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Welcome to our November 2010 issue of *Australian Humanities Review*.

Our lead essay is Melinda Hinkson’s ‘Seeing More than Black and White: Picturing Aboriginality at Australia’s National Portrait Gallery’. Here Hinkson investigates the kinds of visual experiences opened to the Australian public via this important cultural institution, and asks whether the gallery can be a place that might transform our understanding of Aboriginal culture. John Tomaney and Margaret Somerville also raise questions about the capacity for community transformation in their essay, ‘Climate Change and Regional Identity in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria’. The essay looks at the role of ideas of community identity in responding to shifting climate change policies and the future necessity for economic restructuring. In ‘Truth is Not the Seduction: Brian Castro’s Autobiographical Space’, Jacinta van den Berg draws on Philippe Lejeune’s theory of autobiography to analyse the representations and gaps in Australian author Brian Castro’s works. Van den Berg shows how Castro’s playful evasion of truth claims deflects the reader’s desire to find the ‘real Castro’, but also draws attention to the process of writing itself.

The *Ecological Humanities* section begins with Peter Burdon’s innovative essay, ‘The Rights of Nature: Reconsidered’, which argues that the environmental rights movement would benefit from more strenuous critical engagement with the question of nature’s potential legal ‘rights’. Challenging nature/culture binaries is also central to ‘Encountering Native Grasslands: Matters of Concern in an Urban Park’. Here, Lesley Instone draws on the theory of Bruno Latour to reflect on the importance of native grasses in Melbourne’s Royal Park for re-conceptualising human-plant-place relations. The last essay in this section is Jodi Frawley’s ‘Detouring to Grafton: The Sydney Botanic Gardens and the Making of an Australian Urban Aesthetic’. Frawley analyses the role of Sydney Botanic Gardens as a ‘hub’ of information on global horticultural and urban design trends in the shaping of the aesthetics of Australian towns, in this case the ‘Jacaranda Festival’ town of Grafton.

Our book reviews section begins with a focus on Australian theatre. Michael Buhagiar reviews a collection of essays devoted to Australian actor, teacher,
director and playwright, Nick Enright, and Bradley Wells raises questions about the under-theorised topic of masculinity in post 1950s Australian theatre. Wells then turns his attention to the broader question that underpins *Turning Points in Australian History* and asks whether we can understand historical change as a response to specific events. Australian colonial history is the focus of Jo Chipperfield’s comparison of two books that take different approaches to everyday life in the colony: *Australia through Women’s Eyes* and *An Everyday Transience*. Finally, Greg Lehman provides both a critical and personal perspective on two recent books about the controversial figure from Tasmanian colonial history, George Augustus Robinson.

As always, we welcome submissions to AHR from writers and scholars across the humanities. Please see http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/about.html#submission for our submission guidelines.
In December 2008 Australia’s National Portrait Gallery opened to the public in a new building prominently positioned in the parliamentary triangle in the nation’s capital. In this essay I explore depictions of Aboriginality in the Gallery’s opening hang. The Gallery’s development since 1992\(^1\) has coincided with a tumultuous period in relations between Indigenous and other Australians and a clash of interpretations over the past, present and future place of Aboriginal people in Australian society. Simultaneously over the same timeframe Aboriginal cultural production has continued to gain increasing recognition and prominence within the terms of fine art both nationally and internationally, and to be widely mobilised in support of a range of nationalist projects. The majority of non-Aboriginal Australians have little opportunity to interact with Aboriginal people and form their perceptions via media imagery that tends to deal in starkly negative or (less often) positive representations. What kind of visual experience of Aboriginality has been unveiled before the Australian public in this new cultural institution? Here I am interested to consider what kind of recognition the Gallery works with—does it include the work of Aboriginal cultural producers and subjects in support of a unified idea of the nation? Does it embrace difference procedurally, a kind of recognition identified by political philosopher Charles Taylor, that simultaneously denies the substantive claims associated with that difference? Or, does the Gallery have the capacity to foster recognition with transformative potential? Taking seriously the idea that interactions between visitors to the Gallery and the pictures they encounter will be influenced by the associations they bring with them, I interpret my own visits against a backdrop of a series of relevant events that unfolded in Canberra in February 2009.

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1  See Engledow for an overview of the corporate history.
On Monday 2 February I attend the High Court to hear the judgment in *Wurridjal and Others vs the Commonwealth and Northern Land Council*, the challenge by traditional owners of the Aboriginal community of Maningrida in north Australia to the compulsory leasing of their lands, as part of the Northern Territory Intervention. The Intervention, which had been dramatically declared on 21 June 2007 by then Prime Minister John Howard, saw the deployment of armed forces personnel to help ‘stabilise’ remote Aboriginal communities, as well as a raft of measures introduced under the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act ostensibly as a response to reportage of widespread sexual abuse of children (Altman and Hinkson 2007). Coincidentally, the bringing down of the Court decision occurs on the first day of a ‘Convergence on Canberra’ by Aboriginal people from the Northern Territory to protest against continuation of the Intervention by the Rudd Labor government. They are here for the first sitting of Parliament for 2009, just weeks before the first anniversary of the Rudd government’s ‘Apology to the Stolen Generations’. Having learnt the High Court judgment is to be announced, they walk the few hundred metres from their camp at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy to be present. In Canberra as part of this contingent is my Warlpiri friend Napaljarri. She spots me as she enters the public gallery of the Court and rushes over. We embrace and then in characteristic Warlpiri style she sits down and proceeds to bring me up to date on ‘news’. Her niece’s son, she tells me, died before Christmas. He was twenty years old, a young man full of promise when I’d last seen him at his home town north-west of Alice Springs in central Australia. He had succumbed to some kind of cancerous tumour. Napaljarri is visibility distraught as she describes how she cared for this young man in his final days. After registering my shock, I ask after her daughter—just home, she tells me, after having been hospitalised in Adelaide following a heart attack. When I had last seen Napaljarri a year earlier she was grieving the loss of her youngest daughter who had died suddenly of heart related complications, also aged about twenty. In this short exchange I’m jolted back to a world far removed from Canberra. The importance of family, the ever-presence of death, invoked so straightforwardly as twin poles that structure daily life for Warlpiri people, provides a sobering backdrop to our anticipation of the High Court decision.

I try to process Napaljarri’s news as we sit side by side, taking in our unfamiliar surroundings, looking each other over for the first time in a year, waiting for the judges to enter the room and take their chairs. The public gallery of the court is by now nearly full—an audience composed largely of the Aboriginal visitors from the NT and those hosting their visit and providing support at the
Aboriginal Tent Embassy, a motley crew of the marginalised and radicalised, some sporting dreadlocks, torn clothes, bare feet, with a small number of suited advisers, legal types, media personnel, bureaucrats and academics interspersed across the benches. A court warden approaches a man seated in front of us and attempts to remove the plastic Aboriginal flag he is waving; then beats a hasty retreat on being warned ‘don't touch it!’.

We are called on to ‘All Rise!’ (not all do), as the judges file in. Much of the room erupts in spontaneous laughter on the declaration ‘God Save the Queen!’.

This is, I am reminded, a quite particular audience for a quite particular kind of performance of Australian law. And then proceedings quickly get underway. One by one each of the judges state their findings in a series of cases that have been heard in recent months. The talk is fast and difficult to grasp for a newcomer. ‘Hard language’ I murmur to Napaljarri, who keeps looking at me in expectation that I’d be able to translate the legalese. The Wurridjal finding is 6-1 against the plaintiffs, with a direction that they pay the costs of the defendants, the Commonwealth and Northern Land Council. But it is some time before the decision is translated by someone with an understanding of the language of this place, and then for it to sink in. Before this has occurred, the call comes again to ‘All Rise!’ as the Court adjourns and the judges and those in the public gallery file out.

Aboriginal people and their supporters mill just outside the front doors of the Court, trying to make sense of what has just happened. After a few minutes the reality (if not the full comprehension) of the Court’s decision sinks in, and a demonstration is hurriedly formed behind a megaphone chanting ‘Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land!’ , and this newly animated social body re-enters the Court and occupies the foyer. Within minutes the group is surrounded by federal police, and, after a skirmish, encouraged to disband and leave the building. One man is taken into custody but later released without charge. Senior Aboriginal men from the Northern Territory stand visibly distant from this protest, outside the Court looking on in muted discomfort as the action unfolds. For such seasoned land rights warriors, this is not their style of protest.

Flashes of these experiences keep me awake that night and are at the forefront of my mind as I enter the National Portrait Gallery the following morning, specifically to explore how depictions of Aboriginality feature as a dimension of the new visual experience recently unveiled before the Australian public. The Gallery finally acquired status as a fully-fledged national cultural institution with the completion and opening of its new building in December 2008. Positioned in the parliamentary triangle, sited next to the High Court and
within a few hundred metres of the National Library of Australia, National Gallery of Australia and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, it now makes claim to a prominent and distinctive role in reflecting what it means to be Australian back to its visitors.

The opening of a new national cultural institution in Australia is a relatively rare event. What is this new gallery? Part of its interest and potential surely lies in its very ambiguity: this is not simply another fine art gallery, nor a museum in the conventional sense of the term. The Gallery is concerned specifically with ‘portraits of subjects who have made a major impact on Australia’ (National Portrait Gallery). For this reason the very idea of a portrait gallery built around the recognition of ‘notable’ individuals and their contribution to nation making has been scorned by some as an exercise in barren elitism, and the gallery’s ambiguous status accused of giving rise to nothing more than a mix of ‘bad history and inadequate psychology with inferior art’ (McQueen). Yet such criticism seems to miss a fundamental point: this is a Gallery born in an era of accelerated technological mediation. Part of the aim of the Gallery requires it to eschew the values of high art in favour of forms of image-making drawn from a wider public domain. This is a place where the story of the nation is to be amplified through the story of individual experience and imagination. The genre of portraiture and presumably the Gallery itself appeals to a broader audience than other forms of art precisely because it looks through the lens of individual experience (note the 300,000 visitors to the Gallery in the first three months of its opening). Portraiture has been crucial to the formation and articulation of modern individualism (Woodall); it might be seen as a primary genre through which the culture of western modernity is animated and reinforced. In a society that measures social achievement in large part through a person’s attainment of status as image, most often attended to in the form of the face, a portrait gallery is likely to have a particular appeal, especially for its direct engagement with the cult of celebrity, with forms of image culture that are embraced in the world beyond art galleries. And while I will show that chronology and individualism provide the underlying structures that organise the viewing experience here, it will be seen that they by no means imply an interpretive straightjacket.

The Gallery’s stated aim is strongly educational: ‘to increase the understanding of the Australian people—their identity, history, creativity and culture—through portraiture’. Yet it is possible to read much potential latitude into such a seemingly straightforward didactic statement. Because its business is images, representations, the Gallery must avoid the classical museological

3 Over the period of its development, while occupying a smaller and more restrictive space in Old Parliament House, the Gallery has participated in some modest ways in the creative redefinition of portraiture as a medium, strategically interspersing challenging exhibitions with more conventional displays. The most controversial exhibition mounted in the previous location was Reveries: Photography and Mortality. See Ennis.
practice of attempting to tether objects too closely to particular classificatory interpretations (whether these be scientific or art historical). As in any gallery, the images themselves must be allowed to appeal to the viewer for the many ways they might fire the imagination. The Gallery’s founding director, Andrew Sayers, suggested the Gallery be approached as ‘an idea’, emphasising the work of imagination involved in any artistic endeavour to render the complex lineaments of identity into visible form. It may well be that the very looseness of ‘idea’ can work to paper over a lack of coherence or clear organising principle, but if we approach this gallery as a product of the cultural environment with which it simultaneously engages, we arrive, I shall argue, at a somewhat different assessment.

Demand for recognition of Aboriginal people’s distinctive status as first inhabitants of this country characterises a core dynamic of Australian national politics. But as political philosopher Charles Taylor has argued, there is a tendency in modern liberal societies to perform certain kinds of recognition that ultimately result in substantive difference being dissolved in the name of national unity (Taylor; Povinelli; Hage; Lattas; Everett). In this sense democracy and its privileging of the rights and freedoms of the individual citizen has particular and insidious implications for the cultural forms of colonised peoples, as well as for marginal migrant groups within multicultural societies. Taylor cites the acceptance of other societies’ traditions of visual culture within the terms of our own canon of ‘art’ and ‘artist’ as an example of the kind of recognition that ultimately reduces the different to the homogenised preferences of the nation-state and commodity market (see Merlan; Dibley). We can rejoice in the wonder of Aboriginal art and its enrichment of the nation while disparaging or rejecting the ways of life that sustain those very forms of cultural production. Is this the mode of recognition that the Gallery performs, or does it have the capacity to foster a transformative kind of recognition that Taylor invokes from philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, in which a ‘fusion of horizons’ might be born of our willingness to open our existing frames of value to other ways of seeing, to a genuine, and potentially transformative, interaction with those of the other? Can the Gallery be a place where visitors might change the way they understand Australia and Aboriginal people’s place within it? Can it crack open our assumptions about the relationship between an individual and society? The paradigm of recognition has been dismissed by some as lacking the kind of transformative potential we find in dialogical encounters. Yet the situation considered here is one in which the presence of the other, self-other dialogue, is not achievable. Instead the other is only graspable here through pictures, representations. In such contexts the question of the limits and potentiality of recognition seems usefully to reassert itself.

4 Andrew Sayers left the Gallery in June 2010 to take up the position of Director of the National Museum of Australia.
This essay is an experiment in making visible the conjunction between what we observe as processes of public culture and policy making occurring at the level of the everyday, and analytic reflection on a particular set of visual experiences. As I was exploring the opening hang of the Gallery in February 2009, a series of unrelated events unfolded in Australia that both drew attention to and called forth aspects of public imagination that seemed to bear directly on issues I was grappling with. The High Court decision in *Wurridjal* reflected upon above came hard on the heels of a series of contradictory messages conveyed in federal government statements on Indigenous affairs: the first anniversary of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s historic Apology in the federal parliament to the Stolen Generations on the one hand, firm insistence on retaining the controversial Northern Territory Intervention on the other. The shaping of nationalist sentiment that occurred in and through these events came to constitute something of a backdrop against which my analysis developed. My proposition is that such an interpretive model is entirely apposite for making sense of the Gallery for two reasons. Firstly, because it mirrors the process viewers enter into when they interact with any picture—they draw upon a conjunction of personal experience and abstract knowledge in order to produce meaning and form judgments (Elkins; Clark); and secondly, because the Gallery’s charter places it at the centre of a creative collision between fine art and wider understandings of social value. In a society where recognition is principally achieved in media images, there is a recursive loop between the Gallery and its visitors who bring with them expectations and desires increasingly fostered and produced through this same mediatised process. Is it possible to simultaneously sustain and fracture that loop?

III

The first picture encountered on entering the most centrally located contemporary gallery is Gordon Bennett’s portrait *Eddie Mabo*, 1996; highly symbolic given my experience of the preceding day, and a powerful reminder of the high-water mark of the High Court’s 1992 decision, giving legal and moral force to the recognition of Aboriginal claims. Bennett’s image of Eddie Mabo’s joyous face is taken from a newspaper, overlaid partly with a faint dotted stipple indexical of central Australian acrylic ‘dot’ painting, and surrounded by layered grabs of text. The partial words that frame Mabo’s head are taken from newspaper headlines, a multi-layered jumble conjuring the toxic environment of race relations and the complex discursive field of conflict that erupted as his claim to ownership of his customary lands in the Torres Strait was interpreted in law and subsequently legislatively enshrined in the Native Title Act. Simultaneously, a transformative set of events and an ongoing unresolved tension at the heart of Australian identity are galvanised in this picture.
Rather than portraying Mabo the man heroically, Bennett’s picture is a powerful statement about the nature of our mediated public culture and the processes through which we grasp and indeed produce images of persons, the events with which they are associated and the ideas they come to stand for in the present. As Bennett reflects in his statement about the work, Mabo himself is only knowable to us through the images and discourses that make him present in the public domain. Here there is no attempt to depict physical likeness, or to get at qualities that might be associated with ‘Eddie Mabo the man’. Bennett’s work points in another direction. It conveys a sense of the myth making we, the nation, undertake when we turn a person and his achievements into an element of public imagination. In looking at Mabo we see our collective moral redemption—redemption echoed in our regard for ‘authentic’ Aboriginal art, as we are reminded by the faint stipple of dots that intrudes on our view of Mabo’s face. But simultaneously with this redemption Bennett conjures up the conflicting narratives of national self-understanding that have been, and continue to be, hotly contested in Australia in the ensuing ‘culture wars’ (Windschuttle; Manne). In short, in producing Mabo we produce ourselves.

Hanging beside Mabo is Ross Hannaford’s 2006 portrait of Lowitja O’Donoghue, first chairperson of the now disbanded national Indigenous representative body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, tireless campaigner for Aboriginal rights, former Australian of the Year, a once-touted possible Governor-General of Australia, a formidable woman known for her straight talking, uncompromising principles. It is a painting of compelling likeness, and conveys well a complex sentiment; one feels drawn to the picture but simultaneously held at reserved distance by the subject’s regal disposition. At the opening of the Gallery in December 2008 O’Donoghue took aside celebrity portrait painter and Australian icon Rolf Harris for a ‘quiet word’ about recent comments he had made in the media suggesting Aboriginal people should ‘get up off their arses’ and clean up their communities. At the conclusion of the forty-minute discussion a suitably chastened Harris was quick to issue a public apology (Edwards). He lingered in front of O’Donoghue’s portrait for newspaper photographers.

Recalling this episode in the gallery space, it seems to ricochet off Bennett’s Mabo; confirming the artist’s analysis, echoing a sense of the circular processes through which stereotypes are produced. Harris’ directive: ‘get up off their arses’ endorses, reproduces and fuels a conventionalised view of Aboriginal styles of life that he freely admits to having taken from the mainstream mediascape. The media reportage of Harris’ exchange with O’Donoghue in the Gallery in the context of its opening might from one perspective be interpreted

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as a kind of performative gift to the new cultural institution—these two noteworthy Australians have enacted in the flesh exactly the kind of horizon-shifting encounter this Gallery might hope to facilitate: disrupting stereotypes; confounding an imagined stark separation between the abstracted spaces of media and those of the intimate face-to-face; fostering a clear sense that coming to know the other is a relational and potentially transformative exercise.

The third large portrait that completes this wall is Matthys Gerber’s lurid 2002 work, *George Tjungarrayi*. This lush abstract image in a wash of purple, green, blue and orange only settles into the recognisable dimensions of a face once the viewer forces that form upon it. Meditating on the creative tension between portraiture and abstraction, Gerber’s work celebrates his Western Desert subject’s own contribution as an abstract painter in his own right, but gives no access to the physicality of the person, nor his own painterly aesthetic, nor the ‘natural’ environment in which we might expect to see him pictured.

Taken together these three images make a powerful statement about the kind of visual experience the Gallery intends to foster. At the most obvious level is a statement about the central place of Aboriginal experience, perspective and achievement in moulding ‘Australia’ as we know it today. For the majority of Australians who have no interaction with Aboriginal persons in the course of their daily lives, here is an opportunity for a particular kind of mediated intimacy with their images. Three acclaimed individuals—an abstract painter of relationships of people to country, a political leader and activist, and a subversive whose image came to stand for the recognition of Aboriginal land title and Australia’s moral redemption from its colonial origins, convey a sense of the breadth of such contributions. This might be interpreted as the incorporative aspect of the Gallery’s recognition (ie at its simplest: Aborigines have contributed to the building of the nation). But beyond this, these works present a challenging and complex set of statements about the nature of portraiture and more broadly about representation itself. The diversity of depictions simultaneously reassure and provoke viewers as to the range of portraits they will encounter. If visitors were under any misapprehension, *Mabo* makes this abundantly clear: an image is not a person, nor is it necessarily indexical of a person in a straightforward way. These works challenge viewers to consider the relationship between a person and his or her image. And of particular interest to the concerns of this essay is a sense in which all three paintings explore what might be described as the limits of recognition in relations between Aboriginal and other Australians.

In the terms established by the Gallery, as stated clearly on text panels, the images to behold here are ‘encounters’: between artist and subject, between viewer and picture, between Indigenous and other Australians. More than simply offering a new place to celebrate Australian heroes of modern individualism, in subtle ways the Gallery provokes visitors to think about the relational processes in which
both art and identity are created. Its displays challenge the vision of a unified nation, particularly those ways of imagining ‘Australia’ that would disentangle Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experience from their interpenetration, or conversely imagine the dissolution of their difference. On the face of it this may appear an unsurprising narrative strategy for a new national cultural institution to pursue. While the themes of ‘encounter’ and ‘relatedness’ may have become ubiquitous in new museums (Message), and to establish a form of recognition that takes the sting out of the visceral, violent, repressive relations that lie at the very foundations of settler-colonial nations in favour of more gentle, celebratory and blood-less readings of nation making, it will be seen that something more complex is achieved here.

IV

A distinctive characteristic of the way the Gallery structures viewing experience is in the interplay between an artwork and its text panel. Unlike a conventional fine art gallery, here we find text panels of 150-200 words of carefully crafted text, often conveying more information about subjects than artists. These panels are fundamental to the Gallery’s stated educational aim, and may play a role in attracting a wider pool of visitors than tend to be drawn to conventional fine art galleries (I’m reminded of the extensive survey of visitors to European galleries conducted by Bourdieu and Darbel that found that 89% of respondents identifying as ‘working class’ stated they would like artworks to be accompanied by explanatory panels). In this Gallery it is common to find viewers dedicating as much if not more time to reading text as looking at pictures. The exhibition experience, suggests the Gallery’s senior curator, is intended to be ‘a good read’.

One of the interesting things about looking at portraits of an earlier era in conjunction with text panels is that temporal experience is complicated in particular ways. This is strikingly the case with Aboriginal portraits of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, where a clear gulf exists between events described in the text and the pictures before one’s eyes. Tasmanian Trucanini is depicted here by Duterrau (c. 1835) as unblemished, proud, attired in ceremonial regalia, in a stance of radiant, confident nobility. Her head and torso takes up much of the canvas, the only contextual backdrop an eerily coloured sky, evoking twilight, as if in the moment before history overran Trucanini and her community: ‘Trukanini saw many of her family members and close associates killed by white people’ states the text panel bluntly. The picture

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6 Kylie Message, for example, writes ‘themes of dialogical flow and exchange have become ubiquitous in museum practice in the last fifteen years or so. They have been employed as strategies integral to the production of museological spaces, exhibitions and public programmes globally, and form a plank that is central to the development of the “new museology” over that period’ (Message 755).

7 Michael Desmond, senior curator, National Portrait Gallery, personal communication 16 March 2009.
radiates one set of associations, the text another; the viewer’s own perspective ultimately organises the conjunction between the two. The first two historical galleries, laid out chronologically, have a deeply melancholy aura deriving from our knowing what became of these persons and the communities to which they belonged after their portraits were made. Yet these first rooms also disrupt any expectation that the visual journey here will be simply celebratory of Australia’s origins in European settlement. While large portraits of James Cook and Joseph Banks establish the gallery’s origin point for thinking about ‘Australia’, in this distinctively post-Mabo hang, pictures of colonisers and colonised share the same space, eye-ball each other across the room, as in the pairing of Duterrau’s pictures of Trucanini and George Robinson, architect of the notorious civilising experiment that saw hundreds of Tasmanian Aboriginal people transported to Flinders Island, where most died soon after. These works were all created by non-Aboriginal artists; nevertheless they animate complex trajectories, their subjects defying each other’s versions of nation making.

