Why does some country get called bad? Partly it is because the law needs the outlaw for reassuring citizens that the unruly and the unknown can be named and contained even if they cannot be annihilated. Their function is to acknowledge but also to deny insufficiencies that are part of everyday social and psychic reality* (Gibson 179).

This paper began its gestation process after the riots which took place over a period of four nights in early March 2005 in the suburb of Macquarie Fields in the western suburbs of Sydney, NSW, Australia. The riots were sparked after a high-speed police car chase in which two young men in their late teens were killed. Anger of local residents erupted in response to the deaths of the young men and was targeted at local police. This anger took the form of street riots which continued for several days. The driver of the car in which the two young men were killed, who had fled the scene, was taken into custody a week after the riots. In the ensuing days, NSW police arrested 59 people and laid 186 charges for a variety of offences including assaulting police, malicious damage, malicious wounding, possession of an offensive weapon, possession of illegal drugs, and rioting (NSW Police).

Responses in the print media to the Macquarie Fields riots by the government and police, and reinforced by talkback radio commentary, involved a hardline condemnation of the rioters, and, by association, of their families. There was also a call by an Opposition member of the State Government to increase the powers of the police who were seen to have been insufficiently tough. [1] In these responses, the suburb of Macquarie Fields, on the outskirts of the sprawling mass which is Sydney, could be read as a threshold space which, in a symbolic way, marks "not only the boundaries of a society but its values and beliefs as well" (Hetherington 49). The comments by government and police spokespeople which dominated the print media positioned the rioters as criminals acting wilfully against civil society. And the suburb, in a metonymic extension, came to carry, but not for the first time, the marker of this antagonistic choice for criminality and the antisocial. As with other discussions which critique the role of the media in law-and-order debates (see, for example, Goodall), we see here a situation in which the media constructs identity according to familiar discourses, and how representations of the rioters pre-empted responses and concealed realities.

The paper discusses some conditions of this event and the responses which it provoked. While acknowledging that there is an always fragile balance between the possibly good intentions of social policy and its sometimes paradoxical consequences, the paper seeks to show some ways in which the production of space and identity in this site have been obscured in social relations of power. It attempts to delineate some of the social and economic conditions for the riots, in the light of the government's vigorous denial, at least initially, of the impact of any such conditions. It then seeks to develop an argument in which the riots can be seen as a "structure of address" (Butler), as a form of speech, arising out of and expressing these conditions.

In *Precarious Life*, Butler refers to "the vocalization of agony that is not yet language or no longer language" as the cause of our awakening to the precariousness of the Other's life (39). In this text, she is referring to the Othering experienced in contemporary political contexts, above all through U.S. military power, by the political prisoners of places like Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. While not wishing to engage in comparisons of suffering, I aim

to demonstrate in this paper that a related Othering and dehumanisation is carried out on the Macquarie Fields rioters in the responses to them as criminals. I ask what it would mean to hear their Molotov cocktails as "non-languaged vocalisations of agony". Given ongoing calls for change arising from reports on both public housing and youth needs (Spiller Gibbins Swan Pty Ltd; Pain) and the continuing failures of governments to participate in effective community consultation in relation to these calls, the riots can be seen as an expression of an anguish, an anguish which has been ignored. In the light of this failure, by governments, to understand this expression and respond appropriately, the paper situates itself within a more general call for an ethics of listening (Corradi Fiumara). As part of this call, the paper draws on the voices of the residents and the youths themselves.

Some conditions of possibility for the riots

The riots took place in Glenquarie Estate, a public housing estate established in the early 1970s within the Macquarie Fields suburb. It is possible to suggest contradictory reasons for the establishment of public housing in such a location. Its distance from the city, and the lack of facilities in the area, encourage the perception of the area as a dumping ground for "the unruly and the unknown [who] can be named and contained even if they cannot be annihilated" (Gibson 179). Indeed, according to recent research, the Estate today contains "a large number of socio-economically disadvantaged individuals and families, many already experiencing acute social and mental health problems before they are housed on the estate, many long-term unemployed and unemployable, all housed together at a site which is geographically isolated and increasingly losing services, and with them, job opportunities" (Lee 39). In the most recent census, unemployment figures for the broader area were more than twice the Australian average, at 11.3%, while average weekly family income was only two thirds of the average for greater Sydney (Australian Bureau of Statistics). In a study by the University of Western Sydney, the unemployment rate amongst youth aged between 15 and 19 years in the larger local government area (Macarthur) averaged between 15% and 17% in the 1999 to 2000 period (Centre for Regional Research and Innovation).

At the time of the riots, the argument that social and economic conditions on the Estate had an impact on residents and may be a contributing factor to the riots was put forward by academics and others. However, this argument was not countenanced by the government. The then Premier of NSW, Bob Carr, was unequivocal, stating that "There are no excuses for this behaviour" (cited in Jopson, Davies and Norrie). Rather than acknowledge the correlation between entrenched social disadvantage and public housing estates (Spiller Gibbins Swan Pty Ltd), the Premier refused the notion of social disadvantage, reiterating: "I am not going to have it said that this behaviour is caused by social disadvantage. A lot of people grew up in circumstances of social disadvantage and they did not go out and attack the police with bricks and light fires in the streets" (Jopson, Davies and Norrie). This view was supported by the Commissioner of Police, Commissioner Moroney. Citing his own life experiences of growing up on a public housing estate, he claimed "It's about personal choices. It's about life choices. If you can live on a housing commission estate and aspire to be the Prime Minister of Australia, that's a life choice" (cited in Porter and Stapleton). Both the Premier and the Commissioner saw the riots in terms of an implicit agency held by the rioters to choose their way of life, as a choice between a rational and reasonable participation in civil society or an unreasonable choice for criminality. Another contributor to the discussion, an ex-detective speaking in an opinion editorial, also supported the idea of *choice, not circumstance* (Priest), a point to which I return below. The position taken by the Premier and others was strongly represented in the media in the days immediately following the riots while the notion of social disadvantage was relatively muted, allowing a dominant view to circulate in the public imaginary of the police as having been mistreated and of the rioters as trash deserving of water cannons and rubber bullets, as a resident of another Western Sydney suburb told me.

