

THEMED SECTION

Introduction: Landscape, place and identity in craft and design

Kay Lawrence, Editor

Climbed over a gate into a bare paddock for the first two drawings as this site gave the best view of the channel as it entered the lake. Sat on the side of the hill amongst the long grasses, their feathery tips brushing my legs as I perched there setting up, the sun hot on my back. Later I moved to the cliff top near the Ngarrindjeri cemetery to finish the sequence. I could hear the frogs calling from the reed beds below; a hollow, reverberant rhythm, pulsating with different beats like the canopy of reeds in the swamp rippling in the wind.

Kay Lawrence, journal entry, 27 Sept. 2014, near Wellington, where the Murray channel enters Lake Alexandrina/Parknka/Mungkul/Kayinga

This edition of *craft + design enquiry* called for papers that addressed how writers and practitioners in the fields of craft and design have employed the visual, material, spatial and temporal processes of their disciplines to interrogate questions of identity in relation to place and landscape. It was my long-standing interest as a craft practitioner in engaging with landscape to explore issues of personal and national identity that led to the invitation to edit this edition of the journal. So I come to this role as a maker and a writer in the field of craft practice, with a particular focus on drawing and textiles.

In everyday speech, the terms 'place' and 'landscape' have slightly different inflexions. We tend to think of a landscape, whether a representation or a physical terrain, as the topography of a piece of land seen from one spot: we *look* at a landscape. While place may refer to land that is unoccupied by people, places are generally understood to incorporate the idea of dwelling, of people living in and being connected to a particular location. Each term posits a subtly different way of relating to the environment: landscapes perceived largely through sight and thus able to be conceived as separate from and outside us; places lived in and known intimately through the senses of touch, sound, smell and vision.

The excerpt from my journal that prefaces this introduction was written during one of seven drawing trips that I made during 2014 along the Murray River in South Australia to make a series of drawings for the exhibition *Same River Twice*,

which was held concurrently at the Australian Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide and the Murray Bridge Regional Gallery from December 2014 to February 2015. The body of work I presented was titled *No words for the river* and it was painted at sites along the Murray. The works were watercolour drawings superimposed over a lexicon of phrases (in English) that I drew from the historical record that describe the river in terms of lack and deficiency. The intent of this layering was to bring into focus the tension between the expectations generated by the English linguistic concept 'river' and the complex and fluid entity that *is* the 'River Murray'.

As I sat drawing, responding to the landscape in front of me, I was conscious of the bodily experience of being there by the river, in that place, at that time in all its sensory complexity: the light, the air, the terrain, the sounds magnified by water. In 'Place and the problem of landscape', philosopher Jeff Malpas points out that a landscape, whether a visual representation or a physical terrain, is *necessarily* perceived from a particular place and so 'the experience of landscape seems not to be restricted to the visual alone. The experience of landscape is as much the smell and feel of a place as anything purely visual' (2011: 10).

As noted by Malpas and confirmed by my experience, relationships to landscape are multilayered and interwoven with place. In considering the temporality of landscape, anthropologists Tim Ingold and Richard Bradley have concluded that the landscapes in which people have lived are, like places, shaped over time by human action as well as by physical forces, although these temporal processes that occur imperceptibly over millennia are almost impossible to perceive from a human standpoint:

I argue that we should adopt ... what I call a 'dwelling perspective' according to which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of—and testimony to—the lives and work of past generations who have dwelt within it and in so doing have left something of themselves. (1993: 2)

To adopt a dwelling perspective when considering landscape in Australia, for example, is to recognise the continent as a peopled place rather than 'terra nullius', which was the concept invoked to justify the removal of the first Australians from their land during and after the period of colonisation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. My experience walking along the Murray River looking for sites to draw made me viscerally aware of how this landscape has been shaped by thousands of years of Aboriginal inhabitation.

While apprehension of our physical environment is shaped by the senses, the meanings that we give, as individuals and communities, to landscapes and places are socially and culturally inflected, and so bound up with complex questions about human identity. If we accept that 'identity' is not a given, but constructed in response to an intricate array of social, cultural, economic and physical forces, then how we think of ourselves as individuals, communities and even nations will be shaped by the places and landscapes where we live, for,

as art historian W.T.J. Mitchell reminds us, 'landscape is not an object to be seen or a text to be read but a process by which social and subjective identities are formed' (1994: 1). Within this process, it is through our location in and attachment to places that we come to know, understand and give meaning to the world. As geographer Tim Cresswell points out, 'When we look at the world as a world of places we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people. We see worlds of meaning and experience' (2004: 11). The papers in this volume open up the complex meanings that we attach to landscape and place, and how they in turn shape personal, community and national identity. The writers, practitioners and scholars from across the world examine the varying cultural inflections that attach to landscapes and places and how they interconnect or differ across locations as physically and culturally diverse as Antarctica, Australia, England, Greece, Mongolia, Scotland and Slovenia.