Here lies the first important way in which the gallery’s carefully structured chronological narrative is disrupted in the experience of viewing. We encounter these colonial pictures in the cultural time-space of the present. The Port Jackson Painter’s delicate picture, Bennelong, conveys an imagined pre-colonial innocence starkly at odds with what we know of his eventual demise. Augustus Earle’s Bungaree is a masterly study of the contradictory experience that characterised life in the colony for Aboriginal mediators of the nineteenth century. Thomas Bock’s 1842 portrait of Tasmanian Aboriginal girl Mathinna takes on a new significance and set of associations when we know it inspired Aboriginal dance company Bangarra to produce a performance by the same name. Similarly we might read Mathinna’s tragic biography not just through the gallery text panel, but through the widely publicised narratives of those Aboriginal people we have come to recognise as members of the Stolen Generations, and in the culture wars that contest such recognition; through the symbolic discourse of the federal government’s recent Apology to those people; and again through Richard Flanagan’s fictionalised account of Mathinna’s story in his 2007 novel Wanting. Pictures become mired in the complex associations and forms of imagining we bring to bear upon them. We cannot enter into the time of their making. Rather, we encounter them within ours.
VI

Just as a National Portrait Gallery is primarily concerned with national identity, ultimately it assumes a particular kind of subject to animate that identity: the individual achiever, the self-made modern subject. Throughout the Gallery are many instances of Aboriginal individuals being included in this story of nation building through individual pursuit: as great artists, actors, poets, musicians, sportsmen and women, bureaucrats, politicians. Against this apparently seamless flow of nation making come moments where we are reminded that race has and continues to be a primary point of agitation in national identity—in St Kilda football player Nicky Winmar’s defiant lifting of his football jumper to bare his black skin; in then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s pouring earth into the hand of Gurindji man Vincent Lingiari as he is granted ownership of his land; Charles Perkins absorbed in thought riding on a train evoking the ‘Freedom Rides’; and, looking back further, Barak’s campaign for his community to live in relative autonomy at Coranderrk in Victoria. Pictures by Tommy McCrae subtly invoke a highly charged way of seeing ceremonial action in a place and time when such ceremony was under attack by white authorities; while William Dargie’s portrait of Albert Namatjira is a lightning rod for thinking about the collision of two cultural orders and what many find an impossible challenge of navigating between them.

The inclusion of these pictures and the symbolic moments they stand for in a chronological narrative of individual achievement is significant—here the story of nation making is conveyed not in terms of discrete or parallel black and white histories, not simply as an incorporative process, but a chronological narrative inflected with recognition of its multiple, contradictory, and often devastating implications for Aboriginal people.

But can the Gallery go beyond this? What scope is there to unsettle the metanarrative of individualised subjectivity that the very idea of a portrait gallery rests upon? Can different ways of being Australian, different modes of personhood be conveyed here that challenge claims to the universality of individualism? Can Taylor’s idea of a possible ‘fusion of horizons’ be explored here or does the very idea of a portrait gallery preclude us from recognising ontologically different ways of conceiving relations between persons and their forms of visual culture, and beyond this the possibility of relating empathetically across such divides?
“Johny the Artiste Kongatong – 8 Aug 55 (Aborigine).”

Pencil drawing by Eugene von Guerard in his Sketchbook XXIV, No. 6: Australia. 3 Jul. – Aug., Dec. 1855. (Ref: DGB 16/v. 3/f.77)

Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales. Reproduced by permission.

Portrait of von Guerard sketching, 1855.


One particular visual enactment of ‘encounter’ arguably takes us some distance in this direction. In the room dealing with portraits of the second half of the nineteenth century, two small drawings are mounted side by side in a display case: Eugene von Guérard’s ‘sketch of Johnny the artist, Kangatong’ and ‘Eugene von Guérard sketching’, by an artist identified as ‘Black Johnny’. These two sketches were made in the winter of 1855 during the month von Guérard spent at Kangatong near Warrnambool. Von Guérard’s sketch of the teenaged stock keeper is a clear, confident pencil drawing of the features of a handsome male face, executed with the finesse of an artist at the height of his powers. Johnny’s sketch of the painter is made in coloured pencil; it is the work of a gifted novice. It depicts the whole physical person, his dress, the detail of his hat, and captures well von Guérard’s bodily disposition as he sits at work on a chair, legs crossed, drawing tool in one hand, paper in the other.

Johnny’s sketch of the artist puts me in mind of a series of wax crayon drawings made by Warlpiri people at Hooker Creek in the Northern Territory in the early 1950s for anthropologist Mervyn Meggitt. The drawings were produced as part of the tutelage the anthropologist and his informants were engaged in, primarily dealing with ceremonial themes. A small number of drawings explored vernacular topics, some revealing Warlpiri perspectives on European styles of life. In one of the most memorable of these pictures Larry Jungarrayi Spencer draws the superintendent’s house as a block of black flyscreen hovering above the earth, a deep blue sky separating its foundations from the yellow Spinifex ground. Here Spencer evokes a widespread sensibility among Warlpiri people of his generation that a notable difference between themselves and Europeans is that the latter lived above, not on, the ground (Hinkson ‘Warlpiri drawings’). Johnny seems to give a similar significance to the technology that mediates the European artist’s experience of the landscape—his chair, his drawing materials, his dress. Von Guérard meanwhile works in the tradition of life drawing, focusing his attention on the precise depiction of his subject’s head. In both cases drawing is a creative medium of sense making, it contributes a vital dimension to a wider conversation between persons attempting to grasp each other’s view of the world.

Andrew Sayers has observed that a very particular kind of encounter is exercised in Johnny and von Guérard’s drawings, not one that can be made to stand for a generalised interaction between Aborigines and Europeans of the era (Sayers, Aboriginal Artists 2). The meeting of these two artists was not accidental; they came together on the property of wealthy squatter James Dawson who had a reputation for genuine interest in and empathy for Aboriginal people and their customary practices. Johnny acquired from Dawson his European name and employment as a stock keeper. Dawson in turn invited von Guérard, by now a renowned artist, to his property to paint. Positioned side by side here for the
first time, these sketches provoke simply, but powerfully, a sense of picture-making as a dialogical process of coming to grips with another from a distinctive perspective.

Sharing the display case with these drawings is Fred Kruger’s ‘Souvenir album of Victorian Aboriginals, kings, queens, etc’ c. 1877. Here are four individual portraits—the first two of bare-chested ‘kings’, while a third ‘King William—Mt Cole’ and fourth ‘Queen Mary—Ballarat’ are ceremonially attired and piled high with arms full of paraphernalia, possum skins, boomerangs. Kruger’s pictures are powerful indications of the role of image-making in the politicking of nation-state dealings with Aboriginal persons. These photographs reveal one conventionalised approach to picturing Aboriginal subjects in this period, as Aborigines were caught between the impossible poles of how we imagined their pre-colonial existence on the one hand and their successful assimilation on the other. Yet Johnny and von Guérard’s pictures make clear this was by no means the only possible framework for representational engagement, nor its only outcome. Something disruptively productive is achieved by placing Kruger’s pictures alongside the sketches by Johnny and von Guérard. As a suite, these pictures draw attention to the radically different possibilities of representation as a medium of encounter, as othering or intersubjective, as projection or negotiation, as inclusionary or transformative.

VII

Wednesday 4 February: It is perhaps unsurprising that I’m feeling drawn to think about how Aboriginality is conveyed in the Gallery just as the federal government reasserts its commitment to the Northern Territory Intervention, with its ‘normalising’ and individualising measures (see Altman and Hinkson, ‘Very risky business’). After work I drive to the Tent Embassy to pick up Napaljarri and bring her home for dinner. The Warlpiri people who have travelled to Canberra are resting in a tarpaulin-shaded area. A number of their painted canvases are laid out on the grass nearby on display for prospective purchasers. These have been brought along to help generate ‘pocket money’ for the trip. It has been a stinking hot day and there is a disconsolate mood among the group. They tell me they are upset at the response they received earlier in the day in their meeting at Parliament House with the Minister for Indigenous

8 See Lydon for a detailed and compelling study of Kruger’s work at Corranderrk.
9 Under the terms of the Intervention half the welfare payments of all Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory are quarantined by use of a ‘Basics Card’ which can only be used for purchasing designated goods at particular licensed stores in the Northern Territory. Travelling interstate presents particular problems of cash flow.
Affairs. A meeting scheduled for thirty minutes was reduced to just fifteen, the Minister apologising she had ‘orders to sign’. She was said to have spent much of their short time together ‘tippin’ elbow’—looking at her watch.

These residents of one township have been highly outspoken critics of the NT Intervention. Yet the strength of their case has been fractured by the countervailing voice of an ex-resident Warlpiri woman, whose public pronouncements contradict an otherwise largely unified public position. In her forays into the media this woman suggests domestic violence is widespread in the town and pleads for the Intervention to continue. On visiting the town in October 2008 to open a new swimming pool, the Minister was handed a petition signed by more than 200 residents that described the government’s decision to continue with the Intervention as an insult. But reportage of the pool opening event provoked local unrest when one prominent senior woman was quoted as saying the government’s income quarantining was ‘working’, in direct contradiction of the claims of the petition. The woman in question subsequently issued a statement describing the reportage of her comments as ‘lies’ and denouncing the Intervention as ‘rubbish’. She had travelled to Canberra with the group ostensibly seeking an apology from the Minister. Just days earlier, at the conclusion of a government sponsored workshop on domestic violence, the Minister had posed for assembled media alongside the ex-resident Warlpiri woman. This pro-Intervention campaigner has subsequently been made chair of a new advisory group for the NT government.

Perhaps ironically, for these people for whom English is spoken as a second, third or fourth language, the articulation of opposing views on government policy from within the same locality continues to be played out in globalised media space: projected outwards from central Australia, snippets of commentary spoken to journalists find their way into diverse media outlets, in one recent case no less prominent than the *Wall Street Journal* (Trofimov), before being electronically bounced back to central Australia to further agitate debate and division. But the full complexity of the local-global nexus in this particular case is revealed by Napaljarri who over dinner describes to me the ways in which Warlpiri contestation over the Intervention now maps onto the turbulent local politics of retribution following the suspicious death of a young man. Here I am reminded with profound clarity that while Warlpiri regularly participate in regional, national and international events, and strive to assert their rights as Australian citizens in political contests with governments, they continue to invoke clear (albeit at times contradictory) lines between the moral and rational coordinates of their lifeworld, expressed as *Yapa* (Warlpiri) way, and those of *Kardiya* (white people, wider Australia).
The most compelling sense of the Gallery’s potential as a place that will deal creatively with both questions of identity and its definition of portraiture is to be found in the opening special exhibition *Open Air: Portraits in the Landscape*. The first ‘work’ encountered here is a set of Tiwi Pukumani Poles, paint faded and peeling, wood half-rotten, detritus falling at their base. If this cultural production is taken to be a portrait then it stands for a more complex and multi-levelled set of associations than tends to be grasped in the notion of individual achievement. These funeral poles manifest relations between the living and dead, between a lineage of kin associated with a particular place through a body of ancestral knowledge and that of a deceased person. Baldwin Spencer’s compelling photograph of an unnamed Tiwi man crouching among a set of poles deep in a north Australian tropical forest hangs nearby. It humanises the poles for an unknowing audience and conveys something of this different way of enlivening the world through visual cultural production.

The distinctive basis of forms of Aboriginal identity and the visual expressions to which these give rise are core themes of this special installation. Here we find what are essentially portraits of the creation of the world in all of its physical, social and moral dimensions. Art becomes seen here most clearly, in the words of Howard Morphy (2), as ‘a form of action in the world’. The flair of individual producers is to be appreciated in the context of collectively held visual languages through which the world is conjured and depicted. This double distinction is strongly elaborated through the bark paintings produced by members of the Marika family and in the collaborative canvases of brothers Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri.

The works selected for this exhibition emphasise that the contemporary coordinates of Aboriginal identity are by no means isolated from the time-space of mainstream Australia. There is a clear sense here of art as a thoroughly contemporary and intercultural production: in Marika’s *Sydney*; in the Wik sculptures of Cape York that incorporate new carpentry techniques; and in a series of works that deal in various ways with Aboriginal people’s relationships to land in the wake of dispossession, most poignantly Ricky Maynard’s prison series and Darren Siwes’ meditation on contemporary alienation.

Aside from confronting head-on the complexity of Aboriginal identity in post-colonial Australia, works in this exhibition convey ideas that seem central to the question of whether the gallery might have the capacity to transcend Taylor’s ‘procedural’ recognition in pursuit of a ‘fusion of horizons’. The first of these concerns the recognition of the very ontological basis of different visual culture.
systems, the idea that there might be different ways of conceiving persons and their portraits. The second attends to the ultimate limits of what might be knowable across these systems.

One of the most affecting paintings to my eyes is Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri’s Trial By Fire. This large and highly-charged painting makes an imposing presence. It takes some of its force from our knowledge of the context of its creation. As has been described vividly by Geoffrey Bardon, the school teacher who was centrally involved in the establishment of Papunya painting movement, Papunya was a place of devastating sickness, distress and death for the Aboriginal people who came to live there either willingly or by force from the late 1950s, in the midst of a prolonged drought and a governmental push to centralise and make sedentary nomadic desert Aborigines. The indifference and disdain shown to these people by many of the white officials charged with running the settlement, and the melancholy despair that flourished as a result of the stifling of their deeply-held cultural imperatives, produced the demoralising features of this new outback ghetto. The first wave of visual production by senior men under Bardon’s encouragement resulted in pictures of astonishing power and radiance—a torrent of built up creative energy poured forth onto plywood, particle board, scraps of old wood and any other material the men could get their hands on. In the period in which these first works were produced the painters were isolated from their customary lands, having no transport of their own and, as wards of the state, being restricted in their movement by government regulations. Their painting was an inexhaustible process of invoking the cosmological world that bound them to their distant country. In Bardon’s words, painting allowed them to become ‘free men in an otherwise brutal and degrading environment’ (24).

Trial by Fire was produced a few years after this initial outpouring of creativity, and after the painting men had in certain respects secularised their aesthetic, following accusations by their neighbouring ritual partners that the paintings were revealing more ‘inside’ knowledge to the outside world than was acceptable. But Leura’s work retains a clear sense of the vital energy of the earliest paintings, its charged ceremonial context shimmers in the haunting smoky shadows that make present the bodies of two figures running over a dotted ground of sacred sites. This is the kind of visual narrative to which anthropologist WEH Stanner might have been referring when he spoke of there being dimensions of the beauty and mystery of Aboriginal religious thought and expression that ‘lay, and properly so, beyond the reach of anthropology’ (Sutton). Trial by Fire is a work of great power, and part of that power derives from the sense that it deals with organising principles that lie beyond our comprehension, ideas and ways of seeing the world and people’s place within it that might be apparent to us but ultimately ungraspable outside of that system.
One other body of work in Open Air seems particularly to manifest both the possibilities and limits of portraiture as a vehicle for a kind of recognition that transcends the procedural: the paintings by Tim Johnson. Here the artist has produced what are essentially visual diaries of his visits to Papunya in the early 1980s. Most compellingly he reveals the inner workings of his own head, a sense of the process he is engaged in as he attempts to come to terms with an utterly different way of ordering the world (see also Sayers, Open Air 24). Works call attention to different elements of this experience. One portrait of Daisy and Tim Leura depicts their camp, and the searing central Australian light through which the artist glimpses the scene, but only faintly recalls the artists’ faces. Here and in other pictures Johnson is more preoccupied with the detail of the painters’ work than the fine detail of their physical form. What we seem to be presented with here, again, is an idea of painting as a meeting point between persons trying to grasp each other’s worlds.

The work from this series that holds my attention longest is Johnson’s 2002 portrait Clifford Possum Tjapaltarri. Here sits Possum, his face and physical form clearly rendered, meditating contentedly, Buddha-like, clothed in white, surrounded by an ether filled with elements—persons, animals, flora, camp scenes, artists at work, boomerangs and spears, the Rainbow Serpent. Johnson attempts to assemble the various dimensions of a person around his physical likeness, to call forth the ontological ground of the subject who floats, as yet unanchored in the artist’s mind, or rather and more particularly against a sea of dotted and brushed paint. No element is privileged over another; it is as if Johnson is aware he is yet to acquire the language, the worldview, through which they might be ordered. It is through the language of paint and Buddhism that he reveals himself visually grasping and rendering Possum.

Morphy has drawn attention to a similar reflexive process at work in Mawalan Marika’s portrait Djan’kawu, also included in this exhibition, which in one panel depicts the artist reflecting upon himself and his acts of ceremonial production (16). Both artists seem to be engaged in painting as self-reflexive sense-making activity. But it is in Johnson’s painting that something important is enacted before the eyes of the viewer about the potential and the constraints of representational systems as mediums of cross-cultural encounter. Johnson conveys well the heady experience of being immersed in a world one is yet to understand, the mesmerising excitement, the awareness that so much of interest lies outside of one’s grasp. He reveals the lenses through which he attempts to know the Other and his awareness of the limits of his knowledge. In a number of works he puts his paint beside that of some of the Papunya painters, perhaps reaching for a kind of fusion of horizons upon the same canvas? I’m not
convinced that these works are successful in that venture. But perhaps part of the ultimate message in Johnson’s work is about the immense difficulty of that very process?

Like Bennett’s *Mabo*, Johnson’s pictures point away from their subjects in a number of important respects. They meditate on the apparently unbreachable ontological gulf between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experience. Johnson renders the partiality of his comprehension of the universe he briefly enters at Papunya in the manner of an unfinished work, a grasping that will always and necessarily be partial. His painting *Don Tjungarrayi* conveys this sensibility most clearly, a seemingly unfinished painting of a subject at work on an unfinished canvas, both acts still in a process of becoming.

**IX**

Johnson enacts something that agitates at the centre of current debates over what kind of future Aboriginal people in remote Australia might aspire to, and the nation’s ongoing failure to empathetically respond to the difference that lies at the core of such aspirations; a crucial question for those people, for the nation, and for this new Gallery that seeks creatively to respond to its multiple, contradictory and contested desires. Will we foster a vision for the future for these people that is constrained by our still dominant (but increasingly precarious-looking) market-driven individualist aspirations? Will we treat them simply as citizens? Or, will we support Aboriginal people vesting hope in other kinds of value and forms of relatedness, including ways of seeing the world and humanity that seem to directly run against those privileged by the dominant society?11

Following its election to office in late 2007 the new Rudd government was quick to act on a promise to offer a formal apology to the Aboriginal Stolen Generations. The potential transcendentalism of this event was powerfully evoked in the Prime Minister’s speech:

> Let us seize the day … let it not become a moment of mere sentimental reflection. Let us take it with both hands and allow this day, this day of national reconciliation to become one of those rare moments in which we might just be able to transform the way in which the nation thinks about itself. (Rudd)

Twelve months later this rhetoric had fallen flat, the galvanised focus and promised energy dissipated. With some limited exceptions, Aboriginal affairs seemed, especially when viewed from Warlpiri country, to be conducted in a

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11 Here I invoke Ghassan Hage’s argument in *Against Paranoid Nationalism*. 
manner broadly continuous with that of the previous government. As certain intervention measures took hold, combined with the dissolution of community governance structures (following their replacement with new regional shires) and the disbanding of bi-lingual education programs, demoralisation was setting in. The Apology increasingly appeared to be a cunning act of procedural recognition (Povinelli; Kowal).

A year after the Apology, Reconciliation Australia published their first ‘Barometer’, a survey comparing attitudes of Indigenous and other Australians to each other. The striking finding of this survey fixed upon by media outlets was that the overwhelming majority of Indigenous and other Australians do not trust each other. If trust is principally established in face-to-face interactions (Giddens) then this finding is unsurprising—the majority of non-Aboriginal Australians have little opportunity to interact with Aboriginal persons in the course of ordinary daily life (see Hinkson ‘Media images’). They take their impressions from the mediated encounters offered by television, newspaper reportage and other sources of public imaginary. The opening hang of the National Portrait Gallery offers a significant new avenue for differently-inflected mediated encounters, an encounter where pictures of persons and ways of seeing the world complexify the stark images of undifferentiated otherness that so often circulate in other arenas.

Perhaps most significantly, the opening displays gently urge visitors to see depictions of Aboriginality in the relational terms of their production, as part of a shared past-present in which the trajectories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia may seem at odds, yet also deeply entangled. However, Open Air with its great diversity of ways of reflecting on the place of Aboriginal people in Australian society is a temporary display. As this essay is finalised prior to going to press, the director who oversaw the opening program has now left the Gallery to head up the National Museum of Australia. To what extent similar ideas might be carried through in the next stage of the Gallery’s life is yet to be seen.

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I didn’t take Napaljarri to the Gallery during her short stay in Canberra; she was occupied with more pressing business. But I would have been interested in her response. A painter herself, a passionate defender of Warlpiri people’s aspiration to continue living close to their customary lands and to pursue a life that differs in many ways from mainstream Australia, Napaljarri is also an enthusiastic traveller, video maker, broadcaster and observer of global popular culture. I will never forget her confronting me in Alice Springs one day in 1997, distressed and in tears on having just learned of the death of Princess Diana. ‘I idolised that woman!’, she cried as her adult son and I exchanged bewildered
looks. Napaljarri has grown up with a fusion of horizons. But when I discussed this essay with her, she brought my attention back to the other side of the viewing encounter. Did I know of photographs of her mother and father that might be hanging in ‘the gallery’ in Canberra, she asked? It was only on later reflection that I recalled, with deep embarrassment, that Napaljarri had raised the issue of these photographs in conversation with me some fifteen years ago, when our discussion would have been fixed on other matters. And I had not followed up on my promise to try and locate them for her.

This essay has explored what kind of engagement might be possible with an Other when the only medium available for interaction is images, portraits. Just as the majority of Australians know Aboriginal people only in the abstract terms of those representations that circulate in the public sphere, so too ‘the gallery’ along with other institutions of ‘Canberra’ remain abstractions for Aboriginal people living in remote areas until circumstances refigure them as personalised, tangible forms. The spaces of national identity-making and the lives of remote Aboriginal people are deeply entangled. The question that continues to agitate at the core of Australian politics is one of how and to what degree the abiding distance between them might be breached. The opening of the new National Portrait Gallery provides a potent experience for reflecting on these issues.

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Climate Change and Regional Identity in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria

JOHN TOMANEY AND MARGARET SOMERVILLE

Introduction

The recent Australian federal election results suggested that climate change remained on the agenda of the Australian electorate even if it had slipped off the agenda of the major federal political parties. It is generally accepted that the Federal Labor Government, under the previous Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, after becoming a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol and proposing a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, failed to implement policy or develop a new policy platform to address issues of climate change. The election results are believed to reflect this with the Green vote showing an increase of 3.97 per cent with Labour losing 5.41 per cent of the votes they held in the 2007 Election. The first Green member has been elected to the House of Representatives and the Green Party will hold the balance of power in the Senate from July 2011. The most significant election platform of the Green Party is in relation to climate change.