Life on the Estate

The concentration of social disadvantage and associated poverty in the Glenquarie Estate has been seen, by those on the estate, as an error of judgment, as having created a ghetto of disadvantaged and marginalised citizens. As a local community centre coordinator commented, "everyone has admitted that the estate was one of the worst blunders of the last century … they have created terrible social problems" (cited in Jopson, Davies and Norrie). In the views of one resident, the problems of the area derive in part from the lack of support given to single-parent families who make up a high percentage of

those on the Estate. "Single parents suffer dreadfully and some give the area a bad reputation which needs to be organised against. A lot of very young single mothers are given a Housing Commission house and left to get on with it. They are trying to organise a budget and are yet young enough to want to get out and enjoy life and forget the rent. That's why they need some attention" (Luckett 59). This resident saw a link between an overrepresentation in the population of single mothers, and increased levels of juvenile vandalism, commenting "I think this was possibly due to the fact that there didn't seem to be many men about. When an area has an even social mix there is usually harmony. One counterbalances the other"(Luckett 58). This resident's view reflects more recent housing policy which seeks to provide for a mix of income levels in new developments (Toon and Falk).

Another aspect for residents of the area is its social and physical isolation (Lee). The area is relatively poorly serviced by public transport, and facilities are noticeably limited when compared with the not-so-distant yet difficult-to-access possibilities of the inner city. Ongoing problems with public transport and isolation are mentioned in an oral history of the area which covers a period of almost 100 years (Luckett). Residents commented on the distance from parts of the Estate to the railway line, the necessity of having a car and the relocation of basic facilities such as shopping and banking out of the area. One resident cited the five-hours needed to go, on public transport, to buy the Halal meat required by her Muslim family (Luckett). [2] From the point of view of young people especially, facilities are inadequate and have been so since the early days of the Estate. An early report carried out by the National Youth Council of Australia in 1974, for example, which asked local young people their opinion of the area, reported that "60% complained about the general social environment, i.e. lack of facilities for entertainment in the area - no halls for dances etc. 29% complained about the general physical environment, especially mentioning the isolation" (National Youth Council of Australia 11). A concern over inadequate public transport services and the need to travel outside of the area to find work was also an aspect of a 2001 report (Centre for Regional Research and Innovation).

In this early part of the 21st century with its high unemployment rates and uncertainties, this geographic isolation manifests in a sense of social isolation and hopelessness, also experienced by earlier generations who have been subjected to this same isolation. The parallels, in the exchange below, between the adults' beliefs and those of the young man demonstrate these intergenerational cycles of beliefs about life and future prospects (McDowell); both the 16-year-old boy and the adults concur about the hopelessness of the boy's situation.

> Female: My boy's home now, I left him in bed, he hasn't
> been up, there's just nothing to do. I'm not getting up,
> that's his attitude.
> Researcher: How old is he?
> Female: 16...[..]
> Male: There's no escape at all, not at all for them. (cited in
> Lee 40)

The social malaise which manifests in young people's apathy and sense of hopelessness about their prospects was strongly expressed by one resident in an interview at the time of the riots: "Life here is putrid. What's here for them? Nothing" (Jopson, Davies and Norrie).

Comments by the young people also published at the time of the riots demonstrate clearly this sense that they feel there is nothing for them to do in the area. Importantly, in terms of causes of the riots, their comments also demonstrate the links between "hanging around" in streets and shopping malls and an increased surveillance of their activities by police, which is associated with a growing criminalisation of hanging around (Pain 154). The resultant high level of antagonism between the young people and police is also clear: "We got nothing to do here. So the cops harass us, they pull up at four o'clock in the morning and play the song Bad Boys really loud and put their sirens on. We want revenge" (15-year-old male quoted in Jopson, Davies and Norrie); "What's there to do here, man. Whatever you do the cops come after you. You walk down the street, you get harassed by the coppers" (19-year-old male quoted in Totaro and Connolly); "For the past 12 years the cops have been coming here throwing blokes into the back of paddy wagons and taking them on joyrides where they beat the shit out of them. It's no wonder everyone who lives around here hates the f---ing cops" (Statement by a youth cited by Haines). The statement, "I wish I was anywhere but here",was cited as being the text of a T-shirt worn by a

member of the group known as the Kelly Gang, one of whom was the driver of the car which crashed. Debbie Kelly, the mother of three members of the Gang, stated "The boys just need someone to trust them, someone who doesn't call them scum. The police treat them like dirt" (quoted in McDonald, Stapleton and Gosch).

Indeed, this complaint, that there is nothing to do and nowhere to go, is a common response from young people when challenged over their behaviour (Pain). But the criminalisation of "hanging around" is a heavy-handed response symptomatic of a failure by authorities to acknowledge that there is a clash between young people's needs to develop and perform their identities and the fact that public spaces are most often adult spaces. The street, specifically, is one arena in which masculine performance is constructed, and car racing in suburban streets provides a practice and a site for "issuing rhetorical challenges to the law" (McDowell 62). A heavy-handed response to "hanging around" contributes to the deep mistrust of police and the institutional victimisation experienced by many young people (Pain).

A spiralling cycle of behaviours can be seen at work here in which boredom provokes behaviours which are viewed negatively by police, and are often subject to criminalisation. Responses by police are viewed as provocation by the young people who then enact further "bad" behaviour prompting further retaliation by police.