This edition of *craft + design enquiry* begins in South Australia with a journey across time and continents to the crowded urban streets of nineteenth-century London, at that time the centre of the British Empire. As Ingold and Bradley point out, it is *where* we are positioned within a landscape that activates a point of view on our surroundings (1993: 18). It was a journey undertaken by Sue Kneebone in 2012, from her home in Adelaide to a house in London, which prompted her insight into some of the dark forces that shaped a nascent Australian identity. In her essay '*Dark Manners*', she employs the particularities of the outwardly respectable home of surgeon and anatomist John Hunter in Leicester Square, a house that concealed a shadowy trade in human remains, to interrogate 'dark issues of colonial settler identity' in Australia. The essay examines the intent and material processes that shaped her exhibition of the same name, which was presented in 2013 at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia. The exhibition alluded to the layout of Hunter's house in a series of Gothic tableaux, where animal remains grafted on to period-style furniture, anachronistic laboratory equipment and a reliquary of camel bones created an uneasy and sinister conjunction of nature, culture and science. Kneebone's use of bricolage as a crafting practice to bind disparate things in disturbing relationships brought into focus the oppressive and destructive relations between the colonists and Indigenous Australian people that underpinned the British colonial project and that lingers still in Australia.

It is these repressed forces which Ross Gibson asserts still haunt the Australian imagination (2002), that trouble any straightforward reading of the innocuous needlework kits that Sera Waters critically examines in her essay 'Inside the outback: An exploration of domesticated landscapes in Semco's Long Stitch Originals series of the 1980s'. Waters points out that these long stitch embroideries, many picked up in opportunity shops, represent landscapes unconnected to the specificity of an actual place. She argues that, instead, they offer idealised depictions of pastoral scenes that conform to well-worn tropes

from the twentieth-century Australian landscape tradition, which are presented as simple scenes to be quickly stitched in wool. In evoking nostalgia for an idealised Australia that is represented by rural landscapes set with homesteads and scattered gums, and a time when housewives had the leisure and skill to decorate their homes with needlework, Waters reveals how, in the lead up to Australia's bicentenary in 1988, these embroideries disavow the realities of the colonial past and even the postcolonial present, to offer instead the reassurance of a unified and unproblematic Australian nationalism.

Rowan Bailey and Claire Barber in their essay 'The sleeping-bag landscape' present another use for needlework, in this case a way of stitching an 'ethics of care' into salvaged sleeping-bags for those without a place to call home in the chilly north of England. In their essay, they conceptualise the sleeping-bag as a 'travelling concept' that moves across landscapes to finally become a material landscape itself, full of imaginative possibilities. They position the sleeping-bag as a place holder for different kinds of identity; as it moves from its material resonance and use in landscapes as diverse as Mongolia and Antarctica, it becomes a way of crafting an identity of place for the displaced in urban Bradford. Here, in a textile-based community project at the University of Huddersfield, abandoned sleeping-bags were salvaged and laundered by makers whose textiles skills were then used to reconfigure them as private places that offer protection and even a sense of belonging to the homeless people to whom they were given. As the authors note, 'to be homeless is to be without the certainty of belonging to a place'. Through small empathic gestures, the sleeping-bag becomes a way of putting oneself in the place of another, as well providing another with a warm, dry place to sleep.

Like the sleeping-bag, buildings and garments are designed to enclose and protect the human body from the elements, and it is through the evocation of these functions and meanings that they give shape to human identity. Drawing on Gottfried Semper's insights into the origins of architecture in textiles (Schaffer 2003: 37), Peta Carlin extends these ideas to encompass the concept of place. In her essay 'PLACE | DRESSING', Carlin conceives of place as a garment: the geographical and cultural specificity of the Outer Hebrides as expressed in the enclosing and protective weave of Harris Tweed is contrasted with the undifferentiated and reflective surfaces of the curtain walls that clothe the global city. In a scholarly and poetic discussion of the affiliations of words like 'dressing', which describe the process of clothing the body and building a dwelling, she reveals how the languages of cloth, architecture and body illuminate the complex relationships that shape the identity of persons and places.

In situating place as central to the experience of landscape, Malpas opens up 'the possibility that the place at issue ... is one that encompasses more than the visual alone, one that combines the spatial and the temporal and constitutes a mode of *engagement with* rather than merely *separation from*' (2011: ix).