Equally significantly, the Green representative and two Independents have established agreements with the Labour Party in order for it to form government. Labour and the Coalition each won 72 seats in the 150-seat House of Representatives, four short of the requirement for majority government, resulting in the first hung parliament since the 1940 election. Six crossbenchers hold the balance of power. Greens MP Adam Bandt and independent MPs Andrew Wilkie, Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor declared their support for Labor on confidence and supply. The resulting 76–74 margin allowed Labour to form a minority government with the Prime Minister, government ministers and parliamentary secretaries being sworn in on 14 September 2010 by the Governor-General Quentin Bryce. The Australian Greens and the Labor Party have signed an agreement to ensure stability for Labor in Government. The Greens will ensure supply and oppose any motion of no confidence in the Government from other parties or MPs. Labor will work with the Greens to deliver improved transparency and integrity to Parliament and pursue policies that promote the national interest and address climate change.
The Greens are the only party with a public policy about climate change (<http://www.greens.org.au/about/policy>). The policy has 14 principles including the first three which establish climate change as ‘the greatest threat to our world in human history’ and claim the significance of Australia’s position as ideally placed ‘to lead the world in this challenge’. The remaining principles all deal with the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with a recommendation for early action, equity and social justice, and a ‘plan for a future that does not rely on coal export and coal fired electricity’. To this end a new Climate Change Commission is being established and a carbon tax is again on the political agenda. According to the Garnaut Report, climate change will have differential impacts on different communities. Our interest in this paper is to explore the potential impact of policies to address climate change on the communities of the Latrobe Valley, Victoria, where 85% of the state’s electricity is produced in brown coal-fired power generators, noted to be the most highly polluting of all forms of energy production.

Coal, climate, region: the Latrobe Valley

The adaptation of coalmining regions in Australia generally is of pressing political importance. On the one hand, it is claimed that Australian political culture is captured by the mining interest and dominated by a ‘quarry vision’ (Pearse); on the other hand, employment in some mining regions is seen as vulnerable to the impacts of schemes to reduce carbon emissions. The Latrobe Valley in Victoria presents an emblematic case study of the contemporary dilemmas of coalmining communities. However, its experience is by no means entirely unique. In this paper we examine the material and discursive production of the Latrobe Valley by drawing comparisons with the experiences of two coalmining regions in Europe: North East England and the Ruhrgebiet in Germany, which have adopted markedly different approaches to restructuring, with the former dominated by ‘market shock therapy’ and the latter undergoing planned economic change within traditions of ‘codetermination’. We are particularly interested in the role of conceptions of local identity in shaping the range of political possibilities in such places.

The aim of the paper is to explore the capacity of communities, especially those in coal mining regions, to adapt successfully to new policy regimes associated with responses to climate change. Climate change is one of the most significant challenges of the present era, yet adaptive responses involving changes in attitudes and values are the most difficult to bring to account (Garnaut 14):
Every Australian will have to adapt to climate change within a few decades. Households and businesses will take the primary responsibility for the maintenance of their livelihoods and the things that they value. ... Adaptation is best seen as a local bottom-up response. (Garnaut 363)

Communities and regions whose livelihoods and identities are tied up with the production of energy through coal are critical sites for processes of economic, social/cultural and environmental transformation under conditions of climate change. These communities have been affected by previous restructuring, privatisation and retrenchment, resulting in high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, which potentially limits their capacity to effect any transformation.

In the debate about climate change, its impacts and the appropriate responses, while technological and regulatory innovations have received much attention, there has been comparatively little research into the ways that the values and identities of such communities and regions are formed under these conditions (Lynch). Deb Anderson has identified the need to ‘shed light on the interplay of lived experience and scientific knowledge in constructing place- and identity-based responses to climate change’ (68) in relation to community transformations in the Mallee region in north western Victoria.

The production of locality in an era of climate change

One approach to addressing these questions is to consider coalmining regions as a distinctive type of locality situated in the interplay of global economic, cultural and environmental processes. Such regions have been somewhat overlooked in current research on notions of place, which tends to focus more on phenomena such as trans-nationalism and hybridity, on global cities and border regions (e.g. Eade; Vila). Within Europe, however, some researchers with an interest in old industrial regions in Europe have theorised them as having discernible identities, related to local forms of economic production and associated social relations and thus as exhibiting material, cognitive and institutional ‘lock-ins’ that prevent their adaptation to new forms of economic activity (Hassink and Shin; Pike et al.). Such localities are often seen as consisting of marginalised, culturally introverted communities characterised by low levels of geographical and social mobility and recently have also been discursively constructed around the notion of ‘dirty’ industry. These are amongst the localities that are seen as the likely losers of climate change policies, although, of course, this story is only part of a much larger and more complex story about diverse inter-generational and intra-spatial identities (Massey, Space, Place and Gender; Kenway et al.). Thus, in this paper, we are interested in the fate of coalmining regions in the context of the production of locality and local identities within global discourses of climate change.
O’Brien and Leichenko seek to capture the assemblage of forces impacting on communities and regions in relation to climate change through the concept of ‘double exposure’:

regions, sectors, ecosystems and social groups will be confronted both by the impacts of climate change and by the consequences of globalization. Our point of departure lies in the widely recognized perception that there are ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ associated with both of these global processes. Climate change and economic globalization, occurring simultaneously, will result in new or modified sets of winners and losers. Double exposure has important policy implications, especially for those that are likely to experience the negative consequences of both globalization and climate change. (222)

Drawing on O’Brien and Leichenko, we consider both the material and discursive dimensions of these intersecting phenomena. McManus has shown, in the case of the Upper Hunter, that there is a complex mutually constitutive relationship between the material and discursive aspects of the region, while Cameron and Gibson (‘Alternative Pathways’) suggest that a significant part of the regional problem lies in the representations themselves: once communities and regions are designated as losers, they may become losers. At the same time, the local represents an important arena for social action and, according to David Harvey, there are dangers in the promotion of politics ‘abstracted from the material world of experience in particular places’. In any event, such a politics lost some of its credibility and appeal because the promotion of universal considerations drove out sensitivity to the particularities of environment, milieu, collective memory, community, myth built forms. While it is one thing to articulate a critical line against a politics based only on all of these, it is quite another … to fashion a politics that treats the politics of place as nothing more than a numbing fantasy. (Harvey 314)

In this vein, Anderson’s account of understandings of drought and climate change in the Mallee contends that ‘the social decline Mallee communities were experiencing served not only to amplify nostalgia for the Mallee of the past but also heighten local identity-based responses to the contemporary experience of change in the Mallee and projections for its future’ (74). We are interested, therefore, in local identity-based responses to climate change in the case of coalmining regions in Australia. Addressing these issues requires the use of ethnographic models to interrogate the assumptions of ‘double exposure’ and ‘winners and losers’ and explore the possibilities for identity transformations in the context of debates about the nature of the local.
The fate of the local in the age of the global has emerged as a key theme of contemporary social science research. Academic assertions are plentiful about both the ‘unbounded’ nature of the locality or region and about hybridized global networks in the formation of identities and communities (Amin). Yet many anthropologists, sociologists, historians and geographers have questioned such claims about the ‘discursive erasure of place’ (Escobar 141). They have suggested instead that (shifting) geographies, boundaries and multiple scales continue to matter ‘as expressions of social practice, discourse and power’ (Paasi 541), while others have called for detailed and grounded empirical studies of ‘global change’ (Burawoy et al.; Gille and Ó Riain) through the methodology of global ethnography. They argue that abstract notions of globalization, posited on globally networked forms of social life, risk overlooking the complex ways in which people continue to live locally, albeit in altered ways (Escobar; Kenway et al.).

Simultaneously, inquiries into ‘place’ are central to post-colonial, post-development and feminist understandings (Escobar; Gibson-Graham; Pike et al.; Somerville), which suggest that storylines of place belonging and attachment remain central to the mutual constitution of identities and places (Somerville). Certain contemporary ethnographies are thus concerned with analysing ‘the process whereby a space achieves a distinct identity as a place’, albeit a place understood as ‘an imagined state or moral location’ (Gupta and Ferguson 8, 10; Entrikin), rather than a merely physically bounded territory. Places are historically contingent phenomena (Pred) and the locality/region is produced when ‘People continue to construct some sort of boundaries around their places, however permeable, and to be grounded in local socio-natural practices, no matter how changing and hybridized those grounds and practices might turn out to be’ (Escobar 147).

**Storylines**

Gieryn states, ‘Place is thus remarkable because it is an unwindable spiral of material form and interpretative understandings or experiences’ (471). We focus on this ‘unwindable spiral’ in the relationship between the physicality of material places and the people and communities in those locations. In her discussion of ‘a global sense of place’, Massey describes these place relationships as ‘the event of place’ (For Space 141). The concept of ‘the event of place’ suggests a sense of place and place identities as shifting and dynamic, with openings to new possibilities through the sets of relationships enacted there. Massey describes these features of place as presenting ‘the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of then and there); and a negotiation which must take place within and between both human and nonhuman’ (Massey, For Space 140).
We take up this concept of the negotiation of place and expand it in our development of place-based global ethnography to focus on the relationships between locality, identity, economy, ecology and technology in the context of contemporary global discourses and material effects of climate change. The concept of the negotiation of place enables possibilities for transformation. A methodological focus on storylines of place as the locus of transformation of identities and places (Somerville) allows us to explore the concepts we discussed above. Story is here understood as a basic unit of meaning-making and the concept of story can be expanded to embrace visual and oral forms of representation as well as the stories of scientists, policy makers and other actors. The analytical strategy of storylines, as developed in feminist poststructuralism (Davies; Sondergaard), can be used deconstructively to analyse how stories function to shape identities and places: ‘A storyline is a condensed version of a naturalized and conventional cultural narrative, one that is often used as the explanatory framework of one’s own and others’ practices and sequences of action’ (Sondergaard 191). The concept of story and storylines can also be used reconstructively to articulate previously invisible place stories or to generate new stories about places. Storylines ‘are realised and created/changed in the more or less fragmented ways they are taken up by subjects as they develop their own narratives’ (Sondergaard 191). They are made and changed in community, and the task of generating alternative storylines ‘that have the power to displace the old is extraordinarily complex’ (Davies 79).

The Latrobe Valley—the Ruhr of Australia?

We develop these ideas through a preliminary analysis of some the storylines that have emerged in the process of regional change in the Latrobe Valley, in order to shed light on how the region and its communities grapple with issues of climate change identified in the Stern Report (2007) and further elaborated in the Garnaut Report (2008). The recent experience of people in the Valley has been marked by changing political ideologies and state strategies, including corporatisation, privatisation, and the resulting social, economic and environmental impacts. In the early 1990s approximately 8,000 people lost their jobs due to the privatisation of the state electricity power generators, transforming the region from a hub of proud industrial labour to a depressed region depending on government welfare support. The region retains a distinctive character and identity as a producer of non-export brown coal, but continues to be marked by storylines of disadvantage and despair (Cameron and Gibson, ‘Alternative Pathways’; Fletcher). These trajectories will be examined in more detail within the broader historical and global context in the following sections.
The Latrobe Valley is a distinctive locality, within the region of Gippsland, in the state of Victoria, 160 km east of Melbourne. European settlement created a largely pastoral agricultural economy in Gippsland at the expense of the Indigenous Kurnai people, and led to the development of small farming settlements in the Valley (Watson). The development of the Valley in the twentieth century arose from the desire of the Victorian government to exploit its brown coal resources for the production of electrical power. The Victorian government commissioned an engineer, Charles H. Merz from Newcastle upon Tyne in England, to investigate the development of an electricity industry in the state. Merz produced reports in 1908 and 1912 and among his recommendations was the construction of a power station at Morwell in the Latrobe Valley to provide baseload electricity and supply the state’s electric railway. These recommendations were acted upon in 1917. In 1918 a Bill was introduced to the Victorian parliament to create a public corporation, the Electricity Commission (which became the State Electricity Commission in 1921). Three Commissioners were appointed in 1919, and in 1920 Sir John Monash was appointed as general Manager of the new organisation. Monash, fresh from his role as head of the Australian forces in First World War France, delayed his return to Australia to visit Germany to oversee inspection of the coal industry in the Ruhr and elsewhere and to draw lessons, determined to reduce Victoria’s dependence on coal from New South Wales (Searle). Industry developed in the Valley in the form of open-cut brown coal mines and co-located power stations and the electrical power was transmitted by cable to Melbourne, as the main economic population centre in the state. The co-location of power stations and mines reflected the particular economics of producing energy from brown coal, which requires much larger volumes to produce the same amount of energy as black coal, making mineral transport uneconomic.

The State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) became the key institution in the development of the Valley, for instance constructing a new town for its workers at Yallourn—and later destroying it in pursuit of further coal measures (Fletcher). The provision of electricity by the SECV fuelled the industrialisation of the state in the twentieth century, ensuring the emergence of a relatively high income (largely male) labour force in the Valley and, in this respect, it became a particular expression of Victoria’s distinctive state-led developmental agenda, which, according to Eggleston (1) constituted ‘the largest and most comprehensive use of State power outside Russia’. Sir Henry Bolte, Victoria’s Liberal Premier (1955-72) famously described the Valley as the ‘Ruhr of Australia’, a sobriquet which gained wider usage (McLaren). The growth of an industrial workforce provided the conditions in which the region developed a reputation simultaneously for labour militancy and for employer paternalism, reflecting the widespread role of the SECV in social provision.
The stable economy and society of the Valley were transformed in the 1990s with the privatisation and restructuring of the electricity industry by the Liberal government of Premier Jeff Kennett. Privatisation saw ownership of the industry pass into the hands of international companies and was followed by major job losses, with direct employment in the power industry falling from around 10,500 workers in the early 1980s to about 1,800 by 2002. These job losses were accompanied by rising unemployment rates and population loss, which, according to Birrell, transformed the Valley into the most disadvantaged location in regional Victoria by most social and economic indicators. The population of the Valley fell from 79,450 to 73,439 in the ten years to 2002 as skilled workers left (Birrell) and had fallen further to 72,905 in 2007 (Latrobe City Council 2). The Valley’s external identity, according to one commentary, was transformed:

Perceptions that it was a poverty trap for a provincial underclass were highlighted when low-rent housing was used to house welfare dependants—anecdotally, at least, single mothers with boyfriend … an unfair perception that ‘the Valley’ was an economic and social morass, a place of polluted air and broken homes, broken hearts and broken dreams. It is a perception that still lingers in the outside world. (‘Renaissance in the Valley’, The Age, 23 September 2008; see also Fletcher 219-222)

The Kennett government lost office in 1999, to be replaced by a new ALP State Government under Steve Bracks (later replaced as Premier by John Brumby in 2007), elected on a platform of addressing the perceived neglect of regional Victoria and ensuring that ‘provincial Victoria’ had a higher profile in state politics. For the Valley, a traditional a Labor heartland, the new political attention came in the form of a Ministerial Taskforce, which promised a $100m plan to revitalise the valley focusing on investments in public housing, marketing, urban renewal of the town of Morwell including a new court house and college, and the development of an aviation-focused industrial park at the region’s small airport (Victorian Government). Although Labor maintained a stranglehold over Victorian electoral politics, in the 2006 State Elections it lost its seats in the Latrobe Valley, and in the 2007 Federal election the National Party won the electorate against the national swing. The proximate cause of Labor’s performance in 2006 appeared related to a dispute over the diversion of the region’s water resources to supply Melbourne; but it probably also reflected a more general disillusionment in the region over the impact of the Ministerial Taskforce’s revitalisation plan, which had failed to improve social and economic conditions in the Valley (Economou).

The importance of the Latrobe Valley’s coalmining and power generation complex to the economic development of Victoria in the twentieth century
is hard to question. But the region was also constructed discursively during this period through official publications (Cameron and Gibson, ‘Transforming Communities’), the influential promotional and other materials of the SECV (Fletcher) and political rhetoric such as that of Bolte. The dominant representation of the region tended to stress a distinctive identity that was mono-industrial and working class, mixing both militancy and paternalism.

The advent of more recent concerns about climate change has added a further dimension to the identity of the region as a ‘dirty’ locale. Thus, ‘Victoria is the least climate friendly state—home to three of Australia’s dirtiest power stations and none of the 12 biggest renewable energy plants. … The Loy Yang A, Hazelwood and Yallourn W power stations were found to be among the highest-emitting plants in the country’ (‘Victoria proving the dirtiest state’, The Age, 21 July 2009). The power companies and their proxies play on these associations: according to Alan Moran of the Institute of Public Affairs, a free market think tank on whose board are representatives of the Latrobe Valley power generators:

> The Latrobe Valley’s brown coal stations have been demonised because of their emissions of carbon dioxide. Using terms like ‘notoriously polluting’, some journalists echo green activists’ Pol Pot-like descriptions of these electricity generators. In fact the Valley’s power stations have allowed Victoria to benefit from electricity which is amongst the cheapest in the world and remains cheap. Low electricity charges have been a foundation stone for the state’s economy. (Alan Moran, ‘Dreaming of a Different White Paper’, Herald Sun, 27 December 2008)

**ETS and the future of the Latrobe Valley**

Despite recent restructuring, power generators in the Latrobe Valley continue to supply 80-90 per cent of Victoria’s electricity. According to research commissioned by Latrobe City Council, the industry continues to have an important place in the region’s economy. Economic value-added revenue generated by the power industry was estimated at $802.4m in 2008, representing 21.2 per cent of gross regional product, while every ten direct jobs in the coal and electricity sector were estimated to sustain a further eight jobs in the local economy (Latrobe City Council). Moreover, the region continues to support a significant engineering industry, including international companies such Bilfinger Berger and locally-owned small firms, which service the coal and power industries and markets elsewhere in Australia.

At the same time, there is wide acknowledgement of the inefficiency of brown coal as a source of energy for electricity which produces high emissions even compared to black coal. According to Senator Bob Brown, leader of the Australian
Greens, the brown coal-fired power stations of the Latrobe Valley (Loy Yang, Hazelwood, Yallourn, Morwell) which supply Victoria’s power represent the worst form of carbon pollution:

When you look at it per unit of electricity, those brown coal-burning stations in Victoria go right to the dirtiest top of the league. Coal itself is a huge menace in terms of greenhouse gas production going into the atmosphere and the threat that’s now creating for the world’s environment and economy. But brown coal is 30 to 50 per cent worse in greenhouse gas emissions for the amount of electricity being produced, even than black coal. (ABC News)

It is in this context that the local impacts of any proposed Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) were discussed during 2008. The Garnaut Review was commissioned by the former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, when leader of the opposition. An Interim Report was presented to the new ALP government in February 2008. It proposed a carbon ETS for Australia, but it specifically did not consider the distribution of the costs of this scheme between households and regions. A Draft Report was published in July 2008 and a Final Report in September 2008. The Final Report dealt, among other things, more explicitly with the regional consequences of an ETS. It argued that the long term future of coalmining regions relies on the commercial development of new and (as yet largely unproven) ‘clean coal’ technologies such as carbon capture and storage (CCS), but acknowledged that the shift to a low emissions regime would have uneven regional effects. In the main Garnaut rejected the case for structural adjustment support for affected regions (and sectors) arguing the market should determine allocative outcomes. However, he also concluded:

In considering the various impacts of an emissions trading scheme on different sectors, industries and regions, there is one geographic area the Review identified where such targeted transitional assistance may turn out to be warranted—the brown coal region of the Latrobe Valley. It will be a number of years before it is clear whether there is likely to be a regional problem. The Latrobe Valley satisfies the dual criteria in that:

Brown coal electricity generation is one of the most emissions-intensive industries in Australia, and the expected consequences may be severe, depending on the range of factors affecting future competitiveness, and concentrated in the region.

There would be limited opportunities for the employment of people who may be made redundant in the event of industry decline. (Garnaut 398)

In July 2008, the Energy Supply Association of Australia published a report warning that three of the four Latrobe Valley power stations would close by
Climate Change and Regional Identity in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria


**Storylines**

Confronted with the prospect of an ETS, the future of the Valley has been subject to much debate. The debate around the proposed ETS, therefore, dominated debates about the future of the Latrobe Valley in 2008, but must be seen in the context of earlier rounds of industrial restructuring. The news media has been an important forum for the rehearsal of the storylines that developed in relation to these debates. In order to investigate these we surveyed every issue of *The Latrobe Valley Express*—a twice weekly publication—during 2008 and sorted articles which addressed the subject of climate change and policy responses and their implications for the Valley. In the latter cases, we sorted for articles which addressed the development of the Valley. We regard the material produced by this survey as an element of the ethnographic record of the Valley. In the case of the *Latrobe Valley Express*, which has a very high household penetration, the paper sees itself as both a voice of the Valley and a platform for diverse views within the Valley. The key theme of the *Express*’ coverage, as far as climate change is concerned, is the threat posed to the Valley by the potential impact of ETS (e.g. ‘Trading Scheme Would Hurt’, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 3 April 2008), while stressing the potential benefits to the region of solutions based on CCS (e.g. ‘Clean Coal Support’, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 12 May 2008; ‘Commitment to store Valley’s emissions: Carbon breakthrough’, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 19 May 2008; ‘There’s beauty in the beast’, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 10 June 2008). At the same time, the paper was the vehicle for a contest of ideas about the future of the region, notably during and after a Federal by-election which took place in June. Unsurprisingly, the Greens called for the replacement of coal by renewable energy, but Labour and Darren Chester, the eventually victorious National candidate, defended coal (‘Coal industry must go say candidates’, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 2 June 2008). According to Chester, ‘We need to be viewing coal as an outstanding natural asset which must be used in the cleanest way possible to power our nation’ (‘Morwell unemployment double the national average: where are the jobs?’, *Latrobe Valley Express*, June 2008).

For some, these debates overshadow and obscure other attributes of the Valley. For instance a business group formed to promote the valley as tourist destination ‘were keen to prove to outsiders there was more to the Valley than the power industry’ (‘United bid to boost Valley’s future’, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 11 August 2008), reflecting a wider sense in which any new employment opportunities are likely to come through expansion of the service sector. But overall, the debate about climate change is viewed through the lens of the likely impact of the ETS.
on employment and income. The region’s power station owners presented the ETS in terms of threats, albeit the transitional arrangements for its introduction proposed by Garnaut removed that threat into the distance (‘Power boss warns of price hike’, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 21 June 2008). The trade unions also perceived the ETS in terms of a threat to employment. The Gippsland Trades and Labour Council ‘warned thousands of power jobs could be lost, replicating the circumstances which surrounded the privatisation of the region’s power generators in the 1990s’, while the CFMEU Victorian mining and energy branch president argued,

> There was no involvement from the Latrobe Valley community when the generators were privatised (in the 1990s) and it devastated our community, we don’t want that to happen again. Yes things need to be done about cleaning the environment but we think the Latrobe Valley, community, union and workforce should be involved. … Clean coal technology is the way forward so let’s get on with it and start getting things done. (‘Protect Valley Jobs’, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 17 June 2008)

The connection between the threats to the Valley through the ETS and the trauma caused by privatisation of the power industry in the 1990s was expressed provocatively by a community activist writing in the paper:

> The underpinning reason why Latrobe Valley voters turned their backs on local sitting ALP members at the last State Election is the lack of action by the Bracks-Brumby governments to ameliorate the destruction of our region’s economy. … As our regional community stares down the barrel of climate change impacts, the economic and employment consequences of a carbon trading scheme on the energy industry, and the manoeuvring of private power companies to force and capture government compensation without regard for the welfare of the Valley families, we have yet to hear how and if the Brumby Government intends to support our community through the anticipated tough time ahead. What is the Brumby government’s ‘brave policy action plan’ that will guarantee the economic survival of the Valley beyond the pipe dreams of geo-sequestration, the hot air wishes of clean technology and the richly fertilising promises of a highly polluting coal-to-urea plant? (Cheryl Wragg, ‘Reader’s Say’, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 30 June 2008)

The debates reported by the *Latrobe Valley Express* represent an element of the ethnographic record. It is a partial record, including and valorising some storylines and marginalising others, in ways that have implications for the future development of the region. It also disposes of complexity and nuance in articles of 200 words. Nevertheless, a number of themes emerge from the storylines presented in the local press. The first is that the internal and external
perception of the region is dominated by the fate of the power industry. Popular and negative perceptions of the ETS proposals and their implications for the Valley are heavily conditioned by the experience of the region during the privatisation of the power industry. Industry leaders reinforce this perception by continually emphasising the threat to employment embodied in an ETS. Clean coal technologies are seen as offering the most hope for the preservation of industry in the Valley, although the technological uncertainties surrounding them and the absence of significant investment in their development are given cursory attention.1 The image that emerges is of a region beleaguered and threatened by powerful external forces: markets, globalisation, climate change and the ETS.