Compounding this sense of surveillance experienced by young people, is a similar sense in the community at large of being under surveillance. At the time of building, the Glenquarie housing project was regarded as innovative due to implementation of Radburn principles of housing layout, in which dwellings have pedestrian access, leading to schools and shops on one side, and roads and vehicle access on the other. The Radburn approach was initially seen as "a way of humanising" public housing estates (Toon and Falk 144). However, the layout was experienced by some residents as compromising of their privacy and of their conception of a respectable family life. The fact that the front door was the backdoor, and the backdoor was the front door meant that visitors could arrive and leave at any point. "People were always coming into the back door because the road was there. I didn't like it much when the kids were small. You always had washing in the laundry and that was the main entrance to your home….The street was your backyard" (Luckett 67). Because of this lack of differentiation, there was effectively no private area to the houses. The Radburn layout can be seen to work in a way similar to the panopticon discussed by Foucault in that family life was constantly on display and families were effectively subjected to a kind of "axial visibility" (Foucault 200). Another resident commented that the houses "weren't designed for privacy" (Luckett 79). This sense of undergoing surveillance was aggravated by the fact that "everybody could see in because the fence palings were spaced out. Everybody knew your business and though I was a private sort of person I had to adapt because we had no choice" (Luckett 79).

In the 1990s, a change of policy led to a de-Radburnisation move in which the process of renovating houses to relocate front and back doors of dwellings was begun. A dual justification is evident for this process. On the one hand, the Radburn layout was attributed (Spiller Gibbins Swan Pty Ltd 26), albeit without hard evidence, with being one of the causes of the Estate's social problems. At the same time, new housing policy which favoured a mix of public housing rental and private ownership required the sale to private owners of some housing stock. For this to occur, increased saleability was important. However, housing lots in a Radburn layout, which require public maintenance of public spaces, are less saleable than more conventional lots (Toon and Falk). In both cases, political and economic imperatives are strongly evident, while the life world experiences of residents are occluded from consideration.

Contrasting dominant media representations of the rioters and police

In the light of these conditions, I now turn to consider the way the rioters were represented in two major Sydney newspapers, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*, at the time of the riots. I focus on statements, referred to earlier, by the Premier and the Commissioner of Police, and on their association of the rioters with criminality and with "choosing" to enact this criminality. This representation of the rioters could also be found in an opinion piece written by a former detective. In this piece, the rioters were positioned as active, in a binary opposition with the police who were aligned with a kind of passivity. Thus, while the rioters were addressed as criminals, as "rock throwing hoodlums", "disaffected local youths", "urban hoodlums", who had carried out "wanton behaviour" (Priest), the police were described as the passive victims, the

"stationary targets"(Op cit), of unprovoked violence. In these representations, the young rioters are aligned with activity and choice; as having wilfully chosen to take up these antagonistic positions in which they actively create trouble. The police on the other hand are positioned as without choice; the passivity of their *stationary target* position implies a kind of abnegation of choice which by implication is imposed from above. Described as "unable or unwilling to quell the disturbance" (Priest), they have apparently not been given the powers to act more forcefully by their superiors. As I have attempted to argue, the positioning of the young rioters as having choice is belied by the conditions of their existence and the fact that these cycles of poverty and crime are intergenerational.

In this positioning, the binarisation *active criminal* versus *passive target/victim* becomes fixed. The possibility that the rioters themselves may also be victims, while the police may also be criminals becomes impossible to consider. In fact, a number of statements were made which implicated the police in the death of the two boys – it was implied that the car chase was an unnecessary and malign attempt to kill the boys and there were also some questions around the actual circumstances of the accident and the police involvement in it – but also, as we saw above, the police, over a period of time, have continually harassed the youth of the area. A reverse alignment, with the possibility of police as criminal and youth as victims cannot be taken seriously if the overriding representation of the youth is that of *criminal and hoodlum*, while that of police is *stationary target*.

A second effect of the binary is that no complexity is allowed into the picture. The Premier's comment that there is only one source to blame is patently simplistic. His statement, "There is one blame here and that is the people who went out and threw bricks and caused riots. There is only one thing to say to them: the police will get them, because they are engaged in illegal behaviour" (Jopson, Davies and Norrie), is unable to accommodate the complexity of human life and human behaviour. The idea that the youth may be both carrying out criminal acts – and throwing a Molotov cocktail can undeniably be seen in this way – while also expressing their very real frustrations at not only harassment by police, but also the frustrations of being victim to particular social and economic conditions with limited outcomes for employment and quality of life, cannot be countenanced within such a framing of the problem.

A week after the riots, the Premier did acknowledge what he called the "so-called disadvantage of Macquarie Fields" but he claimed to have chosen not to talk about this "in the middle of a law enforcement challenge" because it would have sent "a confusing message to police, a message of weakness to the wrongdoers, and it would have undercut decent, battling families in the area" (quoted in Davies). The binary is still evident here with the "wrongdoers" placed in opposition to "decent, battling families" and the confused police caught somewhere in the middle.

Importantly, the binary which operates here positions the rioters as invalid speakers. In aligning them unequivocally with the criminal and the bad, this binary thinking precluded the possibility of listening to the content of the rioters' statements as an attempt to communicate something; it precluded the possibility of considering the communicative intent of their actions and comments. Being positioned as criminals, wrongdoers and hoodlums ensures the rioters are not given the right to address the government and be heard.

Structure of address

In opposition to a positioning of the rioters as criminals, I want to suggest that it is possible to recognise that underlying the riots is an address on the part of the rioters, in terms of the social and economic conditions of their lives and their lack of hope for their futures. I draw here on Butler's notion of "structure of address" and her suggestion that the terms of this structure of address must be met for the functioning of moral authority. I argue that the responses to the Macquarie Fields riots demonstrate clearly that the terms of a basic structure of address have not been met.