These physical and bodily relationships to the temporal and spatial aspects of landscape are examined by Alice Lewis in her essay 'Body scape: A wearable inquiry into body-landscape relations'. She interrogates the conception of landscape as outside the body, to propose instead that bodies, as tangible material presences in the world, exist *within* the landscape, which she considers as a kind of infinite space rather than bounded by geography. In the workshop and project, a Conversation of Space—which Lewis conducted for the Meeting of European Design Students at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia during 2011—she worked with a group of students to stage a series of performative interventions into the spaces of the city. Through the design and wearing of abstract garments that complicated and interrupted the way that people were able to move through the urban landscape, their bodies became complex material presences, disrupting and displacing space, picking up detritus and leaving faint traces of their passing. The performances were not designed to address these embodied relations to the streetscape in terms of identity but, rather, to draw attention to the spatial and material significance of human bodies in the urban landscape.

The inexorable accumulation of the residues and traces of human action, like those described by Lewis, make their contribution to the slow evolution of the forms of landscape for, as Ingold and Bradley have noted, 'it is in the very processes of dwelling that the landscape is constituted' (1993: 11). But, as we dwell, we also die and return to the land that sustained us. It is this aspect of the human connection to landscape that Tom Lee addresses in his essay 'Place and identity: What can we learn from the dead?'. In considering the design of cemeteries in England and Australia, places where the dead are returned to the earth to become, as Lee says, 'mediators between the humans we take ourselves to be and the places we are not', he employs philosopher Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia to situate the cemetery as 'other' to what we think of as 'normal' places. In the essay, he proposes a number of ways that cemeteries could be redesigned to become more like the everyday places we inhabit as living beings with their multiplicity of functions and meanings. One of his suggestions is to recreate the cemetery as a 'natural' burial ground, more like a woodland or the bush: a habitat that is able to support human and non-human alike. Instead of grid-like expanses of lawn and headstones that reduce the complexity of human identity to numbers and information inscribed on a memorial, he suggests that cemeteries could shift from their singular mortuary purpose to include all the diversity of purposes, experiences and meanings that being a place entails. This would enhance remembrance of the dead by activating those qualities of intimacy, attachment and connection that bind human beings to place and mitigate somewhat the loss of individual human identity that occurs when we return to the earth.

If it is memory that enables us to construct those narratives that shape our individual human identity, it is through remembering that we give meaning to the landscape. For Ingold and Bradley:

the landscape tells—or rather is—a story. It enfolds the lives and time of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation. To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past. (1993: 2)

The landscape architecture projects discussed in Panita Karamanea's essay, 'Landscape, memory and contemporary design', seek to reveal the story of three different landscapes in Greece, each with a different history, ecology and cultural identity, and each being rich with associations from the distant and recent past. As the projects she describes demonstrate, it is through small gestures, slight modifications to the terrain, planting schemes that encourage indigenous plants, and paths that enable a kind of physical narration of the terrain, that landscape architecture becomes the means to activate the *genius loci* of each place. These subtle interventions that activate the latent characteristics of each site and encourage an embodied relationship with landscape, become a way of activating acts of remembrance. It is not just the history of events associated with these particular places that this reshaping of landscape is designed to evoke, but that other kind of remembrance as described by Ingold and Bradley that emerges through our perceptual engagement with place.

Conclusion

One comes to understand a landscape through movement within it, and one comes to understand and know a landscape through the journey 'there and back again' that one takes from one landscape to another (Ingold and Bradley 1993: 18)

This volume began with reference to a particular place in South Australia where the Murray River flows into a great lake, known by Aboriginal people variously as Parknka, Mungkul and Kayinga. The essays take us on a journey back and forth across hemispheres to end on another island in the Mediterranean at Armeni, an ancient Minoan Necropolis in Crete. These places have played their part over centuries, even millennia, in the formation of civilisations that now reach into the twenty-first century. This movement through landscape and place reveals the complexity of meaning that our dwelling places and landscapes provoke in the human imagination. They express the diverse ways that human

environments shape how we think and feel. Editing this volume has also been a journey. My knowledge of how we understand our place in the world through landscape has been expanded by the insights provided by these essays.

While craft and design are often thought to be primarily involved in producing ‘things’, they can also be understood as processes — ‘an approach, an attitude or an action ... a way of doing things’, as art and design researcher Glen Adamson once said of craft (2007: 4). The contributors to this edition of *craft + design enquiry* think with and through the design, materials and making processes of their disciplines as well as examining craft objects and human habitats to address the entwined relationships between landscape, place and identity. It’s unsurprising that most of these essays engage with the disciplines of textiles, architecture and landscape architecture within the larger fields of craft and design. Each of these systems of knowledge engage with the materiality of the physical world to produce practices and products that are intimately connected with the experience of dwelling. The materials that create cloth, buildings and the built forms of the environment originate in the earth. Whether derived from clay, minerals or plant life, these are the materials, shaped by human ingenuity and skill, that ultimately shape our habitats, protect the body and provide the context for human life and thought. It is through dwelling that we give places and landscapes their identity as meaningful entities, as they in turn shape us.¹

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