Home thoughts from abroad

The aim of this paper has been to explore the ‘unwindable spiral’ of material form and interpretive understanding of climate change at the local scale. The recent story of the Latrobe Valley, as expressed in local media coverage, exemplifies the difficulty of disaggregating the material and discursive aspects of regional change and the way in which this interplay shapes the structure of political opportunities. The dominant storyline of the Latrobe Valley has shifted from its centrality to the industrial growth of Victoria (‘The Ruhr of Australia’) to its definition as a ‘dirty’ region marked by a problematic working class culture. The region, however, continues to produce the vast bulk of Victoria’s electricity and with the prospect of an ETS, its fate will be determined by national and state politics as well as local action (see ‘State’s clean-coal gamble’, The Age, 4 November 2009).

The dominant storylines emerging through the local media largely focus on the threats to the region arising from the ETS. Views about the future are heavily conditioned by the experience of the past, particularly the impacts of privatisation on employment and social conditions in the region. The idea of the region as under threat is naturalized in the storylines which emerge from the local press and is one which employers (and unions) in the region are keen to promote. The only hope for the region is seen as lying in the possibilities of clean coal technology, notwithstanding the uncertainties that surround its prospects. We found scarcely any discussion of economic alternatives. In this sense, the region could be said to exhibit the functional, cognitive and political

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1 The main international investors ‘deferred’ indefinitely the main proposed clean coal technology project in the Valley in late 2008 (‘Shell, Anglo-American delay clean-coal plan’, The Australian, 3 December 2008). The Victorian government, however, continued to support the building of an additional power station in the Valley during 2008 and to stress its support for clean coal technology as a response to the ETS, including through the provision of funding for research and demonstration projects (‘Where to now?’, The Age, 4 April 2008).
lock-ins which have been identified in European coalmining regions, which are simultaneously material and discursive. In any event the region’s identity is deeply tied up with assessments of the region’s likely fate.

In reflecting on alternative economic futures it is worth looking beyond Australia to consider the restructuring of coalmining regions elsewhere, for instance Europe (see Hudson; Pike et al. 198-205; Tomaney, ‘Restructuring’, for overviews). The restructuring of coalmining regions has been much investigated in Europe as part of the economic study of ‘old industrial regions’, which provides the empirical foundations for alternative theorisations of regional economic change. Such studies reveal that regions do not respond simply to market signals but are influenced by past trajectories of development. ‘History matters’ and the region itself is an influence on the restructuring process and is not merely the effect of shifts in industrial composition. Many European coal mining regions, for example, are characterised by ‘lock-ins’: that is, industry and public authorities struggle to adapt to new opportunities and break their dependence on old forms of economic activity, remaining trapped in low growth trajectories. These difficulties can be linked to issues of community identity formations and transformations over time. A brief exploration of two regions with quite distinctive recent economic histories, the North East of England and the Ruhrgebiet in Germany, illustrates the significance of issues of identity transformation and the extent to which diverse trajectories of change unfold in coalmining regions.

A major phase of restructuring in the North East coalmining regions occurred in the 1980s following the defeat of the miners’ strike of 1984-5, which proved a prelude to privatisation of coal and deregulation of the energy sector. Politically, state intervention on a large scale was eschewed by the Thatcher government, and the changes wrought in the coalmining regions were designed to have cultural as well as economic impacts. Indeed, the traditional identity of the region was seen as intrinsically and irredeemably problematic and unsuited to the ‘new economy’ based on service industries. Coalmining regions were regarded as over-dependant on state support and lacking in enterprise, compared with industries in which the UK exhibited global comparative advantage, notably finance. Policy emphasised the need to ‘diversify’ local economies, and old industrial sites were typically turned over to new activities such as leisure and retail. In part, these regeneration programmes were a self-conscious effort to eliminate the physical traces of the old industries. The region—especially its former mining communities—was marked by below average performance in relation to productivity, innovation, enterprise and educational attainment, while unemployment remained above the UK average. A larger problem is that
of ‘worklessness’; that is, people not registered as unemployed but often in receipt of other benefits, and who would accept work if it was available (Beatty and Fothergill; Pike et al.; Tomaney, ‘Politics’).

The Ruhrgebiet provides a contrasting case where the emphasis has been on more active forms of restructuring aimed at developing existing industries as well as new ones and informed by a heightened cultural awareness. The Ruhr region is the major location for coal production in Germany. Like North East England the region experienced restructuring in the 1960s as a result of changes in energy markets and technologies, which resulted in the closure of 146 pits between 1960 and 1980. Restructuring in the Ruhr has been marked by efforts to develop new activities out of the old, to a larger degree than the case in North East England. Central to this process has been the assisted diversification of engineering supply and service firms, from traditional markets in the declining coal and steel industries into new environmental technologies (Hospers). There has been a strong emphasis on developing new eco-leisure and cultural industries. In addition to a major reforestation project, investment has been made in recycling old industrial buildings. Perhaps the best example of this is the listing of the Zollverein mine complex (designed by Bauhaus) as a UNESCO world heritage site. The government has promoted the Ruhr as Europe’s ‘Energy Region’ and has created a new development agency to give focus to its efforts in developing new industries. For example, the world’s first solar powered science park is home to the Ruhr Energy International Visitor Centre. The relationship between industrial and cultural change continues to be examined and Ruhr 2010 is a year-long arts festival aimed at reflecting and promoting the identity of the region internally and externally. Clearly, in the case of the restructuring of the Ruhr, issues of culture and identity have been fundamental to ongoing economic adaptation and identity transformation under German traditions of cooperative planning known as ‘codetermination’ (Die Mitbestimmung) involving government, employers and unions (Hospers).

These contrasting cases draw attention to different approaches to restructuring coalmining regions. The first approach is largely market-driven and sees economic history and regional identity as problems to be overcome, rather than assets which might be developed. The second approach emphasises planning and consensus and the development of new activities based on existing assets and acknowledging the historic cultural identity of the region. Notwithstanding the likely longevity of the coal industry, a result of its strategic importance in the Victorian energy system, and the likely limited immediate impact of any eventual ETS, the example of the Ruhr raises some interesting questions to consider in the context of the Latrobe Valley—‘Australia’s Ruhr’. For instance, to what extent can existing economic assets be developed in relation to new more carbon neutral markets and technologies? How can existing skills be
adapted to any new opportunities? Thinking about the transformation of the region in this way would represent a departure from existing storylines and create space for the consideration of alternative economic futures. But it would do so in ways that avoid the denigration of all that has gone before and the ongoing abjection of the region. To what extent can a process of change be imagined, incorporating new and fresh developments and different actors, but which also respects existing cultural forms? How can the place itself play a part in the formation of its future? This debate has hardly begun in Latrobe Valley, but a sustainable future requires that it should.

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For readers of Australian writer Brian Castro’s oeuvre, his 2003 ‘fictional autobiography’ *Shanghai Dancing* poses the critical problem of the status of autobiography in his writing. Like Brian Castro, the novel’s protagonist António has migrated to Australia as a child, bringing with him the Portuguese, Chinese and English heritage of his parents. In *Shanghai Dancing*, António travels back to Hong Kong, Shanghai and Macau in an attempt to understand this inheritance. The stories he finds form a ‘tale that has been lurking in the background for quite some time’,¹ a tale we recognise from Castro’s personal essays, speeches, short stories, monologues and novels. However, despite their shared characters and variations on a common history, neither these works nor *Shanghai Dancing* can be comfortably claimed as autobiography. After all, *Shanghai Dancing* carries a disclaimer about non-identification with persons living or dead, and the Castro family tree on the flyleaf supports no ‘Brian’.

The uncertain status of autobiography has long been a feature of Castro’s writing. Critical response to his work reveals a tendency to conflate the author with his fiction, to read *truth* in fiction, and to read for the migrant author to serve as a representative voice of non-Western cultures, a native informant.² As Bernadette Brennan points out, for example, his *Australian/Vogel*-winning first novel *Birds of Passage* (1983) was described as autobiographical in some

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¹ In place of a blurb, the back cover of *Shanghai Dancing* bears the following quote from Castro: ‘*Shanghai Dancing* is a fictional autobiography. Told from an Australian perspective, it is loosely based on my family’s life in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Macau from the 1930s to the 1960s. Drawing on memory, stories, photos, and family myths and secrets, the book is about the twists and turns of fiction and personal history. I feel this is a tale that has been lurking in the background for quite some time, finding its way out of the labyrinth through dissimulation and story-making’.

When quoting Castro, I preserve his layout, spacing, underlining, italics and ellipses without comment. When I abbreviate a quote I use square brackets to distinguish my ellipses from his, in the manner ‘[…]’.

² For example, *Shanghai Dancing’s* António was unquestioningly Castro’s fictionalised self and reviewers of his 1999 volume of essays, *Looking for Estrellita*, and academic readers of Castro’s essays have read them unproblematically as memoir and autobiography. The last few years have seen increasingly sophisticated responses to autobiography in Castro’s writing, prompted by the publication of the acclaimed *Shanghai Dancing*. See for example Gunew, West-Pavlov and Campbell. Nonetheless, confusion over the status of autobiography persists in even these more nuanced approaches.
early reviews because its two protagonists are Chinese-Australians (20). In his essay ‘Writing Asia’ (1995), Castro addresses the disillusionment caused by such limited readings, although he claims later that these misconceptions also contributed to his creative interest in autobiography (101). During his career, Castro has explored the genre of autobiography in his fiction (notably Double-Wolf, Drift and Shanghai Dancing) and essays (particularly ‘Auto/biography’ and ‘Dangerous Dancing’) and has returned repeatedly to a common suite of ‘family stories’ in his critical and fictional works, most notably Pomeroy and Shanghai Dancing.

In this paper I argue that the combination of fiction and essays across Castro’s oeuvre may be read in terms of theorist of autobiography Philippe Lejeune’s notion of an ‘autobiographical space’.3 The repetitions and gaps of this space in Castro’s writing sketch the life of an ‘autobiographical persona’, a phantasm of the author, who links the very different publications and is defined in relation to a present-absent mother figure, a character who otherwise plays little part in individual works.4 The reading practices used here privilege rewriting over individual works, style over substance. This is a hierarchy that deflects our scrutiny from truth claims to poetics and thus from the authorial persona, a significant result for the increasingly public Brian Castro. Identifying a coherent autobiographical persona allows us to acknowledge the emotional investment in autobiography in this writing without making claims on author biography.

Lejeune’s ‘autobiographical space’ accommodates a writer’s investment in autobiography without privileging declared autobiography over fiction. Lejeune observes that when authors claim their fiction is more truthful than their autobiography, ‘they designate the autobiographical space in which they want us to read the whole of their work’, a designation that acts as an indirect or, as Lejeune says, ‘phantasmatic’ autobiographical pact or contract between autobiographer and reader (27). The nature of Lejeune’s indirect pact is aptly demonstrated in Castro’s oeuvre, beginning from his earliest short stories and essays. It is created through the combined effect of Castro’s contradictory statements of personal investment, variations on a common story, and a self-reflexive concern with autobiography theory, which alternately encourages and violates reader expectations of autobiography.

3 Lejeune is an early contributor to what Smith and Watson have described as ‘the third wave of autobiography criticism’, which since the 1970s has focused the study of autobiography on ‘practices of subjectivity’ and signification (137). Lejeune has been influential in focusing on the role of the reader, ‘both implied and actual (flesh-and-blood)’, and on autobiography as a ‘pact’ or contract between reader and writer rather than simply an act (Smith and Watson 140). His ‘autobiographical space’ builds on this contract, attending to the role of the reader in connecting a writer’s works across genres and contradictory truth claims.

4 I use ‘autobiographical persona’ to describe the main subject of the arc of life writing in Castro’s oeuvre, and not Castro’s similar ‘fictive subject’ (Deves, ‘Interview with Brian Castro’ app. 41). My choice reflects the persona’s continuity with the autobiographical space and my debt to Lejeune’s ideas.
This reading identifies *Shanghai Dancing* as a milestone in the autobiographical space. Interviewed by Michael Deves, Castro described his short stories as ‘preparation for a larger work [that] may never be written, and may not exist’ (47). His statement would seem to anticipate the publication of *Shanghai Dancing*, the novel that makes the most sustained contribution to Castro’s autobiographical space, wherein the iterations of a personal history that reaches back around the globe from contemporary Australia to seventeenth-century Brazil are prefigured by Castro’s short stories. However, *Shanghai Dancing* is not to be mistaken for the definitive work of Castro’s autobiographical engagement. Despite claiming in the essay ‘Twice Born’ (2007) that personal history may only be plundered once, Castro has continued the discussion of autobiography and the development of the autobiographical space after the publication of *Shanghai Dancing*. His recent essays—such as ‘Eight Chinese lessons’ (2007-8) and ‘Memory/Memorial’ (2007)—continually cross between fiction, fictional memoir and cultural and literary commentary. Thus, to approach *Shanghai Dancing* as definitive would be, at a simple level, to ignore ongoing contributions; more significantly, it would also stopper dialogue and deny identity as becoming. These are both fundamental tenets of Castro’s writing that are borne out in the increase of the space.

For Lejeune, what becomes illuminating in writing that blends fiction and autobiography in this way is ‘the space in which the two categories are inscribed, and which is reducible to neither of the two’ (27, my emphasis). The autobiographical space reveals that the autobiographical persona is defined in relation to the dynamic, hitherto hidden figure of a living-dead mother. Individual narratives frequently follow a pattern where mother characters are killed off early to make way for stories of the protagonist’s development and artistic maturity, narratives executed in the shadow of apparent paternal dominance. Reading across this textual matrix, the silenced mother emerges as a paradoxically powerful character, a key reference point for the autobiographical persona, where she is merely dead or absent in individual works. Thus the autobiographical space provides an example of autobiographical relationality wherein, as Nancy K. Miller describes in her seminal essay ‘Representing others: gender and the subjects of autobiography’, ‘the self is conceived in relation to a significant other—who is also a mother’.

5 The fate of Castro’s mother-characters is frequently consistent with critical accounts of the dead mother trope, where maternal death or absence inaugurates narratives of development into adulthood. See particularly Dever and Anolik.

6 Miller does not mean to restrict relational autobiography to writing with the mother, and indeed subsequent contributions to the discourse have stressed the significance of relationality and embodiment in autobiography generally. Nonetheless, the examples Miller takes—Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, Augustine’s *Confessions* and the works of Rousseau—all suggest important antecedents for the significance of the mother in Castro’s autobiographical space.
My relational account of Castro’s engagement with autobiography represents a departure from previous approaches. As fictional autobiography, *Shanghai Dancing* is typical of the works of experimental writers such as Michel Leiris and Roland Barthes, who ‘purposely mine the problematics of language and representation to interrogate old meanings of “selves” … they both call the autobiographical into question and relentlessly employ it to demonstrate its impossibility’ (Smith and Watson 131). Further, Castro’s traffic with autobiography stands with the host of voices from beyond the Western canon who have broadened understandings of autobiography in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and the immigrant and Indigenous autobiographies that have interrupted the English-language canon and narrative accounts of Australian cultural identity. These two frames have dominated critical responses to Castro’s writing. Building on these, the relational reading advanced here challenges the persistent perception of Castro as a writer interested in creativity that exists autonomously and sui generis, outside of the social and familial community.

Finally, unlike scholarship thus far, this reading demonstrates the value of including the whole range of Brian Castro’s publications in critical response to his work, not merely his long fiction. Particularly at issue is the use of Castro’s personal essays, with their indistinct mix of memoir, fiction and commentary on his own writing and other cultural production, and which have previously been used as aids to understanding his long fiction. Sneja Gunew’s article ‘Between auto/biography and theory: can “ethnic abjects” write theory?’ stands alone for its equal treatment of Castro’s essays and long fiction. Gunew’s purpose is to undo the opposition between autobiography and theory, and to this end she takes Castro’s writing as evidence of ‘porosity between the categories of autobiography, the personal essay, and theory’ (370). Challenging the ways Castro’s whole body of work has been understood is not Gunew’s main concern. Her approach, however, confirms the value of reading his essays as contributions to a dynamic autobiographical space as well as tools that explain this matrix.

**Personal essays and the indirect autobiographical pact**

Castro’s articles and speeches generate much of the uncertainty surrounding autobiography in his writing. These are written in the tradition of the personal or familiar essay, which accommodates ‘rumination, memoir, anecdote, diatribe, scholarship, fantasy and moral philosophy’ (Lopate 384). After Castro’s first

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7 Campbell, for example, is sensitive to Castro’s reversal of the conventional ‘autobiographical quest … from the dramatised narrator’s initial paralysed singularity … towards a reclamation of multiplicity, remobilising cultural identity as an unstable, hybrid and productive work-in-progress,’ and ‘finding community’ (45, original emphasis). For Campbell, this ‘anti-teleological structure can arguably be seen to work as a critique of imperial narratives of inheritance’ (47).
novel, *Birds of Passage*, a steady stream of personal essays and speeches has accompanied his long and short fiction. These publications accommodate memoir in a way that is typical of the personal essay. Gunew has observed that in Castro’s writing, the ‘personal is no longer quite so transparently personal and is indeed more correctly described as a rhetorical referencing of the personal’ (374).

Castro’s essays establish an indirect autobiographical pact as described by Lejeune. Their rhetorical mode makes readers sensitive to the significance of autobiography in Castro’s work, creating a tacit contract with the reader through the combination of contradictory truth-claims and variations on a common story and ensemble of characters. Castro’s essay ‘Auto/biography’ (1995) is exemplary. In this work, the indirect pact spins out from the opening disclaimer that ‘I shall begin quite categorically by stating that, unlike some writers, I come from a family whose main export is storytelling but whose main obsession is with truth’ (103). From here, the essay moves in two directions. On the one hand, it presents iterations of stories and characters occurring across Castro’s essays, speeches, memoir, critical commentary, short stories, monologues and novels. On the other, an authoritative critical voice addresses the genre of autobiography. The mixture of these two speaking positions, characteristic of all Castro’s writing, establishes the conditions for an indirect pact.

‘Auto/biography’ declares Castro’s investment in autobiography, providing a history of the reception of the genre as a warning against the readerly blindness that ensues from genre-expectations. As Castro puts it, concerned to ‘rank what is true and not true’, readers ignore the ‘higher truths’ of literature (108). Castro’s analysis is cogent and this essay is often quoted as an application of discourses of autobiography to an Australian context. The authority of the critical voice seems to be unequivocally located in the speaking position of the author, in the *I* that claims for example ‘my first novel *Birds of Passage*’ (116). Thus the essay promises more than a commentary on a critical issue; it declares veracity.

This sincerity is substantiated with particular reference to a ‘morality of style’, by which Castro designates the ‘higher truths’ of literature (108). By explaining this term, Castro declares his commitment to ethical representation, pronouncing himself ready to face the implications of his writing. As he puts it, using Paul de Man’s idea of autobiography as a ‘defacement’ of the author, he is willing to confront ‘this return to me of an auto/biographical project in which I am no longer present, but from whose defacement I can no longer escape’ (120).

Beyond this essay, Castro returns repeatedly to the idea of a ‘morality of style’. It is significant here as a promise of ethical representation that is made alongside variations on stories and characters that recur across his oeuvre, irrespective of genre.
Like other Castro essays, ‘Auto/biography’ draws on a personal history that reappears in other works, claiming, amongst other key reference points, a sophisticated father, early abandonment in Australia and a shadowy, depressive mother. It opens with a story about Uncle Umberto Rosa de Castro who ‘built a fake monastery with fake saints bones […] and was charging a huge entrance fee when the authorities and the Catholic Church caught up with him’ in Macau (104). This figure reappears in Shanghai Dancing as Israel de Castro, who builds his home on Macau from junk and martyrs’ bones, a home his relatives try unsuccessfully to sell to the Catholic Church.

The overt fabulation in these stories bears a weight of emotional investment that both gives substance to and challenges the claims to veracity made elsewhere in the essay. This is typically expressed in the standard denouement of such works, which dwell on the mother’s resistance to the son’s chosen craft. In this essay, as elsewhere, the glamorous father provides an engaging departure point, while memories of the mother dominate the conclusion. Her words challenge the legitimacy of literary endeavour, upping the ante on the commitment to ‘higher truths’ and a ‘morality of style’. The essay closes,

> On my mother’s side, the side obsessed with truth, nothing has been said. I asked her once why she won’t write anything down about her life.

> […]

> She shook her head. It’s better in here, she said, touching her temple. Nobody would believe the things I have to tell. And besides, why would you want others to know?

(‘Auto/biography’ 122-3)

The narrator is wearing his heart on his sleeve. With these words, the scholarly discussion of genre theory becomes deeply personal and the issue of truth broadens to include a specific story of the mother’s silence that threatens to deny the legitimacy of all writing, including autobiography.

Thus the repetition of stories and contradictory truth claims in ‘Auto/biography’ suggest that Castro is not merely concerned with a scholarly treatise on autobiography; he is also telling another story, a particular emotional story, if not necessarily a story from his life. While the confluence of speaking positions used in this essay muddies the status of autobiography, it is precisely this uncertainty that for Lejeune designates the autobiographical space in which single works are read, encouraging readerly sensitivity to the ongoing construction of a life in the spaces between fiction and autobiography. This delicate balance helps lay the groundwork for Castro’s contract with his readers.
Short Fiction: not merely variations on a theme

Although the indirect pact is most clearly announced in the essays, its traces—notably the characteristic of telling a shared story from multiple angles and a concern with the genre of autobiography—can be observed in Castro’s first works, before he began publishing essays. Castro’s early short stories create an interdependent space; a forerunner to the more thickly layered, ambiguous autobiographical space rendered through conversation with the personal essays.

Castro’s early short stories never claim autobiographical reference but the figures and events are retrospectively recognisable as typical of the autobiographical space. In an early story, ‘Miniatures’ (1982), the protagonist (later the narrator) is named Jimmy. ‘Miniatures’ details Jimmy’s separation from his mother and his subsequent relationship to the family that he serves as houseboy, and on whose apartment roof he takes up residence. The family’s businessman father, who has more interest in competing against his adopted son for the attentions of younger women than he has love for his wife, is identifiable as Castro’s archetypal patriarch. Jimmy’s outsider-refugee perspective anticipates Shanghai Dancing’s important character Marbles, who also lives on the roof of the protagonist’s family home and who, as the father’s deformed and abandoned first son, is the shadowy double of Shanghai Dancing’s protagonist António. Later in ‘Miniatures’, the family negotiates Jimmy’s adoption into an Australian family, in a farcical surrogacy that recurs throughout Castro’s writing. ‘Jimmy’ reappears in another early story, ‘The Cave’ (1983), which tells the story of ‘Miniatures’ from a different perspective.