Structure of address refers not merely to a top-down address or to statements by one in a more powerful position to one in a less powerful position, but to a complex process of identities and ethics. At the simplest level the term refers to the idea that when we speak, we address others and expect that we will be listened to and understood. However, in this case, there is a unidirectional hegemony in which, as I will show, the government and police assume only the right to be listened to, but not the responsibility to listen to others. When the Premier states that there is "only one blame here" and this is "illegal behaviour", the pleas of the rioters are effectively erased, and are made invalid.

The actual statements by the rioters are thus not taken as "an address" because of the prior effacement of them as valid speakers. In other words, what they have said or may say is not seen as a valid contribution to the discussion. While the government and police can be readily accepted as speakers with the right to be heard – they even have "spokespeople" to do that job – the rioters are not given the right to "take the floor" and be listened to. In the description and labelling of the rioters by the government and the police, their actions are condemned absolutely. The rioters' own descriptions of police, their complaints about being harassed, and the violence which erupts out of the complex interplay between this harassment and the socioeconomic conditions of their existence, although expressed and even sometimes printed in the media, are not heard by the government. In this sense the structure of address which the rioters direct at the government fails; it falls on deaf ears.

At a more complex level, there is a moral imperative implicit in the notion of *structure of address*. It recognises that any address brings with it particular understandings of those to whom it is addressed. We speak, in other words, in ways which presume certain identities of our listeners. Thus, our identities are made, and we come into being, at the moment we are addressed. This understanding, that we come to exist in the moment of being addressed, refers to and draws on an approach which recognises the constitutive effects of discourse on the identity of the subject. It is this constitutive effect of the terms used to describe the police and the rioters which has been discussed above. In naming the rioters unequivocally as criminals, the address fixes and "contains" (Gibson) the identities of the players and precludes not only further apposite discussion but also apposite solutions. And, as Butler shows, "something about our existence proves precarious when [...] address fails" (130).

Conclusion

The Othering and dehumanisation which is carried out on the Macquarie Fields rioters provides governments with a way of denying "the insufficiencies that are part of everyday social and psychic reality" (Gibson 179). To acknowledge the insufficiencies of public housing policy and the needs of young people, and to hear their "bricks and fires in the street" as non-languaged vocalisations of agony, would require a different response, one that did not unequivocally position the rioters as criminals.

The events assist us to consider what it means to acknowledge the humanity of those who, in the first instance, do not appear to conform to notions of "civilized behaviour". While it may be true to say that if you treat people like criminals they will act like them, and that the portrayal of the rioters as criminal is therefore a socially unskilful way of dealing with the riots, we have to go beyond such an analysis. It is also no longer enough to criticise socially unskilful planning decisions which contribute to the social conditions of satellite suburbs like Macquarie Fields and thus, ultimately, to the riots. Rather, it is time to consider the ethics of the situation, to question structures of address, and, in doing so, find other roles in which to act.

Constance Ellwood is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the Narrative Discourse and Pedagogy Research Group within the School of Education at the University of Western Sydney. Her current research investigates transformative pedagogies for youth at risk, from within a poststructuralist framework. C.ELLWOOD@uws.edu.au

Endnotes

[1] Three levels of government in Australia are the federal, state and local. State governments are responsible for law and order.
[return]

[2] The ethnic demographics of the suburb in the 2002 census showed that about two-thirds to three-quarters of the population identified as being of English-speaking background or descent. The remaining third represented some 25

countries (Australian Bureau of Statistics).
[return]

Works Cited

Australian Bureau of Statistics. *2002 Census Data: Macquarie Fields (Suburb), Basic Community Profile - Macquarie Fields*, 2006. 1 June 2006 <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@cpp.nsf/DetailsPage/SSC124512001?Open Document&tabname=Details&prodno=SSC12451&issue=2001&num=&view=&>

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London and New York: Verso, 2004.

Centre for Regional Research and Innovation. *Environmental Scan for the Macarthur Youth Commitment*. Sydney: University of Western Sydney, 2001.

Corradi Fiumara, Gemma. *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*. London: New York: Routledge, 1990.

Davies, Anne. "Carr Searches for Social Trigger to Riots." *Sydney Morning Herald* March 5 2005: 1.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Allen Lane, 1977.

Gibson, Ross. *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002.

Goodall, Heather. "Constructing a Riot: Television News and Aborigines." *Media Information Australia* 68 (1993): 70-77.

Haines, Jenny. "Letters to the Editor." *Sydney Morning Herald*. March 1 2005: 12.

Hetherington, Kevin. *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Jopson, Debra, Anne Davies, and Justin Norrie. "Not Disadvantaged, Just Bad, Says Carr." *Sydney Morning Herald*. March 1 2005: 1.

Lee, Murray. "Public Dissent and Governmental Neglect: Exploring Social Isolation in South West Sydney." *Current Issues in Criminal Justice.* 18.1 (2006): 33-50.

Luckett, Robina, ed. *Between the River and the Railway: An Oral History of Macquarie Fields*. Campbeltown, Sydney: Campbelltown City Council, 1995.

McDonald, Annabel, John Stapleton, and Elizabeth Gosch. "New Riots Follow Arrests." *The Australian* March 1 2005: 1.

McDowell, Linda. *Redundant Masculinities? Employment Change and White Working Class Youth*. 2003.

National Youth Council of Australia. *Macquarie Fields "Youth Say" Project*, 1975.

NSW Police. *Final Report into Macquarie Fields Public Order Management Incidents*. Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Operations), Sydney, 2005.

Pain, Rachel. "Youth, Age and the Representation of Fear." *Capital & Class* 80 (2003): 151-71.

Porter, Jonathan, and John Stapleton. "Riot Rubberneck Shield." *The Australian* March 2 2005: 5.

Priest, Tim. "Pass the Batons, Not the Buck." *The Australian*. March 2 2005: 13.

Spiller Gibbins Swan Pty Ltd. *Public Housing Estate Renewal in Australia*. 2000. Australian Housing Research Fund. 3 Oct 2005 < http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/house_publichousingestate/$File/Final%20 Report.pdf>

Toon, John, and Jonathan Falk, eds. *Sydney - Planning or Politics: Town Planning*

for Sydney Region since 1945. Sydney: Planning Research Centre, University of Sydney, 2003.

Totaro, Paulo, and Ellen Connolly. "When the Rage Hits Boiling Point." *Sydney Morning Herald*. March 5 2005: 25.

TOP

Transformations

Issue No. 13   September 2006 — Making Badlands

Badlands at the Bedside: Fact or Fiction
By *Wendy Madsen*

When Ross Gibson wrote his *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*, he was focusing on a geographical space. But the concept of a badland can be applied to other spaces, even virtual ones. Indeed, wherever one group struggles to dominate another and render that group as "untouchable" or "tainted", the potential for a badland exists, especially if that struggle is depicted in terms of "good" and "evil" (Gibson). This paper explores such a space, that of the nursing bedside; where, from the late nineteenth century, trained nurses sought to take precedence over untrained nurses. What is interesting in this struggle, is the reliance of trained nurses on an early nineteenth century fictional image of an untrained nurse upon which to base their argument. Gibson suggests badlands are created in the minds of the players and are promoted by narrative. This will become evident in this examination of a badlands at the bedside, as trained nurses promoted an image of untrained nurses as threats to public safety. But how realistic was this image? To what extent were untrained nurses dangerous to their patients? To answer these questions, I will firstly outline who nineteenth century nurses were and why there was a need for one group to seek dominance. I will then consider the argument presented by trained nurses during the early years of the twentieth century and whether this argument is consistent with the available evidence. What will become evident is that the badlands associated with untrained nurses was largely created in the imaginations, and narratives, of trained nurses.

Until the nineteenth century, there were a number of people who carried out tasks that were described as nursing related, in a variety of settings. Then as now, there were members of the domestic household who tended family and friends. This group has traditionally drawn on women within the residence, particularly wives and daughters, although men also undertook this function, especially in the more isolated circumstances associated with rural and remote Australia (Madsen "Age of transition"). This group was not paid for their efforts. The second group of nurses was also generally unpaid: men and women of religious convictions, although women again dominated this group throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Nelson). The third group consisted of men and women who were inmates of institutions such as poor houses or, in Australia, prisons. These nurses had little choice in their occupation, and were generally assigned nursing duties because they were unfit for more labour-intensive work (Cushing, "Convicts and care giving" 120; Francis 173). A fourth group worked in hospitals and were provided board and lodging, such as it was, and a small wage or supply of alcohol (Helmstadter 334). In Australia, approximately half of this group consisted of men until the latter parts of the nineteenth century (Cushing, "Perspectives on male and female care giving" 264). Finally, nurses could be employed privately by patients and be attended to in their own homes: handywomen were generally associated with the working class while private duty nurses attended the gentry (Dingwall, Rafferty & Webster 7).

The most significant change that occurred within nursing during the nineteenth century was the emergence of another group of nurses: trained nurses. Initially these came from within religious orders, such as the Sisters of Charity. However, secular hospitals increasingly introduced nurse training. Thus, by the turn of the twentieth century, hospital nursing was dominated by women undertaking training, while private duty nursing was seen as the main avenue for these nurses once they had completed their training. Nursing transformed from something men and women did because they had little choice or from a sense of duty, to an increasingly competitive market between trained and untrained women. The problem for trained nurses was that the customer (or patient) was rarely able to differentiate between the trained and the untrained. With a tradition of so many groups of people who undertook skills associated with

"nursing", trained nurses needed to find a way of discrediting their competition. One of the means they drew upon was through exploiting some popular representations of untrained nurses, particularly those found within novels, as will be explored later.

It is worthwhile pointing out that the status of nursing during the late nineteenth century was extremely variable. Some untrained nurses had gained considerable nursing skill and knowledge through a number of informal avenues: experience, previous generations, contact with doctors, and through the increasing availability of home nursing manuals (Fenne 36). Other nurses, however, took up nursing with little or no preparation, aptitude or skill. Helmstadter's research into the voluntary hospitals of London during the mid-nineteenth century highlights these variations in skill and knowledge as well as the moral status of nineteenth century nurses. Furthermore, because nursing was considered to be part of the domestic function of women, it did not stimulate much attention except when it was remiss. Thus, we have tended to have a skewed perception of nineteenth century nursing based on accounts provided by sanitary reformers of poor houses and public hospitals where there was a considerable lack of attention paid to the ill and incapacitated inmates by their fellow inmates acting in the role of the nurse (Digby and Steward). There is also documented evidence of nurses being brought before a magistrate for involvement with abortions (McIntosh), and there are statistics of high infant and maternal mortality rates (Mein Smith). Using such sources it would be relatively easy to paint a very bleak picture of nurses during the nineteenth century. It was this type of data trained nurses drew on to present themselves to doctors and the public as sanitary saviours, although they were not the sole custodians of sanitary reform.