Although they rarely adopt the literary critical mode evidenced in the essays, these stories reveal a burgeoning interest in the structures and tropes of autobiography, such as the protagonist’s development of creative maturity and the Freudian primal scene wherein the child becomes aware of his parents’ sexuality. The latter takes shape in Castro’s first publication, the short story ‘Estrellita’ (1973), which introduces the first love of so many of Castro’s narrators. Typically, ‘Estrellita’ begins with the father. The ambivalent admiration for the sophisticated style of the ‘father’s side’ that can be observed in Auto/biography is more developed in this story, where it is presented in terms of homosocial rivalry for the desirable Estrellita (103). Over the course of the story, boundaries between father and son become indistinct. Looking forward, a similar situation frames one of Shanghai Dancing’s two primal scenes. There, the episode is rendered with more ambiguity; the same rivalry is displaced onto a rich uncle whom the father allows to molest his daughter and, implicitly, his son (185-187). While the later iteration is more sophisticated, investment in the primal scene in ‘Estrellita’ is typical of Castro’s early concern with the tropes of autobiography. As it spans his oeuvre, his ongoing interest underwrites the phantasmatic autobiographical pact, maintaining the focus on the issue of autobiography.
Further correspondences abound, laying the groundwork for the autobiographical space. However, after the publication of Castro’s first novel, the early dialogue between short stories opens into a more complex interaction between Castro’s novels, short stories, speeches, dramatic work and criticism. The discussion that follows considers how protagonists such as Jimmy and António assemble to form a recognisable autobiographical persona.

The autobiographical persona

The core logic of autobiography is sustained across Castro’s oeuvre by variants on an autobiographical persona who connects his different works. For Lejeune, an autobiographical space reveals corresponding autobiographical personas or ‘phantasms of the individual’ (27, original emphasis). Castro has gestured to such a figure. Interviewed by Deves, Castro asserted that in individual works, ‘there is a fictive subject, and the fictive subject is the one you actually empathize with, you stand behind in a sense. […] I think the fictive subject has been invested with a lot of the characteristics of the real subject’ (41). The accumulation of these fictive subjects forms the autobiographical persona and, while it resists biographical reference, this figure has the greatest unifying effect across the space. However, the stability of this function is deceptive, providing opportunity for Castro to investigate how the subject is discursively constituted, and forming an autobiographical persona in a constant state of becoming.

The autobiographical persona emerges in an intertextual reading of *Shanghai Dancing*. Each of the examples offered so far overlaps in some way with that novel. The matter and style of *Shanghai Dancing* represent the most complex and extensive contribution to the autobiographical space, and its protagonist, António Castro, is the most fully realised example of the autobiographical persona. This figure is distinguished by a common history, an idiosyncratic, shared voice and perspective, and by his positioning in relation to people—particularly as the son of distinctive parents—and places. Across the oeuvre, iterations of the autobiographical persona continually speak from the margins, from the position of a perennial child, frequently excluded from the main action, inevitably at the mercy of other more important players (usually father figures). *Shanghai Dancing* develops an internal dialogism, or ‘voices resonating through bones’, as António describes the various conflicting stories that reach back to the seventeenth-century to describe his cultural, familial and literary heritage (152). This polyphony extends the interaction between texts that I have been exploring, and concentrates around António to form his fictional autobiography.

António’s identity is constituted in relation to a range of characters: from family members to other versions of the autobiographical persona in Castro’s oeuvre, to classical and contemporary literary figures. Like his grandfather Virgil and
so many of Castro’s protagonists, António is a writer and a scholar and, in his personal style, somewhat of an aesthete. In his attention to dancing and music, António exhibits both his father’s cultural sophistication and flamboyance in 1920s/30s Shanghai, Hong Kong and Macau, and the inheritance of forebears such as Isaac de Castro and Isabella Boa Vista, who dance as the Dutch attack the Brazilian port of Recife in 1643. Like almost everyone in his family (with the significant exception of his mother) António leaps and dances and loves jazz, he is an intruder and a squanderer and the one who leaves, repeatedly walking out of relationships and skipping borders, the perpetual prodigal son. None of these traits produce material wealth and he embraces the family motto, ‘Nothing to Declare’, which facilitates easy movement across borders and, more importantly, purports to reject all inheritance.

Cultural and autobiography theory also destabilises the borders of this central subject, deepening its contribution to the indirect autobiographical pact. This is particularly significant in Shanghai Dancing. More than any other text, Shanghai Dancing constructs António’s identity between the tropes of autobiography such as photographs, the family tree and primal scenes, ultimately bringing genre theory into the persona’s becoming. António is constructed within the web of graphics that accompany the text. The family tree (which teasingly omits half of the text’s characters), old photographs of Shanghai, Hong Kong and Australia, family photographs that rarely correspond clearly to the text, as well as old advertisements that may depict António’s mother, postcards, letters and wills, are typical of autobiography while simultaneously, in this case, resisting clear reference by failing to align with the narrative of Shanghai Dancing or indeed with other versions of the life story it presents. These features stress the ongoing importance of the genre of autobiography while simultaneously refusing to fix any definitive version of the autobiographical persona.

These tropes are employed self-consciously, so that Shanghai Dancing dramatises theoretical discussion of the genre of autobiography, bringing it into the evolving identity of the autobiographical persona. In one analogy, referential instability, the risk of exposure and the death of the autobiographical subject are explored through photography. António is reminded that: ‘In early photographic procedures they used to have to constrain people for their portraits [...] they had to act as if they were dead in order to appear alive and whole’ (21). Most strikingly, this vulnerability is dramatised through the reconstructive facial surgery performed by António’s grandfather, echoing de Man’s ‘de-facement’. The persistence of these self-reflexive and theoretical modes of reading means that they hold as much importance in the emerging identity of the autobiographical persona as stories of family and personal experience; the persona grounds not only fiction but also critique across the autobiographical space.
One significant result of this meeting of character and autobiography theory is
an investigation of the discursive constitution of the subject. The questionable
status of fictional autobiography is compounded in Castro’s writing by the
instability of the subject, which shifts between subject positions, and between
critic, memoirist and fictional narrator, emphasising the lack of distinction
between these roles that is characteristic of autobiography. *Shanghai Dancing*
pursues a teasing instability that is typical of all of Castro’s writing, which
slides continually between first, second and third person, between various
speaking positions, and between a discernable autobiographical persona and
the figures around him, so that the relationship between the author and narrator
continually changes. António’s narratorial voice blurs throughout; it is often
unclear whether the narrator is his father, his grandfather or himself, or even
Israel de Castro speaking from the seventeenth-century, reflecting the layers
of personal and biographical storytelling that construct any autobiography. By
destabilising the linguistic subject, these works pose the possibility of reading
character beyond the accounts, actions and clear pronouncements of characters
such as the father, who often threatens to dominate Castro’s autobiographical
space.

The Present-Absent Mother

Alongside variations on Estrellita, the autobiographical persona’s parents are
the characters that appear most frequently across the space; they are enduring
characters in relation to which the autobiographical persona is defined. In this
sense, one might expect them to be illuminated when read as variations on
a theme. However, an intertextual reading does not extend understandings
of the father figure; individual texts already reveal more than enough. One
implication of Lejeune’s autobiographical space is that it encourages us to
read around such noisy, overbearing narrative elements, stressing instead the
importance of gaps to be filled by the reader’s imagination. Lejeune asserts that
the ‘indirect pact’ of the autobiographical space carries the implication that
authors have, in his words, ‘chosen to leave their autobiography incomplete,
fragmented, full of holes and open’ (28, original emphasis). Such absences are
a vital part of Castro’s writing, contributing to the destabilised subjectivity
already noted. As Brennan observes, Castro ‘constructs narratives of absences,
gaps, and multiple perspectives in the expectation that his reader will make the
necessary imaginative connections’ (9). As characters assembled through silence
and absence, Castro’s mothers exemplify such poetics and make an important
contribution to the becoming of the fundamentally unstable autobiographical
persona.

As already noted, the figure of the father looms large across Castro’s writing.
Across the range of texts he is a relatively stable character, a glamorous risk-
taker, a womaniser, dancer, musician, street-fighter, businessman, opportunist and crook. Where António and his other iterations model their personal style on this dominating patriarch, the father is regarded with deep ambivalence, not least of all for his uncaring abandonment of his son. This figure of the father is noisy in his habits and in the way he dominates the narratives, which are almost overwhelmed with adoring-ambivalent stories of the father and by the interruptions of his advice to his son. These include injunctions such as ‘Move on, my father instructed, learn to hate love’, which thinly veil his rejection and eventual abandonment of António’s mother in *Shanghai Dancing* (337). Read across the autobiographical space, the father is a stable figure; he does not develop through an intertextual reading, he is not part of the becoming of the autobiographical persona.

Reading around this dominant figure, the silences and absences between and within the narratives of the autobiographical space reveal that the most persistent gaps point to the mother of the autobiographical persona. That is, my reading exposes an important character that only becomes present when her repeated absence is read across the range of Castro’s publications. Take António’s mother Jasmine, who is presented as missing from her son’s life. The first mention of Jasmine is in a seemingly throwaway line, ‘I try to eat. My mother used to say it helped despair’ (32). Following this reference she is absent from the narrative for approximately one hundred pages, until António again refers obliquely to her, this time in a conversation with his maternal grandmother, Dora. He uses the chorus of one of Dora’s Liverpudlian rhymes to describe Jasmine’s fraught behaviour. Here he is, in conversation with Dora:

> I hear screaming, late at night.
> What kind of screaming?
> *Father, Mother, everyone.* (125)

It is not until much later that António returns to this episode and more directly addresses his mother’s hysteria. Throughout the novel, Jasmine is represented more as an ethereal possibility than as a fully present person; António strains at his memory, ‘behind, the flutter of silks. Perhaps my mother, but more likely … ’ (149). When Jasmine’s name is finally (indirectly) revealed it quickly slips, with her, into ominous obscurity. António’s pillow book depicts her: ‘in flight from her identity […] imagining she was taken to a lake where there was beautiful music and jasmine tea, jessamy for little Xixiu yea, gessamine Gethsemane perfumes’ (215). It is not until almost the end of *Shanghai Dancing* that Jasmine’s character receives António’s explicit, though necessarily brief, attention.

Reading across Castro’s oeuvre, attending to the role of the reader in the intertextual dialogue that creates the autobiographical space, reveals Jasmine’s significance as an important iteration of the forceful present-absence of the
mother. The many versions of the dead mother across the oeuvre magnify the bare details that appear in *Shanghai Dancing*. Jasmine's photo is exemplary. There are three possible photos of Jasmine among the paratextual elements of *Shanghai Dancing*; none are marked as such and one is simply of an empty chair in the garden in which she is said to have suicided. This teasing present-absence recalls an early story, 'Mythos' (1981), where the trope of maternal death is introduced by the persona's photo of his mother 'when she was already dead' (135). Likewise 'Three Hemingway Pieces' (1977), a short story that begins with a photo of the persona's dead grandmother. In *Shanghai Dancing*, these two photos merge to become one of two António has of his grandmother Dora, 'lying in a bed of flowers in a coffin with a glass lid' (35). The ongoing link between the two images haunts the novel. António describes, 'Life exists for [Jasmine] as though it were behind glass; as though she were under glass like my grandmother in her coffin' (242).

Thus overwriting the already complex negation of the mother that occurs between the texts, *Shanghai Dancing*’s Jasmine becomes a clamouring silence, spurring the reader towards an interpretive response. Wolfgang Iser explains the process by which absence becomes presence through the accumulation of reading memories. For Iser,

> Whatever we have read sinks into our memory and is foreshortened. It may later be evoked again and set against a different background with the result that the reader is enabled to develop hitherto unforeseeable connections. The memory evoked, however, can never reassume its original shape. (215)

Through such a layering of memory and forgetting, the reader is compelled to connect these absences, to acknowledge the mother as a palpable, if deformed, presence. The fundamental instability of this present-absent character supports the becoming of the autobiographical persona.

**Reading ‘Brian Castro’**

By focusing on the character of the mother, it becomes clear that reading the autobiographical space encourages sensitivity to silence and identity as becoming. Regarding the authorial persona, this means that the autobiographical matrix paradoxically effects privacy and concealment by championing a destabilised, dispersed subjectivity that is defined in negotiation with the mother’s silence and her refusal, as noted in ‘Auto/biography’, to ‘write anything down’. That is, the stories I have considered are not about Brian Castro as such. Rather, they concern the becoming of a writer in relation to significant others. In this section,
I stake my distance from claims on author biography by highlighting the way the autobiographical space and its constituent parts—the pact, the persona and the present-absent mother—effectively mask Brian Castro the author.

Castro invests this masking role with varying importance throughout his writing. The essay ‘Necessary Idiocy’ (1989) asserts the need to protect the difference ‘between the world of the written and the world of the writer as human being’ (34-5). In this piece, Castro’s mask of ‘necessary idiocy’ describes the mask worn by the writer when he moves out of the private space of writing into the public sphere. Castro defends the importance of both roles, and argues that writing comes from the crisis point at which the two meet. In the foreword to the republished ‘Auto/biography’, Castro’s interest in autobiography responds to the writer’s public role particularly through its creation of such a mask. He observes that in his growing interest in autobiography he ‘was developing a new voice (wrought partly from the exigencies of presence and public appearance)’ (101). Later again, addressing the issue of autobiography and setting the stage for Shanghai Dancing, the essay ‘Dangerous Dancing’ (1998-9) suggests that the mask offers a deathly freedom. ‘It is possible to disinherit yourself. [...] Forever named, the autobiographer is forever erased, exiled in the homeland of the book’ (218).

While these essays attest to Castro’s persistent interest in the mask of the author, of utmost importance is the process of change itself, the overwriting that occurs across the autobiographical space that keeps the private life of the author at a distance from the reader, defending a concealment that Castro suggests is vital to writing. The mask avoids the reification and commodification associated with literary celebrity, and allows the maintenance of autonomy and freedom of self without which writing is impossible. Thus, Castro’s life writing champions the pleasure to be found in truth’s deferral. In António’s words, ‘Truth is not the seduction and sceptics can never know the wondrous pearling around that grain, above all, the swirl of narrative within these oyster-worlds’ (104). Exemplified by the manner and import of this pronouncement, the rewriting across the autobiographical space encourages a reading that privileges style over substance, a hierarchy that deflects scrutiny from truth claims as much as inviting it.

Beyond the personal, Castro’s concealment bears political significance because, while the autobiographical space as a whole is welcoming of multiple perspectives, such disguise resists assimilation and thwarts the denial of cultural difference. In ‘Auto/biography’, for example, the opening disclaimer about the family’s

8 The idea of concealment is explored in Castro’s spy novel Stepper, which otherwise seems insignificant to the considerations of autobiography. This novel explores the need for concealment as a shared experience of the writer and the spy. As Castro explains in ‘Just Flirting’, ‘because the spy cannot reveal himself or herself, the consciousness and understanding of a hidden Being is vital’ (250).
relationship to storytelling and truth is followed by acknowledgement of truth’s instability. Gesturing towards China’s resumption of Macau, the autobiographical persona predicts, ‘I can count at least three uncles who are going to be in trouble when one truth replaces another in 1999’ (103-4). Implicitly denying the possibility of cross-cultural understanding, Castro insists that although not a refuge, the mask provides ‘a position from which to speak’ (‘Heterotopias’ 182). He pits the representation of a life across the autobiographical matrix against racist-assimilationist ideals, insisting on ‘the exceptional event as distinct from the novel of acculturation’ that is a cliché of migrant autobiographies (‘Memory/Memorial’ 128). Such exceptional moments, which are carefully and obsessively embroidered by overwriting, create an autobiographical persona that resists reduction to narratives of successful assimilation. Castro is simultaneously resisting the expectation that ‘ethnic abjects’, as Gunew puts it after Rey Chow, will write autobiography, and asserting the co-existence of multiple and competing truths.

Castro is either taking a gamble here or hedging his bets. Privacy is enticement to curiosity in the small Australian literary community. His writing courts as well as resists exposure and there is always the risk that it will be reduced to the personal. It is difficult for Castro to control the boundaries of his autobiographical space. The Concerto Inn, a novel by Josephine Gardiner, Castro’s first wife, touches on the collapse of their marriage. In her essay in Heat, Jennifer Rutherford begins her critique of Castro’s novel The Garden Book by considering her relationship with the author (83). Part of my purpose here is to provide the language that will allow us to distinguish such biographical readings, while still exploring the possibilities for reading Castro’s oeuvre within the rhetoric of autobiography, that is, while being conscious of the framework created by Castro’s indirect autobiographical pact. By encouraging us to read for politics, theory, genre and style, Castro’s canon quietly defends the boundaries of this territory of identity. Oriented towards silence and concealment, reference stops short of author biography in Castro’s autobiographical space.

Conclusion

By attending to an autobiographical space, I mean to highlight the significance of emotional investment in the repetitions found across Castro’s oeuvre without needing to draw on any specific story. Castro’s engagement with autobiography is also about writing from a position of vulnerability and exposure, as observed through António’s comparisons between autobiography and photography. In ‘Heterotopias’ (1995), Castro argues for the importance of personal experience in creative writing, suggesting that ‘our wounds of experience, imaginary or otherwise, are far deeper, are far more productive of inspiration, and they provide more knowledge than any idea conceived through abstraction’ (181).
The reader is invited to be aware of an autobiographical space that exists in the tension between a personal history and its continuing creative transformation, that is, between the ‘wounds of experience’ and the ‘pearling around that grain’ that for António is far more interesting than truth claims (104). This emotional freight is never totally subsumed by Castro’s program of disinheritance; the reader never quite believes that the autobiographical persona has ‘Nothing to Declare’.

Accenting these recurrent concerns reveals the value of Lejeune’s neglected ‘autobiographical space’ as a tool for approaching writing that blends fiction, critique and autobiography over a writer’s oeuvre, an increasingly common practice. Where earlier responses to Castro’s writing have either avoided discussing his different types of writing together, or have allowed his essays to function as author biography, my reading contextualises individual works in Castro’s oeuvre and in his traffic with autobiography. By including the whole range of Castro’s writing—from essays and speeches to fiction and works for performance and radio—in the discussion, I am able to bring the fictional pearling of these works to bear on discussions of Castro’s writing alongside their theoretical contributions, without discounting his ongoing engagement with autobiography.

Jacinta van den Berg is a doctoral candidate in Australian Literature at the University of Sydney. Her dissertation concerns autobiography, maternity and birth in Brian Castro’s writing and is presently under examination.

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THE ECOLOGICAL HUMANITIES
When God-like Odysseus returned from the wars in Troy, he hanged all on one rope a dozen slave-girls of his household whom he suspected of misbehaviour during his absence. This hanging involved no question of propriety. The girls were property. The disposal of property was then, as now, a matter of expediency, not of right and wrong. (Leopold 237)

In 1972, Professor Christopher Stone from the University of Southern California was approaching the final minutes of an introductory lecture on property law. He noted that, like human culture, property law is an evolving social construct and has progressed through different stages of growth and development (Schlatter). As Aldo Leopold notes in the introductory quote, human beings were once considered property. Assault or even the intentional killing of a slave was considered a matter for property law, not a matter for human rights. Throughout history, we have seen a continual evolution in the types of things that can be owned, who was considered capable of ownership and the meaning of ownership itself (Stone, ‘Trees’ vii). Stone commented to his class that ‘it was easy to see how each change shifted the locus and quality of power ... each advance in the law-legitimated concept of “ownership”, fuelling a change in consciousness, in the range and depth of feelings’ (‘Trees’ vii). Stone was awakened from this historical narrative by the shuffling and voices of his students who had begun to ‘pack away their enthusiasm for the next venture’ (‘Trees’ vii). In an effort to maintain their attention, he wondered aloud:

So, what would a radically different law-driven consciousness look like? ... One in which Nature had rights ... Yes, rivers, lakes ... trees ... animals ... How would such a posture in law affect a community’s view of itself? (‘Trees’ vii)

This thought experiment created uproar and as Stone stepped out of the lecture theatre he asked himself, ‘what did you just say in there? How could trees have rights?’ (‘Trees’ vii). Evidently, he had no idea. Thirty years later, Stone’s paper ‘Should Trees Have Standing’ and its influence in Sierra Club v
Morton\(^1\) has become the thing of legend and continues to resonate with pockets of students in contemporary law schools. However, until recently, the notion of recognising nature as an entity capable of holding rights was completely ignored by lawmakers.\(^2\) Writing in the American Bar Association Journal in 1973, practising lawyer John Naff captures the profession’s early reactions to Stone’s thesis and the dissenting judgement of Justice Douglas in *Sierra Club*. He writes:

If Justice Douglas has his way —  
O Come not that dreadful day —  
We’ll be sued by lakes and hills  
Seeking a redress of ills  
Great Mountain peaks of name prestigious  
Will suddenly become litigious  
Our brooks will babble in the courts,  
Seeking damages for torts  
How can I rest beneath a tree  
If it may soon be suing me?  
Or enjoy the playful porpoise  
While it’s seeking habeas Corpus?  
Every beast within his paws  
Will clutch an order to show cause  
The Courts besieged on every hand,  
Will Crowd with suits by chunks of land.  
Ah! But vengeance will be sweet  
Since this must be a two-way street.  
I’ll promptly sue my neighbour’s tree  
For shedding all its leaves on me. (727)

That Naff chose to write in comical verse is instructive. Indeed, while the law had recently shifted to recognise racial and gender equality,\(^3\) it was not yet ready to consider seriously an extension of rights to nature. Stone anticipated this resistance, noting ‘[t]hroughout legal history, each successive extension of

\(^{1}\) Stone’s thesis concerned the legal issue of standing. Here the court affirmed the existing test that required the party seeking review to have suffered actual damage. However, in a dissenting judgement, Justice Douglas noted ‘the critical question of “standing” would be simplified and also put neatly in focus if we … allowed environmental issues to be litigated … in the name of the inanimate object about to be despoiled, defaced, or invaded. … Contemporary public concern for protecting nature’s ecological equilibrium should lead to the conferral of standing upon environmental objects to sue for their own preservation … this suit would therefore be more properly labelled as Mineral King v. Morton’ (See *Should Trees Have Standing?*). Both Justices Blackmun and Brennan favoured the conventional interpretation of standing but in the alternative would have permitted the ‘imaginative expansion’ of standing advocated by Stone and Douglas.

\(^{2}\) For an interesting survey see Stone, ‘Do Morals Matter?’. Stone notes: ‘Right! /2 (nature of environment) … gets 192 hits in the ALLFEDS database, even though one might have expected courts to be the more hospitable forum for rights-talk. None of the 10% samples was philosophically significant’.

\(^{3}\) Specifically in regard to the civil rights and feminist movements.
The Rights of Nature: Reconsidered

rights to some new entity has been, thereto, a bit unthinkable … each time there is a movement to confer rights onto some new “entity”, the proposal is bound to sound odd or frightening or laughable’ (‘Trees’ 2-3). This is because until the entity in question is recognised as having rights, ‘we cannot see it as anything but a thing for the use of ‘us’—those who are holding rights at the time’ (‘Trees’ 3). This is true for nature, as it was for slaves, women and children at different points in history.

Three decades later, lawmakers are beginning to take seriously Stone’s thesis as a novel and potentially powerful means to protect the environment. In part one of this article, I will detail how the rights of nature have been recognised in municipal ordinances in the United States, the Constitution of Ecuador and in a proposed United Nations Declaration. Following this, I will outline pertinent philosophical objections to the concept of rights and where possible, consider responses to these objections. I contend that the current environmental rights movement must engage seriously with the extensive literature on rights and advocate a position which is robust and intellectually sound. If this can be achieved, recognising the rights of nature could represent a powerful tool for environmental protection and place appropriate responsibilities on human beings as members of a broader Earth community.

The Circle Expands

Municipal Law: The United States

The Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF) is a not-for-profit environmental office, founded in 1995 in the State of Pennsylvania, USA. 4 Their principle clients are conservative, rural farming communities who have sought assistance to stop the production of incinerators, factory hog farms and other large-scale projects (Margil 1). After many years of conventional environmental practice, CELDF grew despondent and sceptical of the mainstream framework for environmental protection. Associate Director Mari Margil explains:

What our experience showed us was that our system of environmental laws and regulations don’t actually protect the environment. At best, they merely slow the rate of its destruction. After several years, we stopped doing that work. We weren’t helping anyone protect anything. (1)

The practice of environmental law seeks to protect the environment by ‘regulating’ human interaction. Only in exceptional circumstances are communities provided the legal right to say no to an activity or stop an existing project. Of course, many activities, such as logging old growth forest and

4 See <http://www.celdf.org.au>
mineral extraction cause considerable harm to the environment. However, unless a human or representative body can demonstrate direct harm as a result of the activity, they cannot meet the requirement of standing to challenge the action. In light of this limitation, the vast majority of work carried out by environmental organisations is to make sure a proponent is meeting their agreed obligations and has applied for the appropriate licenses. Director of CELDF Thomas Linzey provides an example of this work. In his first years in practice he would appear before an administrative judge to argue over a permit application. He would argue, ‘Your honor, this permit is missing what’s required by 26 CFR, Section little 2, little c, little i, little a, little 2d’. Commonly, the judge would respond ‘You’re absolutely right. Little 2, little c, little 2, little d, little 2, little a is missing from this application … I’m going to throw the permit out because it’s not complete’ (Linzey, ‘Of Corporations’). Following the ruling the community group would invite the lawyers back to their home for a victory party. However, in just a short time the proponent would resubmit a stronger application, with the identified gaps filled. The community group would again appeal to CELDF for assistance but all potential appeal grounds had been exhausted and in just a short time the project was constructed. Linzey notes, ‘This story was repeated more times than I care to remember’ (‘Of Corporations’).

Reflecting on the orthodox framework for environmental protection, Linzey comments, ‘the only thing that environmental regulations regulate are environmentalists’ (‘Of Corporations’). Indeed, once an activity has gained the imprimatur of law it is very hard to stop. Those seeking to protect the environment are channelled into an established framework with predefined boundaries and response mechanisms. Operating solely within these bounds has made environmental regulation predictable and reduced its effectiveness. Indeed, by every measurable statistic, the environment is in a worse condition today than thirty years ago when the first environmental protection law was passed. Adding salt to the wound, Linzey notes that it is common practice for companies involved in controversial projects to set aside money to fight anticipated permit challenges. He notes, ‘It’s a cost of doing business, not only is it a cost of doing business, it’s tax deductible!’ (‘Of Corporations’). Faced with this understanding, the practitioners at CELDF were forced to think outside the limits of conventional environmental practice and ask: how can we best protect the environment?

In 2006, residents from the rural township of Blaine engaged the services of CELDF to help them oppose the expansion of coal mining into their community. Coal companies purchased the rights to the ‘Pittsburgh coal seam’ 250 years

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5 For example, see <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/>. For updated information see World Watch Institute, <http://worldwatch.org> and Brown, Plan 4.0.
6 Common name of the coal deposit in the region.
ago, and have been extracting from surrounding regions since this period. While once a slow and tedious process, modern extraction occurs through a process called ‘long-wall mining’. Linzey explains:

Six to eight hundred feet below the earth’s surface, depending on the seam, a machine moves across the face of the coal, grinding it up at tremendous speed. After the machines come through and remove the coal, the earth drops three to six feet above the seam. This is called subsidence. (‘Be the Change’ 25)

Because of the damage this process causes to soil structure and subterranean ecosystems, it has been banned in many countries, including Germany where it originated (‘Be the Change’ 25). With the assistance of CELDF, the Blaine community collectively drafted ordinance that sought to ban corporations from mining in their area, recognise the rights of ecosystems and strip corporations of their power to override the ordinances. At the conclusion of this process, the ordinance was advertised and a time was set for public comment. Only two people spoke against the ordinance, ‘a representative from the coal company and an attorney, who threatened the supervisors with law suits’ (‘Be the Change’ 37). While much more could be said, the section relating to the rights of nature provides that ecosystems—including wetlands, rivers, and streams, ‘possess inalienable and fundamental rights to exist and flourish within the Township of Blaine’ (Margil 3). The people of Blaine had the ability to defend the rights of ecosystems without having to prove standing, and damages were to be measured by harm caused to the ecosystem itself.

Following this ordinance, CELDF have worked with over 200 communities and over 20 have adopted rights for nature ordinances. One example is Barnstead New Hampshire, who adopted their ordinance in 2008 by a vote of 135 to 1. The ordinance confers rights on specific parts of nature and reads:

Natural communities and ecosystems possess inalienable and fundamental rights to exist and flourish within the Town of Barnstead. Ecosystems shall include, but not be limited to, wetlands, streams, rivers, aquifers, and other water systems. (Margil 3)

More recently CELDF has worked with the city of Spokane, Washington,7 and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Both cities represent a combined population of over 500,000 people. While one does not commonly associate rural American townships as a source of progressive environmental ethics, their vision and earnest desire to protect local ecosystems represents a tangible fulfilment of

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7 For further information see <http://envisionspokane.org/index.html>.
Stone’s thesis for recognising the rights of nature. However, it must be noted that municipal ordinances are the most grass-roots form of law and subservient to the laws of the state and the constitution. In the event of inconsistency with these ‘higher’ laws, the ordinances can be struck down. To secure the rights of nature, one needs to implement change further up the legal hierarchy.

**Constitutional Law: Ecuador**

The legal developments in the United States quickly attracted international attention from organisations and governments looking to strengthen environmental safeguards. One such organisation was the Pachamama Alliance, a not-for-profit environmental office operating in San Francisco and Ecuador. In 2007, Ecuador began the process of drafting a new constitution and the Pachamama Alliance had begun a dialogue with the Ecuadorian government about including provisions that would better protect the environment. Like many other third world countries, Ecuador has been used as a dumping ground for many wealthy western corporations, who exploit weaker safety and environmental standards. This culminated when Texaco (subsidiary of Chevron) dumped nearly 16 million gallons of oil and 20 billion gallons of waste into 17,000 acres of pristine forest. In addition to the environmental impacts, local indigenous groups have claimed that the dumping has resulted in higher rates of cancer and miscarriages (Mayhew 8-9).

The Pachamama Alliance invited representatives from CELDF to meet with delegates from the Ecuadorian Constitutional Assembly, including former minister of energy, Alberto Acosta. Margil recalls:

> We thought that we’d have an uphill battle trying to explain to this former minister of energy and mines why communities in the U.S. were adopting laws recognizing ecosystem rights. But before we had a chance to say anything, he told us that to his mind, the law treats nature as a slave, with no rights of its own. We had found a meeting of the minds in one of the most unlikely, but most critical of places. (4)

Acosta requested that CELDF draft a constitutional provision for them to consider. This was shaped and expanded by the Constitutional Assembly. In September 2008, an overwhelming majority of citizens approved the new constitution and Ecuador became the first country in the world to codify the rights of nature in their constitution. The provisions relating to the rights of nature read:

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8 In making this point I acknowledge that many farmers and farming communities have intimate connection with the land and possess a strong conservation ethic.

9 As this article was being finalised, the township of Blaine had their ordinances declared invalid and long-reach coal mining has been introduced into the area.
Art. 1: Nature or Pachamama, where life is reproduced and exists, has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution. Every person, people, community or nationality, will be able to demand the recognitions of rights for nature before the public organisms. The application and interpretation of these rights will follow the related principles established in the Constitution.

Article 2: Nature has the right to an integral restoration. This integral restoration is independent of the obligation on natural and juridical persons or the State to indemnify the people and the collectives that depend on the natural system. In the cases of severe or permanent environment impact, including the ones caused by the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources, the State will establish the most efficient mechanisms for the restoration, and will adopt the adequate measures to eliminate or mitigate the harmful environmental consequences.

Article 3: The State will motivate natural and juridical persons as well as collectives to protect nature; it will promote respect towards all the elements that form an ecosystem. (Linzey, ‘Be the Change’ 134-135)

It is important to note that in contrast to the United States Municipal Ordinances, this provision leaves nature undefined. The use of general language is common in constitutional drafting and allows for words to have broad interpretation and remain relevant over time. However, it also provides no guidance for lawmakers or those who would seek to enforce nature’s rights. As a result, questions remain regarding how this article will be integrated with other legislation and provide a comprehensive scheme for environmental protection. Further to this practical point is the question of how President Correa’s government will interpret and uphold this provision in the face of industry and social pressure to combat competing issues such as poverty and unemployment.

International Law: Charter for Mother Earth Rights

Following their South American neighbours, on the 22 April 2009, Bolivian President Evo Morales Ayma addressed the United Nations General Assembly and articulated his hope that the twenty-first century would be known as the century of the rights of Mother Earth. To achieve this hope, Morales called on member states to develop a Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth which, among other things ‘would enshrine the right to life for all living things; the right for Mother Earth to live free of contamination and pollution; and the right to harmony and balance among and between all things’ (Cullinan, ‘A History’ 4). This was followed on 17 October 2009 by a declaration from the Bolivarian
Alliance for the Peoples of Our America supporting the call for the adoption of a Universal Declaration of Mother Earth Rights. The Declaration expresses the fundamental tenets of Berry’s Proposal with great clarity, stating:

In the 21st century, it is impossible to achieve full human rights protection if at the same time we do not recognise and defend the rights of the planet earth and nature. Only by guaranteeing the rights of Mother Earth can we guarantee the protection of human rights. The planet Earth can exist without human life, but humans cannot exist without planet Earth. (Cullinan, ‘A History’ 4)

On 22 April 2010, Bolivia hosted a Peoples’ World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights. The conference was attended by over 35,000 people and concluded with President Morales adopting a declaration which will be presented to the United Nations. The declaration draws inspiration from other authoritative agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Earth Charter. The preamble expressly acknowledges our profound dependence and relationship with the Earth, noting ‘we are all part of Mother Earth, an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with a common destiny’ (People’s Conference). Specifically in regard to rights, the declaration states:

Article 2. Inherent Rights of Mother Earth

(1) Mother Earth and all beings of which she is composed have the following inherent rights:

(a) the right to life and to exist;

(b) the right to be respected;

(c) the right to continue their vital cycles and processes free from human disruptions;

(d) the right to maintain its identity and integrity as a distinct, self-regulating and interrelated being;

(e) the right to water as a source of life;

(f) the right to clean air;

(g) the right to integral health;

(h) the right to be free from contamination, pollution and toxic or radioactive waste;

(i) the right to not have its genetic structure modified or disrupted in a manner that threatens its integrity or vital and healthy functioning;

(j) the right to full and prompt restoration for the violation of the rights recognized in this declaration caused by human activities;

(2) Each being has the right to a place and to play its role in Mother Earth for her harmonious functioning.

(3) Every being has the right to wellbeing and to live free from torture or cruel treatment by human beings.

(People’s Conference)

The declaration is not limited to ecosystems and expressly includes non-human animals. For example article one, part five notes that ‘Mother Earth and all beings are entitled to all the inherent rights recognised in this Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as may be made between organic and inorganic beings, species, origin, use to human beings of any other states’ (People’s Conference). Further, the declaration notes in part six ‘just as human beings have human rights, all other beings have rights which are specific to their species or kind and appropriate for their role and function within the communities within which they exist’ (People’s Conference). Finally, the declaration places specific obligations on human beings in regard to their interaction with nature. For example, article three, part one, notes that human beings are responsible ‘for respecting and living in harmony with Mother Earth’. Further obligations listed in part two include to ‘promote the full implementation and enforcement of the rights’; ‘promote and participate in learning, analysis, interpretation and communication about how to live in harmony with Mother Earth’; ‘ensure that the damages caused by human violations … are rectified and that those responsible are held accountable for restoring the integrity and health of Mother Earth’ and ‘empower human beings and institutions to defend the rights of Mother Earth’ (People’s Conference).

Rights: A Troublesome Concept

That the concept of rights that has worked so well to protect human dignity is a hallmark of recent cultural progress. The rights model, however, proves troublesome when used to protect the biological world. (Rolston 256)

From a legal-operational perspective the notion of recognising the inherent rights of nature is relatively straightforward (Stone, ‘Trees’ 4-23). Courts can look directly at the harm caused to nature; the legal concepts, standing and
guardianship, can be extended to provide local communities, environmental NGO’s or traditional owners with the power to speak on behalf of the entity; and compensation can be awarded in its favour. Certainly, the legal tools required to implement this system already exist and as noted above, are being implemented to suit this purpose. Yet, law is only as good and effective as the intellectual foundations that underpin it. While many individuals are attracted to the rhetoric and potential of a rights-based environmental movement, it is vital to pause and reflect on the philosophical objections and extensive literature surrounding this debate. This section will highlight and, where possible, respond to some of the hard questions involved in expanding rights beyond human beings. Having considered this aspect, we will be in a stronger position to consider its desirability as a tool for environmental protection.

Legal Categories

The first significant objection is from environmental philosopher Holmes Rolston III. Rolston correctly notes that the language and framework of rights is a uniquely human construct. There were no rights for the billions of years prior to human beings and outside of our community, there are no rights today (Rolston 256). Trees, rivers, mountains and soil do not have rights and they are unable to recognise the rights of others. Thus, a mountain slide that uproots a small pine forest does not violate the rights of the tree community. Even if the mountain slide kills human beings, it does not violate human rights. The mountain is not guilty of reprehensible behaviour and one cannot bring it to be shamed in a court of law. Legal rights correspond with legitimate claims and entitlements. Thus, a mountain climber has a right to be rescued by a mountain ranger, because of their relationship and the existence of a duty of care. If the mountain ranger stood and watched the mountain slide engulf the mountain climber and he was in a reasonable position to rescue the individual, he would be morally, as well as legally, responsible. Reflecting on this point, Rolston notes: ‘Using the language of rights for rocks, rivers, plants and animals is comical, because the concept of rights is an inappropriate category for nature’ (257).

An intellectually sound rights-based discourse must acknowledge and accept Rolston’s comments. It is plainly nonsense to speak of nature holding duties or to suppose that rights exist between one part of nature and another. The concept applies only in the context of human interaction with nature and would place duties only on human beings. Importantly, Stone foresaw this objection in *Trees*, commenting:

to say that the environment should have rights is not to say that it should have every right we can imagine, or even the same body of rights as human beings have. Nor is it to say that everything in the environment should have the same rights as every other thing in the environment. (4)
Rather than simply transplanting the full range of rights held by human beings onto other entities, one can implement the concept in a limited and relative fashion. The recognition of rights is not an ‘all or nothing’ conferral. Commenting on this point, Thomas Berry notes, ‘rights in the nonliving form are role-specific; rights in the living form are species specific and limited’ (‘Evening Thoughts’ 111). Thus, rivers have river rights; trees have tree rights; birds have bird rights and humans have human rights. The difference is qualitative, not quantitative, and the rights of one part of nature would be of no value to another part. Finally, it should be noted that this specific application of rights requires an intimate understanding of the entity in question and a precise determination of the borders/constituents of an ecosystem or species. Potential power dynamics arise regarding ‘who speaks for nature’ and in particular the role of science in answering these questions. For a rights-based environmental movement to be taken seriously in western culture, disciplines such as ecology will need to play a primary role. Ideally however, traditional owners and local communities would have input into this process and could supplement the general principles of science with specific, place-based knowledge and natural history.

In Nature’s Interest?

The only stone which could be of moral concern and hence deserving of legal rights is one like Christopher. (Elder 285)

The proceeding section gives rise to two further questions: does nature have interests? And if so, how can people accurately discern what those interests are? Mark Sagoff powerfully raised the first objection in 1974 in response to Stone’s thesis. Sagoff mocked the idea that ‘all of nature marches forward in legal equality, with rights for all, without regard to race, creed, color, sex, leaf structure, or atomic number’ (‘On Preserving’ 221). How, he wondered, did Stone or the environment movement purport to know the interests of a voiceless object? Turning to the facts under examination in Trees, Sagoff asked: ‘Why wouldn’t Mineral King [mountain] want to host a ski resort, after doing nothing for a billion years?’ (‘On Preserving’ 222). In making this statement Sagoff is not siding with development. However, by turning the issue around, he highlights the inherent difficulty of discerning the interests of nature and also the presumption that conservation, not development represents this interest. If a presumption or individual case is decided in favour of conservation, this will need to be justified and considered with reference to the needs of other parts of nature, such as human beings.  

Returning to the important issue of ‘interest’, the current debate is influenced heavily by Joel Feinberg and his ‘interest principle’. Briefly, Feinberg considered

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11 See further Sagoff, ‘Do Non-Native Species Threaten the Natural Environment’.
that an entity could possess rights if it had the ability to be harmed or benefited and was conscious of such treatment. Feinberg notes, ‘without awareness, expectation of belief, desire, aim and purpose, a being can have no interest; without interests, he cannot be benefited; without the capacity to be benefited, he can have no rights’ (47). This principle restricts the category of potential right-holders to people and most nonhuman animals. In regard to the latter, Feinberg argued that they were not moral agents but possess interests and thus a right to have these interests respected. Plants, rivers, mountains and forests were excluded from Feinberg’s rights community on the basis that they possess insufficient ‘cognitive equipment’ to possess interests, needs or wants (50). Even less deserving of rights were what Feinberg terms ‘things’. He notes, ‘[i]t is absurd to say that rocks can have rights … because rocks belong to a category of entities of whom rights cannot be meaningfully predicated’ (60). People can still enact laws for environmental protection, however; these laws should be understood as a category of human interest and of human rights to benefit from nature.

One response to Feinberg’s interest principle is the development of holistic philosophy, common to followers of Alfred North Whitehead, Gaia theory and Deep Ecology. From this perspective, everything in nature, down to the cells and atoms, has the potential for fulfilment. Berry exemplifies this view in the following statement:

In reality there is a single integral community of the Earth that includes all its component members whether human or other than human. In this community every being has its own role to fulfil, its own dignity, its inner spontaneity. Every being has its own voice. Every being declares itself to the entire universe. Every being enters into communion with other beings. This capacity for relatedness, for presence to other beings, for spontaneity in action, is a capacity possessed by every mode of being throughout the universe. (‘Great Work’ 4)

Further to this point, one should be hesitant to draw moral boundaries on the basis of cognitive ability or the extent to which an entity can be described as an ‘honouree human’. Descartes famously excluded animals from the moral community on the same basis as Feinberg denies other parts of nature.

Stone also responded to this objection and advanced the notion of ‘moral pluralism’ as the means to include ‘unorthodox entities’ which lack discernable interests in ethical and judicial systems. Stone notes that ethical activity exists on several different levels. To illustrate this point he draws an analogy with maps that reveal different information about the same area and serve distinct purposes. He notes, ‘[t]here is no one map that is right for all the things we want to do with maps … nor is one map more right than another’ (‘Ethics’ 137-
Following from this analogy, Stone envisioned different ethical systems that could regulate human behaviour toward each other, different levels within the environment and also other things such as embryos and clones. As a starting point, Stone suggested a presumption that all objects (and parts/qualities of objects) held legal considerateness (‘Ethics’ 44-62). With reference to nature, this presumption rests on the idea that a river has value in its whole condition ‘simply because the universe is better for containing it in that state’ (‘Ethics’ 59). Thus, if a specified condition of a lake is harmed, its guardians could represent its ‘rights’ in court and seek redress or compensation on its behalf. As Roderick Nash notes, ‘in effect this was a backdoor way of giving [nature] legal rights without using either human interests or a supposition of the existence of interests on the part of the lake’ (135).

**Human Domestication**

Following from this point, John Livingston questions whether or not recognising the rights of nature would actually achieve environmental protection. Instead, he notes that the consequence of the recognition would be to domesticate nature. In a recent interview he noted:

> I don’t think I want a redwood grove to have rights. Rights are political instruments—legal tools. We hear a lot of talk about ‘extending’ rights to nature. How bloody patronizing! How patriarchal for that matter. How imperialistic. To extend or bestow or recognise rights in nature would be, in effect, to domesticate all of nature—to subsume it into the human political apparatus. (‘Listening’ 62)

Part of Livingston’s point is that if lawmakers were to enact a general provision stating that nature has rights, the legal framework could be imported across all of nature. While this might be attractive at first blush, Livingston warns that it ‘represents the dedication of the entire planet to the human organization, the final conquest of Nature’ (‘Rogue Primate’ 173). Indeed, taken to its extreme, environmental rights would result in the humanisation of wild forests and grasslands and even the deepest parts of the ocean. Further, Livingstone notes that the framework of rights is a poor reflection of how ‘natural’ relationships function. Livingston notes, ‘to suggest that our dogs have a right to demand our company and we have the duty to provide it, is to perceive our relationship as a political one, based on power and dominance, submission and subservience’ (‘Rogue Primate’ 161).

While not wishing to dismiss Livingston’s objection, it should be noted that the municipal ordinances passed in the United States are specific and targeted. They have not resulted in wholesale human domestication. Further, the constitutional provisions enacted in Ecuador and the declaration currently
before the United Nations could similarly be implemented in a targeted or needs based fashion into domestic law. Lawmakers also have the freedom to expressly limit application to certain areas. This of course might raise other concerns and impact the effectiveness of rights as a tool for environmental protection. Certainly advocates of rights for nature will need to be conscious of the risks posed by rights proliferation both across and within nature.

Livingston’s second concern to maintain ‘natural relationships’ has been echoed most visibly by communitarian writers who contend that social relationships ought to be based on sympathy and care. In a respectful and loving household few would deny a preference for this approach. The argument for recognising human rights becomes stronger in abusive households. Similarly, if a dog owner was cruel or neglectful few would deny the obligation of organisations such as the RSPCA to intervene to protect the animal. The point is that recognising the rights of nature does not mean that human beings must always interact or engage with nature or non-human animals in an artificial or political way. We do not ordinarily do this with other human beings. However, in some circumstances it may be appropriate to interact with nature with recognition of its rights and our corresponding duties toward it. This is most obvious in extractive economic relationships such as mining, logging and fisheries. In these relationships rights may occupy a fall back position when ‘natural’ relationships lead to exploitation and harm. Speaking with reference to marriage, Jeremy Waldron notes:

> there is a need for an array of formal and legalistic rights and duties, not to constitute the affective bond, but to provide each person with secure knowledge of what she can count on in the unhappy event that there turns out to be no basis for her dealings with her erstwhile partner in the relationship. The importance of rights ought to be much easier to defend from this somewhat less inflated position. (629)

A similar position can be adopted with reference to nature. Rights ought not to constitute our bond, but in the context of extractive and exploitative industry we cannot rely on affection and care. In this instance, rights could provide a powerful device to regulate human behaviour and intervene when necessary for environmental protection. As Waldron notes, there is value in being ‘realistic enough to notice the tragedy of a broken bond and ask “what happens next?”’ (647).