In 1899 a group of doctors and trained nurses met in Sydney to form the Australasian Trained Nurses' Association (ATNA), the first on-going professional nursing organisation in Australia (Strachan 30). One of the aims of this organisation was to protect and promote the interests of trained nurses over their untrained counterparts. Within the pages of the ATNA's official journal, members reiterated their "right" to preferential treatment by doctors and the public, and condemned the untrained. Until the beginning of WWII, the ATNA in Queensland urged its members to distinguish themselves from the untrained through the use of badges, uniforms and veils.[1] One trained nurse wrote in 1907, "Would it not be possible for a Branch of the Australasian Trained Nurses' Association to be formed in Perth, which would defend somewhat the Nurse outside the hospital, and which would enlighten the public generally on the treatment a Nurse might receive at its hands" (MATNA 119). There were also questions being asked as to whether untrained nurses could be stopped from practicing: "Can you let me know if there is any law prohibiting the practicing of the "Gamp" in midwifery" (Matron 313). The issue related to competition within the private duty market, but was frequently portrayed as a sanitary one:

> At first I was only engaged by the better class of people, meeting with active opposition from the miner's women folk, the "Sairey Gamp" of today being deemed all that was necessary for them. Being blessed with a good deal of obstinacy, not to say pig-headedness, I was determined that both classes should feel that trained nursing, with its attendant regard to strict asepsis, was necessary for all confinement cases, with the result that now "Mrs Gamp" in this place has to hustle for a good number of the cases she still gets. (Bellambi 380)

Gibson proposes that badlands are created in the minds of people so the unruly and unknown can be named and contained (178). One of the avenues trained nurses used to invoke a fear of untrained nurses within their communities and their profession was to draw on a fictional image: Mrs Sarah Gamp. By doing so, they were attempting to identify the unruly and to draw the boundaries around that which was deemed to be unsafe. That they should take this tack was probably not unintentional. Fenne points out that novels were closely aligned with the emerging British middle class in the nineteenth century. As such, a number of images of nurses would have been familiar to this group and they would have identified closely with these images because of nursing's common domestic association. Indeed, we can find a number of fictional characters to represent the various nurses of the nineteenth century. Jane Austin portrayed examples of domestic nursing in Mrs Harville and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion,* while Mrs Rooke is an example of a privately hired nurse. Charlotte Bronte described another private nurse in *Shirley,* although Mrs Horsfall was depicted as a much rougher

character than Mrs Rooke. A number of studies have been undertaken that investigate the fictional representations of nurses in Victorian novels (Maggs; Fenne; Judd). However, it was Sairey Gamp who captured the imagination of trained nurses who used her to construct the badlands at the bedside image. As such, it is worthwhile considering her in a little more detail.

Sairey Gamp is introduced about half way through the story of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, by Charles Dickens:

> She was a fat old woman, this Mrs Gamp, with a husky voice and a moist eye, which she had a remarkable power of turning up, and only showing the white of it. Having very little neck, it cost her some trouble to look over herself, if one may say so, at those to whom she talked. She wore a very rusty black gown, rather the worse for snuff, and a shawl and bonnet to correspond. ... The face of Mrs Gamp – the nose in particular – was somewhat red and swollen, and it was difficult to enjoy her society without becoming conscious of a smell of spirits. Like most persons who have attained to great eminence in their profession, she took to hers very kindly; insomuch, that setting aside her natural predilections as a woman, she went to a lying-in or a laying out with equal zest and relish. (310-11)

Gamp has a habit of relaying conversations she has had with Mrs Harris, who is a figment of her imagination. She is also very quick to ensure she would have a ready supply of liquor available throughout her term of employment, although stresses she does not drink much:

> If it wasn't for the nerve of a little sip of liquor give me (I never was able to do more than taste it), I could never go through with what I sometimes has to do. "Mrs Harris", I says, at the very last case as ever I acted in, which it was but a young person, "Mrs Harris", I says, "leave the bottle on the chimley-piece (sic), and don't ask me to take none, but let me put my lips to it when I am so dispoged (sic), and then I will do what I'm engaged to do, according to the best of my ability. (Dickens 311)

Mrs Gamp is a close associate with the undertaker, and provides an example of moonlighting within nursing, when she is employed to attend a patient for 24 hours a day, but sneaks off to do a 12 hour night shift as well. Dickens' description of Gamp during the beginning of this shift is insightful. First Sairey looks out the window to ensure she has a safe route of escape in the case of a fire, she tries the easy chair, looks over the medicine bottles, glasses and tea cups before finally taking a look at the patient, whereupon she places the patient's arms by his side to see how he would look if laid out as a dead man. Her manner of nursing is also described. To administer medicine to the patient, she clutches his "windpipe", and then removes his pillow to place on her easy chair, with the justification that, "Now he's comfortable as much as I can be I'm sure" (Dickens 405).

It is easy to see how trained nurses would be able to demonise untrained nurses through association with such a figure and how the figure of the Gamp came to represent all that was contemptible in untrained nurses, and thus a badlands at the bedside. Dickens is noted for bringing his keen observations of life into his writing, often in an amusing although cutting manner. Indeed, the character of Sairey Gamp was based on a real nurse (Fenne 120). Although *Martin Chuzzlewit* was written a number of years before the introduction of trained nurses, Sairey Gamp provides us with an example of the handywoman and highlights the everyday, domestic nature of nursing as it existed in the nineteenth century. As indicated earlier, some of these women had gained informal nursing skill and knowledge. Others, however, would have been quite unprepared to take on such a role, and hence ineffective in their attendances. Unfortunately, necessity strikes the capable as well as the incapable, and in an era when women were severely limited in their paid employment options, nursing was often turned to as an acceptable means of income. Mrs Gamp was such a nurse, a woman with no formal skills, needing to earn her keep as best she could.