*Individualism*

One final objection to extending rights to nature is that legal rights are excessively individualistic (Plumwood 152). Joseph Raz argues that there is a right if and only if some interest (i.e. aspect of well being or moral interest) of some entity capable of being a right holder is sufficient to ground a duty to
care for and promote the interest in a significant way (183). Thus, that $x$ has a right means that some aspect of $x$’s wellbeing is a sufficient reason for holding some other person to be under a duty. Considered in the context of nature, legal rights are essentially claims, which place a duty on another individual or group of individuals. Logically speaking the individual claim comes first and the duty follows. The application of this concept to nature is potentially problematic. Indeed, it asks us to fragment an integrated system and impose an artificial system of competing interests. As Ted Benton notes, rights theory proceeds as if the moral status of nature ‘were a function of the kinds of being they are, independently of the diverse relationships in which they stand to human moral agents and their social practices’ (92). Arguably, this framework focuses on ranking species and systems and dissuades more complex thinking about the interdependent constitution of nature and concepts such as relationship.

This paper will not attempt to dissuade the reader about the individualistic nature of rights or the serious questions that arise in their implementation with nature. Instead, it will focus on a relevant branch of rights discourse, which seeks to shift the focus of rights from individuals, to relationships. The relational nature of rights was recognised by Wesley Newcomb Hohfeld in two historic law review articles in 1913 and 1917. Rights, according to Hohfeld, actually constitute jural relations. He identified four types of relationships, which he described in eight distinct concepts. These eight concepts can be grouped into four pairs of correlatives, which describe legal relationships from the standpoint of both the one who is entitled and others who are thereby obliged or vulnerable to the effects of the right. The point is that, at any time a right is conferred, it necessarily puts someone else at a disadvantage. The eight basic legal rights identified by Hohfeld are set out in Figure 1 below (Hohfeld, ‘Fundamental Legal Conceptions’ 714).

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12 From the outset I wish to make clear that Nedelsky is referencing human relationships. In this section I am seeking to extend the term ‘relationship’ further to encompass nature.
In this box, every vertical represents a correlation and every diagonal an opposition. Thus, if a landowner has a right to a piece of land, non-owners have a duty to respect this right. Here the focus of the right is not individual entitlement, but on the surrounding relationship. Further, if nature is recognised as having the right to exist, a duty is placed against human beings who no longer have permission to act in a certain manner. Beyond this, it is difficult to see how nature can engage with the concept of rights. Indeed, in support of Rolston’s critique, Hohfeld’s table illustrates the conceptual difficulty of importing or recognising full legal rights in nature. It is clearly nonsense to speak of nature holding privileges, powers, immunities or the corresponding categories such as duties. Nature can only enter this framework as a ‘right-holder’.

Contemporary writers such as Jennifer Nedelsky and Joseph William Singer have progressed the relational view of rights. Nedelsky, for example, argues that rights should not be viewed as clashing of individual interests or as absolute power within predefined spheres. Instead she situates rights within a broad web of relationships, limited by their impact on others (‘Reconceiving Rights’ 13). She notes, ‘what rights in fact do and have always done is construct relationships—of power, of responsibility, of trust and obligation’ (‘Reconceiving Rights’ 13). From this perspective, rights create a setting in which individuals and communities live their lives and interact with others. This setting consists partly of rules requiring individuals to respect the legitimate interests of others. Other rules are designed to ensure that the comprehensive Earth community functions well. We should thus understand rights as socially constructed, involving not only relations between people, but also between people and things. While
some might view relationships with nature as a limitation on human autonomy, Nedelsky points out that individuals achieve autonomy not in isolation, but by a combination of independence and dependence. She notes:

This approach shifts the focus from protection against others to structuring relationships so that they foster autonomy. Some of the most basic presuppositions about autonomy shift: dependence is no longer the antithesis of autonomy but a precondition in the relationships … which provide the security, education, nurturing and support that make the development of autonomy possible … Interdependence becomes the central fact of political life. (‘Reconceiving Rights’ 8; ‘Reconceiving Autonomy’ 7)

What difference would it make to focus on relationships rather than individual rights? The importance of this approach is highlighted in the case of conflict. Consider for example that the South Australian Government passed law which recognised that the River Murray and Lower Lakes had the right to a healthy flow of water. Plainly such a law would conflict with the pre-existing rights of landowners, farmers and towns to draw water to meet their own needs. On a purely individualistic account of rights, this dispute would focus on the adversarial clashing of interests and a legal hierarchy would be established to settle the dispute. Without wishing to simplify the matter, if instead we focus on relationships then both social and environmental contexts become relevant to resolving the dispute. A court could examine their respective needs and their specific relationship. From a conservation perspective, a good outcome would be that the irrigators’ right to draw water would become encumbered. This does not remove the irrigators’ right; it contextualises its use and requires careful consideration and knowledge of the needs of the river and the unique function it plays in the ecosystem. Water could be drawn to the extent that these vital functions are maintained. While expressed in different terms and not as strong, this relational view can be witnessed in the role performed by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the system of water allocations which irrigators are obliged to comply with.¹³

In this instance, the greatest consequence from recognising the rights of nature is that it contextualises and places limits on human property rights. It is implicit in this framework that property owners look to nature as the standard or measure for their action. Guided in this way, our law could promote greater ecological awareness and express a community’s growing understanding of nature and its willingness to respect nature’s limits.

Conclusion: Should We Be Speaking of Rights?

Arguably the most influential modern advocate for the rights of nature is the late Thomas Berry.\footnote{14 In his final book, \textit{The Great Work: Our Way into the Future}, Berry notes, ‘every being has rights to be recognised and revered. Trees have tree rights, insects have insect rights, rivers have river rights, mountains have mountain rights. So too with the entire range of beings throughout the universe. All rights are limited and relative’. Berry’s argument for rights is developed further in a paper called ‘Legal Conditions for Earth Survival’ in Berry, \textit{Evening Thoughts}.} Berry was the inspiration behind a growing movement in law called Earth Jurisprudence.\footnote{15 See St Thomas and Berry University, Center for Earth Jurisprudence: \texttt{<http://www.earthjuris.org/>}; Earth Jurisprudence Resource Center: \texttt{<www.earthjurisprudence.org/>}; Navdanya & Earth Democracy: \texttt{<http://www.navdanya.org/>}} Earth Jurisprudence has played a key role in the legal developments noted above. As a cultural historian, Berry approached the issue of legal development from a unique perspective. While most commentators focus on how law regulates and restricts human behaviour, Berry recognised that law plays a subtler role in shifting our perceptions and the way we view the world. Obvious examples include how the abolition of slavery, the universal recognition of human rights and the limited recognition of animal rights have expanded our field of moral concern. He hoped that expanding the circle of rights to include nature would play a similar function and that the law could play a role in cultural change.

Importantly, Berry was also keenly aware of the philosophical objections and wider literature on rights. However, he argued that it was the most effective and long-term method for slowing the current environmental crisis. ‘You begin from where you are’, he said, ‘the language of rights answers the legal establishment on its own terms’ (qtd in Cashford 1). Berry was also aware that legal concepts such as right are not static and can expand or change focus. His definition of rights was far broader than conventionally employed at law. Speaking at the inaugural conference on Earth Jurisprudence, he noted, ‘[w]hen we use the term “rights” we mean the freedom of humans to fulfil their duties, responsibilities and essential nature and by analogy, the principle that other natural entities are entitled to fulfil their role within the Earth Community’ (qtd. in Cullinan, ‘Wild Law’ 108).

Berry is an important example for current advocates of environmental rights. In particular he took seriously and sought to integrate the dialogue and objections raised by other environmental philosophers into his own theory of rights. Further, he viewed rights as an interim tool and began the work of evolving the concept toward a less adversarial and universalistic concept. The challenge for the current movement is to continue this work, engage with the extensive literature on rights and communicate their ideas in a way that is meaningful for communities and lawmakers. From one perspective, this places an additional
burden atop of an already difficult task. However, it is essential to creating intellectually sound law, which is robust, long-lived and achieves the desired objective of environmental sustainability.

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Encountering Native Grasslands: Matters of Concern in an Urban Park

LESLEY INSTONE

Encountering the fence-line

Photo 1: Royal Park, December 2009

This paper begins at an unexpected fence enclosing a large area of native grassland in an inner urban Melbourne park (Photo 1). Royal Park at 188 ha is Melbourne’s largest park, and its southern corner is about 3 km from the CBD (Figure 1).
Figure 1: Map of Royal Park
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The fence is located on a hill, sometimes referred to as the dome; an iconic treeless feature, encircled by a path it rises slightly above the surrounding parkland, commanding striking views of the city to the east (Photo 2). On one side of the fence green lawn stretches out across the parkland, pleasing to the eye and unremarkable in its ubiquity (Photo 3). On the other, in the enclosed area, native grasses rise up tall and yellow (Photo 4). These are kangaroo and wallaby grasses re-established to reference the original vegetation of the treeless grassy plains of the western Melbourne area (Photos 5 and 6). The fence is an arresting delineation of native/non-native, introduced/indigenous, colonial/postcolonial. The contrast between inside and outside is stark—green/yellow, mown/unmown, neat/messy, familiar/unfamiliar, accessible/inaccessible, alien/native. The green lawn side references the expected urban park landscape. The other side looks more like a country paddock (although even in the countryside it would be rare to find such a stand of native grasses).

Photo 2: Royal Park looking towards the CBD
Photo 3: Royal Park hill or dome

Photo 4: Royal Park native grassland
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Photo 5: Royal Park Wallaby grass

Photo 6: Royal Park Kangaroo grass
Coming upon the fence and tall native grasses proved an ‘awkward encounter’ (Hitchings), as the native grassland suggests the possibility of another kind of urban park, another landscape, different relations, other bodily stances, and other natures. There is a gate into the grassland, and it’s captivating to walk among the beautiful kangaroo grasses and the taller, now in midsummer, yellow wallaby grass. You can immerse yourself in the novelty and pleasure of such an experience, but it’s one tinged with a visceral anxiety engendered by the possibility of snakes and lurking danger. The fence and grasses trigger a bodily and conceptual sense of unease, a dissonance, a provocation to re-think and to walk differently. In another context, Koori writer and historian Tony Birch contemplates how the Number 55 tram that runs through Royal Park follows ‘a route once familiar to Wurundjeri people travelling to Mt William—traversing the plain just to the east of the Moonee Ponds Creek and Coonan’s Hill’ (397). He gazes (on a tram journey in 2001) at the few eucalypts in the park, not as representations of a previous landscape, but as witnesses to these earlier ‘comings and goings’ across this space (397). Following Birch’s line of thought, the Royal Park grasses reference not just the ‘natural, native, original’ landscape of western Melbourne, but previous human-plant-place relations, colonial dispossession, and other modes of connection between humans and nonhumans. The plants as witness may well have a very different tale to tell than the stories of native versus alien that dominate ecological restoration in Australia today.

Native nature, park nature

There is by now a considerable literature on issues of ‘nativeness’, ‘invasives’, ‘exotic’ and belonging in relation to the management and restoration of Australian parks and landscapes. Authors have pointed to the cultural contingencies and historically shifting meanings that underpin these debates (Head and Muir ‘Nativeness’; Robbins ‘invasive networks’; Kull and Rangan; Jacobs; Trigger ‘native vs. exotic’; Griffiths), and highlight the ‘sliding scales and blurred boundaries’ (Warren 432) that beleaguer attempts at definitive categorisation. Here, I set the Royal Park grass story in motion in the mid-1980s with the rise of an ecological nativism whereby pre-1788 plant distributions were taken as defining what was ‘truly’ native. This vision of local nativeness contends that only plants that occurred in a particular area prior to European settlement were considered to belong to that place. As Geoff Carr, a Melbourne-based botanist interviewed in 1985, put it so polemically, ‘now we’re into a new era where we realise that importing [into Melbourne, that is] Western Australian banksia or hakea is much the same as bringing in a magnolia from China or a yew from Europe (in Clarke 462). This shift in attitude focused attention on invasive species and ‘environmental weeds’ (Low ‘feral futures’; Morton and Smith; Carr;
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Kuelartz and van der Weele; Clark; Head and Muir ‘Nativeness’), advocating that ‘native plants that have spread beyond their natural range within Australia’ can be considered unwanted and environmentally compromising weeds (Groves qtd. in The Weed Society of NSW, my emphasis). Such categorisation set new benchmarks for environmental restoration, and framed it within the discourses of econationalism in the popular imagination (Franklin; Head and Muir ‘Nativeness’). Such foundational narratives, based on a questionable and colonial notion of what is ‘natural’, redraw and unwittingly rigidify the lines of the native/alien debate in Australia by structuring environmental narratives within Eurocentric discourses of a pristine, purified and timeless precolonial nature, and create new geographies of whiteness in putatively postcolonial settings (Hage; Dunlap; Jacobs; Head; Anderson ‘white nature’; Rose).

In recognition of these concerns, attention has turned to the contingencies and corporeality of plants (Head and Atchison 237) and the embodied encounters through which humans engage with them (Hitchings and Jones; Zagorski, Kirkpatrick and Stratford; Hitchings; Head and Muir ‘Suburban life’). Likewise, Kull and Rangan shift focus from the normative dimensions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ inherent in the native/non-native debate, and instead, explore questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’: that is, ‘how and why a plant becomes imbricated in regional landscapes and how human sensibilities emerge in concert with the plant’ (1271). We can understand these new approaches as akin to Bruno Latour’s quarrel against purified categories (We have never been modern), a position that he pushes further by advocating the elimination of the categories of both nature and society (see Politics of nature) as a necessary strategy for sidestepping the fence-line of definitional disputes and the aporia of what Val Plumwood terms hyperseparation (Plumwood Feminism and the mastery of nature).

Instead of trying to make a bridge between nature and society, Latour suggests another sort of move, one he characterises as a ‘moving sideways’ and ‘going with the flow’. Moving sideways and going with the flow take us into the messy, mixed up and mobile experience of being in an unstable ‘middle’ space that is neither nature nor culture. ‘It is the same world’, says Latour ‘and yet, everything looks different’ (Latour, ‘What is the style …’ 39). Rather than two incommensurable sides of nature/society or native/alien, Latour plunges us into a world of encounter and mediation where there are only naturecultures. For Latour’s mobile body, the fence becomes a line of communication, not just a system of division (Carter 13). Far from being stationary and fixed the fence is a dynamic space of contestation and interaction that activates all manner of work (Instone ‘fences’; ‘dingoes’). At the heart of Latour’s sideway move is the shift in register from ‘matters of fact’ to ‘matters of concern’:
A matter of concern is what happens to a matter of fact when you add to it its whole scenography, much like you would do by shifting your attention from the stage to the whole machinery of a theatre. (Latour, ‘What is the style…’ 39)

In this paper I take up Latour’s challenge to shift attention to ‘the whole scenography’ of an event and pay attention to the multiple practices and materialities that are assembled and enacted in the re/introduction of native grasses in Royal Park. This includes the work of restoration and re/introduction of native species, the work undertaken to make the park look ‘natural’, as well as the work that it takes to both make and maintain the separation of native/non-native categories so evident at the Royal Park fence-line.

Anthropologist David Trigger and colleagues argue that changing and contested dispositions towards nativeness and belonging inform practical decisions about ecological restoration, conceptually and materially (Trigger, Mulcock, Gaynor, and Toussaint). They emphasise that ecological restoration is not a straight-forward singular activity, but a complex and shifting set of socio-cultural concerns that shape the claims to nativeness of particular species. They suggest three cultural frames of ecological restoration (1274):

- Restoration as re-naturing and re-valuing — enhancing a biophysical environment by reintroducing ‘native’ species—e.g. the native plant movement;
- Restoration as removal — attempting to return an environment to an earlier state by removing exotic species—e.g. cane toads;
- Restoration as re-conceptualisation — conceptual restoration through processes of reinterpretation, repatriation or claiming of species as native—e.g. the dingo.

Here, I extend and re-read Trigger et al’s dispositions of ecological restoration in the light of Latour’s provocation to matters of concern, not as cultural frames but as a bundle of unevenly distributed practices involving re-naturing, revaluing, removal and repatriation which each enact shifting relations between native/non-native, nature/culture and constitute different modes of what ‘restoration’ might be with divergent effects. Such contested notions are evident in urban park restoration projects where a complex mix of revaluing previously unwanted plants (eg. mangroves (McManus), removing plants identified as weeds or invasives, and reconceptualising the spatial parameters of belonging for some species (for example seeing native grasses as belonging in urban areas) are evident. Further, I draw upon work in relational geographies that question the ontological separation of plants and people (Head and Atchison 236; Whatmore; Hitchings and Jones). These geographies insist, as Haraway so nicely puts it that ‘beings do not predate their relatings’ (‘Companion species’ 6). In other words
people, plants and restoration activities can be understood as emergent in the practices, relations and entanglements that adhere in particular places and at particular times. My argument is that grasses and grasslands are multiple and unfixed entities that come into being through the assembled practices of a range of actors—human and nonhuman—and that shift in relation to the broader assemblages that constitute them. Taking account of the co-presence of grass in the practices of restoration and re/introduction highlights not just the agency of nonhuman others, but the affective qualities of nonhuman presence and the embodied nature of the practices that shape and are shaped by such encounters.

This paper began at the fence with the moment of disconcertment (Verran) that sparked my curiosity. Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholar Helen Verran welcomes such affective moments of pleasure and confusion, suggesting that they are openings in which to figure difference in another way. Further, she notes that “These fleeting experiences, ephemeral and embodied, are a guide in struggling through colonising pasts, and in generating possibilities for new futures” (5). In what follows I trace the plethora of practices, presences, encounters and contexts that constitute the re/introduction of native grass species in Royal Park, focusing particularly on the enactment of naturalness and nativeness in urban park space, and the historical contingencies that give rise to particular configurations of people-park-plants in a particular place.

Grass tales

The vegetation of the volcanic plains of Victoria is characterised by grassy ecosystems and grassy woodland, and these ecosystems are now one of the most endangered in Victoria (Williams, McDonnell and Seager). These plains sweep westward from what is now Melbourne, and were among the first areas to be settled by European colonisers. This section of the plains is the home of the Wurundjeri people for whom the western grasslands provided good hunting and gathering in precolonial times (Presland). But the grasslands, and the area that Royal Park now occupies, were soon appropriated for sheep grazing, then later, in 1845, set aside for parkland and open space by Governor La Trobe (Donati; Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi 143). Despite this, the area was neglected and sheep continued to be the main occupiers until the 1860s when 20 hectares of land were granted for a zoological gardens (Donati). About the same time, the park hosted large crowds to witness the departure of the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition to navigate a passage from south to north across the continent.

Governor La Trobe’s lasting legacy for Melbourne is the ring of parklands that surround the city, of which Royal Park is one. Yet all of these parks have been whittled down in size over the years, none more so than Royal Park, which
now occupies only a third of the area it was in 1885 (Sexton and Reilly). The edges of the park have been carved away by various excisions to house State institutions (past and present) including a high school (1929), children’s (1957) and dental (1963) hospitals, youth detention centre, scientific research centre, and commonwealth games athletes’ village (2006) (Whitehat). Further, excisions for suburban development and expanded allocations for the zoo and associated car parking, have shrunk the park to its current size (RPPG, ‘Whatever happened’). The park was used as a temporary army camp during WWI, and again in WWII when it was used by US military forces, and known as Camp Pell. Subsequently the camp was converted to emergency housing until around the late 1950s when it was demolished in preparation for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics (Urban Camp). Only one building remained, and this was converted to become an Urban Camp for country children in 1984 (Urban Camp). Various busy roads and a tramline run through the park. The park has recently come under threat from pressures of urban expansion and freeway development and a new Children’s Hospital is currently under construction (RPPG, ‘Whatever happened’ and ‘Under threat again’).

Sports infrastructure was first introduced to Royal Park in 1903 with the establishment of a golf course, followed at later dates by sports fields, pavilions and car parks. These became contested uses of the park, engendering debate as to the place of sporting facilities in contemporary urban parkland. This debate flared most recently when the state government proposed to build a hockey and netball stadium as part of the state’s bid for the 2006 Commonwealth Games (Munro). In the past, the term ‘park’ applied to cleared open spaces and reserves used for sports and as sportsgrounds (Whitehead, ‘Parks and gardens’), but more recently parks have been appreciated for their natural qualities and for different forms of recreation. The history of Royal Park calls into question what a park is, what uses can legitimately take place there, what counts as an acceptable park landscape, and who and what the park is for. It highlights the shifting imaginaries—ecological, aesthetic and cultural—of urban parkland across time and between different, often competing, groups.

The vegetation in what remained of the open space areas of Royal Park has been extensively cleared, grazed, modified, graded and grassed, and variously ‘improved’ over the years. However, it appears that Royal Park was not ‘improved’ in the manner of the other parks that LaTrobe set aside, many of which displayed elaborate plantings of exotic trees, garden beds and formal layouts (Whitehead, ‘Civilising’). There had been some planting of native trees in the 1930s, a time when ‘nationalistic sentiments and the desire for Australian flora were high’ (Donati). However, it wasn’t until the late 1970s that resident opposition to proposed commercial activities in the park led to the development

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1 Yet inside the Zoological gardens formal garden beds were established.
of the ‘Royal Park Landscape Masterplan’, 1977 (AILA, ‘Masterplan’). This Masterplan included a small native garden to be established in a corner of the park (AILA, ‘Masterplan’) not far from where the native grassland is now located. The Masterplan proposed bush regeneration, cycle paths, picnic facilities, road closures and opposed the expansion of sporting facilities. None of these proposals were implemented at that time (AILA, ‘Masterplan’). Continuing debates over the changing uses and nature of the park, failed planning attempts, and resident agitation about incessant incursions of other uses into the park, prompted the Melbourne City Council to hold a design competition for the park in 1984.

The winners of the 1984 design competition aimed ‘to create a coherent, informal pattern of dominant eucalypts in a naturalistic woodland, crowned with the hill covered in native grasses’ (AILA, ‘Competition’). At the same time they stressed the impossibility of a fixed and finished landscape, and devised a ‘living landscape’ design that would ‘support a changing community’ and ‘gradually evolving activities and elements of the landscape’ (AILA, ‘Competition’). They referenced their design on their reconstruction of the ‘landscape that confronted the first European settlers’. Their vision was premised on divining the ‘essential’ qualities of that landscape and creating a place that seemed natural (AILA, ‘Competition’). The first step in this process of restoration was to rid the park of what they termed ‘horticultural clutter’. In the context of the new nativist planting scheme such ‘clutter’ included deciduous trees, palms, pines and the like (AILA, ‘Competition’). Yet, this was no uncompromising restoration, native versus alien restoration plan. Indeed Strafford and Jones, the authors of the winning plan, wanted first and foremost to recreate the atmosphere and look of a ‘natural’, pre-contact landscape. To do so they were willing to include ‘apparently native vegetation’, avoid native plants that looked too exotic, and use non-native plants if they added to the natural ambience of the park (AILA, ‘Competition’). In their plan for a restored Royal Park, a naturalised landscape was to be achieved by way of a hybrid planting scheme. In doing so their plan eschewed a seamless elision between nativeness and naturalness. ‘Plantings’, they said, ‘should seem natural to the place, but do not need to be limited to indigenous species’ (AILA, ‘Competition’, my emphasis) thus bringing a visual rather than ecological priority to the project.