Interestingly, many of the letters of complaint generated from members of the ATNA came from regional and rural areas where there was a higher prevalence of untrained nurses. One such area was Central Queensland. While there is little doubt incapable nurses continued to exist into the twentieth century, one has to ask if Sairey Gamp represented all untrained nurses as trained nurses would have us believe and indeed, could the bedside provide Gibson with an eighth version of a badland? Was there substance to the badlands association or was it a convenient ploy by one group striving to dominate? Furthermore, one needs to ask in whose minds was the badland created – was it evident within the general public, or was it limited to trained nurses themselves? These questions are best addressed by considering one of the most controversial health aspects of the early twentieth century, that of puerperal fever. Moreover, focusing on a single geographical place where a large number of untrained nurses existed, such as Central Queensland, the site of Gibson's badlands, these issues can be examined in more detail.

Puerperal fever was not the main cause of maternal morbidity or mortality, but it drew the greatest level of political and social attention because it was deemed as preventable from the late nineteenth century, and was linked to the lack of cleanliness by the birth attendant. Because of its infectious nature, it was a notifiable disease in Queensland. Table 1 illustrates the number of cases of puerperal fever in Queensland from 1901 – 1956.

Table 1: Total number of puerperal fever cases in Queensland, 1901 – 1956 (Solomon 75)

1901	1909-1910	1919-1920	1930	1940	1950	1954	1955	1956
10	11	26	40	33	2	8	29	23

What is clearly evident from this table is that there was an increase in puerperal fever post WWI. However, this was a time when untrained nurses were becoming less prevalent. In 1916 when lying-in hospitals were required to register with the Rockhampton City Council, eight of the nine nurse proprietors were untrained (Madsen "Nursing services in the Rockhampton district"; QNRB). All of these women registered as midwifery nurses with the Queensland Nurses' Registration Board when it was established in 1912, indicating they had been nursing for some time.[2] Lying-in hospitals reached a peak during the early 1920s, but by the mid 1930s only one remained in Rockhampton (Madsen "Working from home" 51), and this was run by a trained nurse. Thus, by the early 1930s, most births were undertaken in larger hospitals, either public or privately owned, under the supervision of doctors and trained nurses, and yet the puerperal rate continued to rise. Furthermore, despite puerperal fever being a notifiable disease with significant sanctions associated with detection and the regular inspection of lying-in hospitals by the Medical Officer of Health, no record has been found of any cases of puerperal fever within Rockhampton's lying-in hospitals among the available documents (from 1916 – 1930).

Similar rises in puerperal fever were evident in Victoria. Marshall-Allen's 1928 report also indicated 90 percent of births were supervised by doctors. Marshall-Allen's explanation of the increase in maternal morbidity associated with puerperal fever was the excessive use of artificial delivery and lack of aseptic technique by doctors (21-22). Despite this, Marshall-Allen recommended the elimination of untrained nurses from the midwifery bedside (23).

This examination of puerperal fever highlights two issues. The first is that the prevalence of untrained nurses had little impact on puerperal fever. Lack of asepsis, whether that be by untrained nurses or trained medical staff was the key to puerperal fever rates. The second is that despite the evidence, there was significant prejudice against untrained nurses suggesting the badlands concept of untrained nurses being unsafe was firmly in the minds of at least some medical staff by the 1920s, but perhaps not all, as the lying-in hospitals run by untrained nurses in Rockhampton did not operate in isolation of doctors (Madsen "Working from home" 59). Furthermore, the Rockhampton data indicates women continued to seek the services of untrained nurses throughout the 1920s, and that the reasons for lying-in hospitals closing related to economic circumstances and the age of the proprietors, not to unsafe practices (Madsen "Working from home" 59-62).

The data relating to untrained nurses in Rockhampton contributes to a growing

argument over the past decade or so that untrained nurses continued to be quite prevalent well into the twentieth century and that their presence did not pose a significant health threat to the general public (Summers; Mortimer; Martyr). Such evidence suggests that it was trained nurses and professional nursing associations who created the image of untrained nurses as a badlands at the bedside. Undoubtedly, incompetent nurses existed in the nineteenth century, and continued to exist during the early part of the twentieth century, but it was the manner in which professional trained nursing associations portrayed all untrained nurses as incompetent and a danger to the community that is interesting and probably not a reflection of reality. Indeed, the community and even the government appear to have supported untrained nurses in a variety of clinical settings. For example, lying-in hospitals owned and managed by untrained nurses provided the majority of maternity beds in Rockhampton until the late 1920s (Madsen "Nursing services in the Rockhampton district"). Furthermore, government run facilities such as Westwood Sanatorium were mostly staffed by untrained nurses, albeit under the supervision of a small number of trained nurses (Madsen "Nursing services in the Rockhampton district"). Small hospitals also used untrained staff supervised by one or two trained nurses. Moreover, some of these staff became so valuable, their hospitals' managing committees wanted to pay them as staff nurses (QATNA minutes). Edwards also notes that aged care facilities in Britain have relied heavily on untrained nurses throughout the twentieth century. Thus, the skills and knowledge of untrained nurses were not universally called into question. Rather, the rhetoric coming from professional nursing associations reflected the social and political stances of an elite group within nursing – including those of the executive committee who were from large metropolitan training hospitals where untrained nurses were not permitted. It was these nurses who were pushing the untrained = unsafe agenda as a means of promoting nursing's professional aspirations and thus their own social positions.

To a certain extent, Charles Dickens created the badlands at the bedside image in 1844, based on a characterization of handywomen during a time when trained nurses did not exist. It was not the only representation of nurses within Victorian literature, but it came to symbolize all that was undesirable in a nurse. As nursing came to be particularly associated with a more limited group, that of trained nurses, so the image came to be associated with those who sat outside that group. This paper has explored this image: its origins, its reflection of reality and the way it was used by one group of nurses to exclude another. Interestingly, Sairey Gamp was remonstrated by Martin Chuzzlewit for her selfishness and disinterest in her patients (Dickens 786), not her ineffectiveness as a nurse. Ironically, it seems that self-interest was a prime motivating factor behind the campaign against "Gamps" by trained nurses.

Wendy Madsen has been researching the history of nursing in Central Queensland for the past decade, including masters and recently completed doctoral studies. She is interested in how nursing practice evolved during the first half of the twentieth century in response to factors internal to the profession as well as those external to nursing.
w.madsen@cqu.edu.au

Endnotes

[1] Queensland branch ATNA minutes *The Australasian Nurses' Association Journal* 15 May 1933, p. 97; Annual General Meeting QATNA *The Australasian Nurses' Association Journal* 15 August 1933, p. 167; AGM QATNA minutes *The Australasian Nurses' Association Journal* 15 August 1934, p. 177; QATNA minutes *The Australasian Nurses' Association Journal* 15 September 1936, p. 172; QATNA minutes *The Australasian Nurses' Association Journal* 15 December 1938, p. 255
    [return]

[2] In order for untrained nurses to register with the Queensland Nurses' Registration Board, they had to demonstrate they had been working as a nurse for at least the previous three years (Health Act Amendment Act 1911). This provision to allow formally untrained nurses entry to the register was closed

within a few years.
　　[return]

Works Cited

Austin, Jane. *Persuasion.* Hertfordshire:Wordsworth Classics, 1996.

Bellambi. Letter to Editor. *The Australasian Nurses' Association Journal* 5.12 (1907): 379-381.

Bronte, Charlotte. *Shirley.* Hertfordshire:Wordsworth Classics, 1993.

Cushing, Angela. "Perspectives on male and female care giving in Victoria, 1850 – 1890." *New countries and old medicine. Proceedings of an International conference on the history of medicine and health.* Eds. Linda Bryder, Derek A. Dow. Auckland: The Auckland Medical Historical Society, 1995. 263-270.

Cushing, Angela. "Convicts and care giving in colonial Australia, 1788 – 1868." *Nursing History and the Politics of Welfare.* Eds. Anne-Marie Rafferty, Jane Robinson, Ruth Elkan. London: Routledge, 1997. 108-132.

Dickens, Charles. *Martin Chuzzlewit,* London: Collins Clear-type Press, n.d.

Digby, Anne, & John Steward. *Gender, health and welfare.* London: Routledge, 1996.

Dingwall, Robert, Anne Marie Rafferty & Charles Webster. *An Introduction to the Social History of Nursing.* London: Routledge, 1988.

Edwards, Margaret. "The nurses' aide: past and future necessity." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 26 (1997):237-245.

Fenne, Jennifer. "'Every woman is a nurse': domestic nurses in nineteenth century English popular literature." Diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2000.

Francis, Karen. "Service to the poor: the foundations of community nursing in England, Ireland and New South Wales." *International Journal of Nursing Practice* 7 (2001): 169-176.

Gibson, Ross. *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland.* St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002.

Grehan, Madonna. "From the sphere of Sarah Gampism: the professionalisation of nursing and midwifery in the Colony of Victoria." *Nursing Inquiry* 11.3 (2004): 192-201.

Helmstadter, Carol. "Early nursing reform in nineteenth-century London: a doctor-driven phenomenon." *Medical History,* 46.3 (2002): 161-197.

Judd, Catherine. *Bedside seductions: Nursing and the Victorian imagination 1830 – 1880.* New York: St Martins, 1998.

Madsen, Wendy. "The age of transition: nursing and caring in the nineteenth century." *Journal of Australian Studies* 78 (2003): 39-45.

Madsen, Wendy. "Working from home: lying-in hospitals of Rockhampton, 1916-30." *Health and History* 7.1 (2005): 49-66.

Madsen, Wendy. "Nursing Services in the Rockhampton District." Diss. Queensland University of Technology, 2005.

Maggs, Christopher. *The Origins of General Nursing.* London: Croom Helm, 1983.

Martyr, Phillipa. *Paradise of Quacks. An Alternative History of Medicine in Australia.* Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002.

Marshall Allen, Robert. *Report on Maternal Mortality and Morbidity in the State of Victoria, Australia.* Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1928.

MATNA. Letter to Editor. *The Australasian Nurses' Association Journal* 5.4 (1907): 119-120.

Matron. Letter to Editor. *The Australasian Nurses' Association Journal* 5.10 (1907): 313.

McIntosh, Tania. "An abortionist city: maternal mortality, abortion and birth control in Sheffield 1920 – 1940." *Medical History* 44.1 (2000): 75-96.

Mein Smith, Phillipa. *Mothers and King baby. Infant survival and welfare in an imperial world: Australia 1880 – 1950.* Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1997.

Mortimer, Barbara. "Independent women: domiciliary nurses in mid nineteenth century Edinburgh." *Nursing History and the Politics of Welfare.* Eds. Anne-Marie Rafferty, Jane Robinson, Ruth Elkan. London: Routledge, 1997. 133-149.

Nelson, Sioban. *Say little, do much. Nurses, nuns and hospitals in the nineteenth century.* Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2001.

Queensland branch of Australasian Trained Nurses' Association minutes, 10 March 1943, Queensland Nurses' Union, Brisbane.

Queensland Nurses Registration Board (QNRB). Register of Midwifery Nurses 1912 – 1925. Queensland State Archives, Brisbane. File A/73218.

Solomon, S.E. *Queensland Year Book 1957.* Brisbane: Government Printer, 1957.

Strachan, Glenda. *Labour of Love. The History of the Nurses' Association in Queensland 1860 – 1950.* St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996.

Summers, Annette. "Sairey Gamp: generating fact from fiction." *Nursing Inquiry* 4 (1997): 14-18.

TOP