The centrepiece of the 1984 vision for Royal Park was the clearing of the large hilltop, or dome, to create a ‘spacious quality’ and ‘reveal … a vast sky’. The hill was to be delineated by a circular path and planted ‘as a sea of grass’ (AILA, ‘Competition’) swaying and rippling and crowning the hill surrounded by naturalistic woodland. The designers saw native grasses as superior to introduced grasses in that they ‘require less maintenance and water than

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2 The native garden was later established in a corner of the park, close to where the native grassland is now located.
introduced grasses’ (AILA, ‘Competition’). The choice of a cleared, elevated site for the grassland was ecological as well as aesthetic. For the grassland to be self-regenerating it needed full sun, isolation from invasive roots and water-borne weed seeds, and to be away from excessive foot traffic. An irrigation system would help establish the new plantings and reduce flammability.

At the time, the design was a bold and radical move (Munro). On the one hand it was a romantic vision where the designers, quoting Thoreau, imagined an open sky and swaying grassy fields: ‘Sweeping like waves of light and shade over the whole breadth of (the) land … ’ (Henry David Thoreau) (AILA, ‘Competition’). In this vein, referencing the picturesque tradition, the designers wanted the park to appear unstructured and unplanned, and their design relied on a notion of the hidden hand of the designer to create an apparently spontaneous and natural landscape. On the other hand, the proposed expanses of native grassland raised the spectre of a park without cool green grassy lawn, a wounded park from which non-native trees would be ‘ripped-out’ (the term popular in news reports), decimated sports ovals turned over to native grassland, and other such action counter to the conventional European image of urban parkspace in Melbourne.

**Domesticating native grass**

The native grassland depicted in the fence image I started with may have resulted from the design competition. Its entrance into Royal Park in the late twentieth century echoed changing appreciations of Australian nature, increasing interest in growing Australian native plants, urban environmental movements and community actions towards restored urban environments and urban conservation. The 1970s saw the first serious consideration of the use of native grasses in urban parkland, driven by the National Capital Development Corporation, a body established in 1957 to develop new satellite suburbs to house Canberra’s growing population. Canberra was established on extensive grassy plains and the resulting ‘bush city’ was heavily influenced by the garden city movement. It may have been the confluence of these features with nationalistic desires that sparked the interest in using native grasses in low-use parkland, as well as along roadsides and verges (Anon). Hampered by the lack of knowledge about sowing, harvesting, germination and maintenance, the NCDC in 1973 funded the CSIRO to conduct experimental research investigating the parkland potential of four native grasses, including kangaroo and wallaby grasses (Anon). Canberra’s City Park Administration also set up trial plots. The team gathered data on germination, water requirements, management of established grasses, weed control, extolled the potential of native grasses in urban spaces, and developed a set of guidelines for parkland use of native grasses (Anon; Powell; Hagon, Groves and Chan).
This scientific work articulated discourses equating ‘nativeness’ with ‘naturalness’, where naturalness is figured as harmony with the natural environment (Trigger, Mulcock, Gaynor, and Toussaint 1276). The benefits of native grasses are thus described in terms of ‘adaptation’, and ‘unique qualities’ such as drought resistance and no need of fertiliser. ‘Fit’ with the environment was also emphasised through the claim that native grasses—as ‘natural’—needed little maintenance especially compared to introduced grasses (Hagon, Groves and Chan; Anon; Power). The scientists also reflect a re-valuing of Australian vegetation, occurring in the 1970s, with all mentioning their ‘attractive appearance’ (Hagon, Groves and Chan 11) and promoting aesthetics as a major advantage of native grasses. Later Stuwe (a botanist from La Trobe University) goes as far as to note:

A neatly manicured, traditional lawn in a supposedly natural bush setting can look rather absurd. The rich greens of introduced grasses clash violently with the more sombre tones of much of the Australian bush. (40)

Such an impassioned rejection of exotics and their comparability with natives points to the complex imbrication of scientific and cultural categories in ecological restoration in Australia. The early native grass research program demonstrates a mix of socio-cultural and scientific factors at work in re-valuing native nature, and bringing native grasses into popular use (Trigger, Mulcock, Gaynor, and Toussaint). In this sense, the scientific work was as much about helping to redefine what belongs in park space as it was about plant ecology and production. The winning Royal Park design built on the enthusiasm and vision of this early scientific work and took an optimistic stance that the re-establishment of grasses was feasible and that once established would be stable, cheaper and less work to maintain (AILA, ‘Competition’).

Such optimism was built on the ecological nativism imaginary that if a plant is in its ‘proper place’ then it will flourish and look after itself, and in the park context that native plants require few inputs, little maintenance, and are hence cost-effective. Such an imaginary assumes that the material properties of grass are fixed, and that landscapes tend to stable, steady state environments. However, as I have argued, grass is not a singular entity, and it is only the intense work of park managers and their institutions that hold park nature, lawns, native grasses and all, in the specific configurations that are recognisable as a park landscape. Lorimer, for example, notes that urban parks are ordered into an artificial equilibrium and managed to appear as stable, idealised climax communities (2050). In the Royal Park context, in order to hold the new native grass landscapes in place, park managers have had to develop new practices of control and management to ameliorate the problems posed by native grasses in urban settings, such as the need to burn or slash and bale grasses, weed control,
invasion by exotics, and their vulnerability to trampling. It has proved difficult
to mix species due to divergent seed germination requirements (Hitchmough
453), and plantings have often been limited by the availability of commercial
quantities of seed (Stuwe 42; Hitchmough). Ironically, the development of
commercial seed has involved the domestication of species and concerns have
been raised regarding genetic conservation (Hitchmough 449). As well, a species
such as *Austrodanthonia* (wallaby grass) is a poor competitor as a seedling, and
different grasses have varying susceptibility to herbicides. It’s not surprising
that attempts to re/create grasslands have generally been small scale and
hampered by a lack of horticultural capability (Stuwe 42).

**Making the Royal Park grasslands**

After three years of deliberation Melbourne City Council adopted Stafford
and Jones’ design in principle (Munro). But it took another four years before
grassland plantings were commenced in 1991 in accordance with the designers’
intentions. In Royal Park, the large area of native grassland enclosed by the
fence occupies part of what was once the WWII Camp Pell military camp, and
subsequently emergency housing until around 1960, when it was cleared. It
was later utilised as a car park, sports field and associated pavilion (Mawditt).³
These uses left the area bereft of any indigenous vegetation. The initial area for
planting the native grasses was intended to be the highest part of the dome,
but due to a surveying error, this is not the case. In 1991 the small area that
was once the car park was planted with kangaroo grass and this was expanded
in 1999. In 2003 irrigation was installed and the fence erected prior to sowing
35,000 kangaroo grass (*Themeda*) cells. Most of these, however, were pulled out
by ravens looking for insects and other food. Another planting of 2.4 ha in early
2004 also failed and had to be sprayed out with a non-selective herbicide due
to weed growth. A few months later 1.6 ha of wallaby grass (*Austrodanthonia*)
was sown. A later phase of plantings commenced in September 2005. Broad
spectrum weed control was deployed and the area was irrigated. Again, success
was elusive and the area was re-sown in May 2006 to fill-out thin areas. The
work on the site brought asbestos fragments to the surface from the bull-dozing
of the military camps, and the site had to be cleaned up in late 2006 and the
asbestos removed.

The efforts to establish the grasses has involved site preparation, installation of
an irrigation system, mowing and bailing, soil nutrient control, weed control for
broadleaf weeds and weedy perennial grasses once or twice a year and annual
hand removal of Chilean Needle Grass and Serrated Tussock (Mawditt). The

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³ The information in this paragraph as been kindly supplied by Phillip Mawditt, Royal Park Officer, Serco
Australia.
fence was erected to prevent public access due to the regular and consistent herbicide weed control program and to protect seedlings. It's outlived its use and was meant to be removed in 2007, but so far no action has been taken (Mawditt). As Paul Robbins points out in his work on the American turf grasses, a range of human and nonhuman actors need to be assembled in the act of creating a lawnscape, and these are greatly influenced by culture and politics (Robbins, ‘How grasses’ 140). Likewise, the complex mix of people, plants and technologies at Royal Park highlights the socio-technical assemblage of scientific inquiry, horticultural practices, commercial nursery industry, multinational chemical industry and state power, that intermingles with the belief that native grasses are better adapted, more natural and require little maintenance. The re/introduction of native grasses at Royal Park called for the cultures of re-valuining (involving community desires and political will from the city council to implement the winning design), practices of removal (involving weeds, herbicides, various other chemicals, human labour), and the work of re-naturing (involving the nursery industry, private management firms to undertake the plantings and maintenance work, irrigation systems, top dressing, mowers). As well, the grasses themselves, ravens, and the like, exerted their agency in often surprising and obstinate ways. In many ways, the restoration efforts failed to take account of the grasses themselves—they became design elements and horticultural objects of trial and error, imagined as singular, stable and passive entities. All these practices, institutions, human and nonhuman actors have to be assembled and that assemblage maintained to re/create even a monocultural grassland such as that at Royal Park.

Grasses coming and going

While the scientists and landscape designers may have been enthusiastically promoting native grasses, their proposed introduction in 1984 at Royal Park was met with some spirited opposition. In many sections of the community native grasslands have a poor image, are envisioned as ‘simple’ ecosystems (Ross), lacking aesthetic value and appeal (Williams and Cary). Detractors of the Royal Park winning design highlighted the ‘ripping out’ of exotic and deciduous trees and the removal of sports fields as acts of vandalism ‘wrecking perfectly good parks and gardens’ (Blunden 12). Further, they accused the winning design of breaking the ‘covenant’ that a park is ‘for the recreation of

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4 At the close of 1984 there was much consternation regarding conservation and heritage issues in Melbourne. At the same time as the changes to Royal Park were in the media, the Melbourne City Council (MCC) released a conservation report authored by Rex Swanson, which was seen, among some sections of the population, to threaten the garden heritage of Melbourne’s older parks, particularly the Fitzroy and Treasury Gardens. One of a number of letters in the media complained that the council was planning to ‘sweep them clean and reform them to today’s ideas’ (Eager 12), a claim disputed by Swanson and the MCC. The Draft State Conservation Strategy was also released at this time. It suggested a conservation role for urban parks, further
the people’ (Grant 12). This latter view draws on long standing anthropocentric conventions that ‘parks are for people, not for plants’ (Meserow 11). Human-plant relations in parks have historically been invested with moral significance (Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi, ‘Chapter 4’; Goodman 404) and charged with the ‘important role in civilising and “improving” the citizens’ (Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi 10). In this sense, plants in public parks are not just a neutral backdrop, nor even there for their own right, but are carefully placed and selected species that are figured as instructive, health-giving, and morally-enhancing. The plants and their arrangements are perceived as playing an important role in forging suitable citizen bodies worthy of belonging to the nation (Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi 130). The control of nature and the citizen are figured as a simultaneous achievement.\(^5\)

Urban parks have historically been about the ordering and control of nature as an exemplar for the ordering and control of human bodies (Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi, ‘Chapter 4’). So the introduction of ‘nativeness’ and a ‘wilder’ less controlled, or less controllable nature introduces not just a challenge to park managers, but a challenge to the existing social and urban order. It undoes the park as a consummate space to encourage horticulture and civilise the populace (Goodman 404). It gestures towards disorder, or at least a different order of the urban, and concomitant ‘new’ urban citizens. Indeed, the winners of the 1984 competition saw their design as expressing ‘the particular character of this place’ which they linked to a notion of a ‘freely thinking people’ (AILA, ‘Competition’). They appear to draw on econationalistic sentiments to build an alliance between naturalness, informal plantings, movement and the character of the populace, perhaps envisioning that a native-style landscape would both mirror and build a relaxed Australian citizen body, a sort of home-grown identity in line with the proposed home-grown look of the park.\(^6\)

More than this, the opposing view that native grasses are incompatible with urban parks figures native grass as an alien and invasive plant (in a cultural rather than ecological sense). Environmental philosopher Val Plumwood encountered enmity towards native grassland when she tried to protect a small area in a NSW country town cemetery. Plumwood’s efforts came to nought against the desires of local people for a neatly mown Europeanised landscape. In such public spaces, Plumwood argues that ‘[t]he war against nature aims to eliminate independent agency, and is waged under the banner of tidiness, order

\(^{5}\) Indeed, as Anderson notes: ‘The narrative connections that existed in the minds of British colonists between the activities of cultivating the land and settling were the key pillars underpinning the project of colonisation in Australia’ (Anderson, ‘Race and the crisis’ 92).

\(^{6}\) Likewise, Paul Robbins (‘How grasses’) in his study of grass in American domestic lawns, argues that the practices of maintaining grass as turf/lawnscape interpellates a certain subject.
and respect’ (64). ‘Natives’, she suggests, ‘disrupt rigid, instrumental categories of control’ (64). Certainly at Royal Park the re/introduction of native grasses was seen as invading the ‘proper grass’ and ‘proper uses’ of the park, and images of snakes escaping from the grassland and disrupting cricket matches were used to engender fear of disorder and chaos in the park and to highlight the displacement of humans from their rightful public space. The grasses caused consternation by moving from passive backdrop to demanding their own presence, and decentring the conventional image of the human as the active subject of park space.

**Grassy matters of concern**

By paying attention to the multivalent story of native grass in Royal Park, what looked like matters of fact begin to soften, to

render a different sound, they start to move in all directions, they overflow their boundaries, they include a complete set of new actors, they reveal the fragile envelopes in which they are housed. (Latour, ‘What is the style …’ 39)

The matters of fact that appeared ‘indisputable, obstinate, simply there’ (‘What is the style …’ 39)—the ‘facts’ that native grasses are better suited to Australian park environments, that they are more natural and therefore need less attention and artificial chemicals, and so on—have been revealed as disputable and uncertain. In the move to matters of concern we witness the shift from native grass as a landscape feature representing precolonial nature, to grass as a relational achievement, emergent in varying assemblages, and co-produced by many actors. Native grass is no longer a singular, discernable category or an object of manipulation ‘where nature is divided into manageable parts’ (Verran 72), but thickly entangled in heterogeneous networks of people, chemicals, animals, irrigation technology, insects, institutions, place, time, socio-cultural values and ecologies, to name a few.

In the mobile swirl of moving sideways, matters of concern ‘carry you away’, says Latour, and they have to be ‘appreciated, tasted, experimented upon, mounted, prepared, put to the test’ (‘What is the style …’ 39). In other words, matters of concern matter. The wily, uncooperative grasses at Royal Park demanded attention. My encounter with fence and grass in Royal Park carried me along between pleasure and disconcertment, and raised the question of how we might coexist with park nature as active, unexpected and enlivened (Hitchings and Jones 15). As a matter of concern, the proliferation of native grasses upsets the previous constitution of urban parks, what they should look like, and who or what they should be for, and opens to visibility the presence of others, suggesting a more-than-human park of active engagement. And like my
perplexing, albeit ordinary, everyday encounter with the Royal Park fence and grasses, matters of concern are embodied and affective. They focus our attention on ‘difference as located in banal routines of ongoing action’ (Verran 38).

If you enter Royal Park along a small path from Bayles’s Street you’ll come upon a smaller, more diverse planting of native grasses, that follows the path along the southern edge of the dome (Photo 7). This area was developed in 2002 to show what indigenous grasslands would have looked like and involved a community planting of over 6000 tubes (Mawditt). The diversity of grasses gives it a more naturalistic feel than the fenced area, but like its big cousin it has involved site preparation, weed control and on-going maintenance. As a consequence of its open edges and proximity to the path, the area is degraded by trampling from dogs and humans, and requires about 200 new plants each year (Mawditt).

These grasses have a distinct presence in relation to the fenced area and they elicit different performances from humans. People often slow their step here and may be observed to stop and linger or to pick some grass stalks. There’s no fence here, and no sweeping vista across swaying grasses, just a small planting, accessible to mobile park bodies (human and nonhuman). It could be the more domestic scale and feel, the greater diversity of the grasses, the lack of fencing or the community relations that created the grassland, that engender a different

Photo 7: Royal Park, Bayles St grassland
Encountering Native Grasslands: Matters of Concern in an Urban Park

encounter between humans and native grass here. This area is pretty, accessible, safe, more garden-like and domesticated compared to the wilder more unruly expanses further across the dome.

Two proximate areas of native grassland, two different naturecultures, each stitched into different, but overlapping, assemblages and relations. The same grasses, but different, each enacting a different proposition of the relation between people, park and grass. Pondering this difference brings me to Latour’s suggestion that we encounter the native grasslands as a proposition; that is, as a new entity, not as a recreation of an old one, or as Latour would have it, a novel nonhuman/human assemblage of native grasses, involving park managers, city council, local residents, dogs, ravens and others. The proposition of a field of native grass cannot be considered in isolation, but rather as one entangled in wider networks. In this account the grasses have no innate essence for that would arbitrarily close down the conversation across the fence far too quickly (Latour, ‘Politics of nature’). Labelling the grasses native/non-native and assigning value and worth along these dimensions leaves us stranded in a politics of my side/your side, battle lines drawn, defending a position, competing stakeholders and the demand for certainty. The questions of ‘is the grass native’ and ‘is it endemic’ are far too simplistic and only give us the answer of the dividing fence. Instead of seeing the grasslands as examples of ecological restoration, Latour encourages us to envision a new proposition that upsets the previous constitution of how humans and native grasses should be knotted together in park spaces. As such, it is a provocation of perplexity among many actors.

Perplexity for Latour requires that we resist any arbitrary simplification, trying instead to grapple with the cacophony of voices—human and nonhuman—that constitute a situation. Perplexity exposes ‘the conditions, forces and potential that might be activated within a proposition’ (Ripley, Thun and Velikov 6). As a relation of perplexity, the grasses pose a host of questions: Can we live with this new proposition of native grassland? How do we make room for, and how do we situate native grasses in the urban order? For these questions there is no ready answer, no categorisation into good/bad, native/non-native, no preordained value. The new proposition of native grasses also engenders work to be done; it sets things in motion and brings disparate things into articulation. For example, the native grasses require the work of ecologists, nurseries, and scientists to figure out how to grow, produce and maintain native grasslands in contemporary urban environments. They require the work of local councillors to

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7 Latour’s suggestion resonates to some extent with Tim Low’s (‘New nature’) concept of a ‘new nature’ of mixed native and alien species assemblages, and the emerging concept of ‘novel ecosystems’ (Hobbs et al). ‘Novel ecosystems’ refers to ecosystems emergent in a human-modified world that differ from past and present configurations. These landscapes are neither historic or hybrid, but new ones which challenge current conservation and restoration practices. Both ‘new nature’ and ‘novel ecosystems’, however, still rely in varying ways on an ontological separation of humans and nature.
persuade dog owners and sports people to accept them, along with the work of understanding the relations of care needed to tend native grasses in park spaces. And so on. The grass and fence join together a heterogeneous assemblage that stretches from the park to laboratories and chemical plants, from dog walkers to plant nurseries, from local government authorities to private park management firms, and from local residents to sports people and others who use the park facilities. But more than this, native grasses activate the work of finding new ways to live in colonised landscapes. In this sense, Latour’s notion of ‘matters of concern’ might help enact different possibilities of native/non-native relations that facilitate postcolonial times and places.

Conclusion

Latour suggests that we no longer inhabit a world (if we ever did) of smooth objects, with clear boundaries, objects firmly embedded in the world of facts and untouched by politics or culture. Instead he suggests a world of tangled objects with risky attachments where we are enmeshed in complex networks in which we ‘can no longer be detached from the unexpected consequences that they may trigger’ (Latour, ‘Politics of nature’ 24). As a risky attachment, the Royal Park grassland draws us into a number of matters of concern, including the use of herbicides and other chemicals in practices of re/introduction and maintenance work, the place of sport in contemporary urban life, the desire for a return to originary nature, the place of humans in the park, the fight to keep public lands, research funding policies, and the politics of shrinking grasslands in the face of urban expansion. As such it enacts not one ecological politics of native vs. alien, belonging/not belonging, but a multiple politics of naturecultures and uncertainty that can ‘catch us off guard’ (Latour, ‘Politics of nature’ 25). Back at the fence we can understand a different relation than that of division and dualism, instead considering the fence as enacting an encounter, a space of conjunction and the possibility of a sideways movement across and along. From this perspective, other forms of connectivity more attuned to uncertainty, context, situation and multiplicity, more open to earthly others and lively encounters, may serve us better. Following Tony Birch, we may wish to re/orientate ourselves to pastpresents8 (Haraway, When Species 292) through modes of witnessing, for example, that are open to other presences and non-visual forms of knowing. As Deborah Rose notes: ‘to hear is to witness; to witness is to become entangled’ (Rose, ‘Reports’ 2004).

The design winners for Royal Park tried hard to enact a ‘living environment’ of changing nature, yet notions of stability, in nature and history, crept in to scupper

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8 Haraway uses ‘pastpresents’ to describe the knotting in and around each other of pasts, presents and futures.
their vision and create an ambiguous outcome. My encounter with the Royal Park fence and urban grassland provoked disconcertment and the question of how to respond to complex issues of human-plant relations in colonised settings without re-enacting dualistic division or repeating foundational narratives. Throughout the paper I have endeavoured to hang onto that affective moment as a provocation to perplexity and openness. The rich particularities and complexities of the Royal Park grassland story remind us that what matters is the precise how of entanglements (van Dooren). Modes of entanglement that refuse dualistic categorisation will need to be nurtured in the search for reparative practices that enact alternate management regimes and urban park design choices. The fence in the guise of dualistic division embodies a moral choice between native and alien, anchoring parkspace within the deeply sedimented humanist tradition of human exceptionalism. Yet, moving through the Royal Park grassland, we can apprehend other possibilities. The park, grass, fence, perplexity, body and affect, as matters of concern, can nudge us towards an ethics of co-transformation, postcolonial ecologies and multispecies encounter. Anna Tsing imagines ‘a human nature that shift[s] historically together with varied webs of interspecies dependence’ (Tsing qtd in Haraway, *When Species 218*), a proposition that tugs us bodily into entanglements of people and plants as mutually constituting networks that are constantly becoming, open-ended and historically contingent. Not just one native grassland but multiple ones, manifested through different and on-going sets of nested relations.

Shrinking native grasslands and urban park grass re/introduction projects deserve our attention as matters of concern, not as representatives of an idealised past or as resources for an idealised future. Matters of concern force us to pay close attention to what is going on, and slow us down enough to encounter a problematic and pleasurable space full of uncertainties (Stengers 144-5 qtd in Bingham 116), a curious and perplexing space in which we can reorient ourselves to multispecies coexistence with the dry grasses scratching our legs. Moving sideways from the twin poles of nature and society ‘frees us to perform new expressions’ of coexistence in the here and now (Muecke 8), and enact postcolonial possibilities of how we might better live together. The practices of proposition and perplexity take us only to the first base of an ecopolitics of matters of concern.9 But my goal here has been to map out the human-plant relations in urban parks as ‘matters of concern’, as a first step towards revealing the park as a multispecies site of inhabitation and negotiation—neither culture nor nature—neither a ‘park for people’ nor an open space delivering ecosystem services. Something richer and more interesting is going on.

9 Latour’s ecological politics involves two powers; the power to take into account (the practices of proposition and consultation) and the power to put into order (the practices of hierarchy and institution) (see Latour, ‘Politics of nature’).
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For the last seventy-five years Grafton has celebrated the Jacaranda Festival in late October. The festival commences in the town square with the crowning of the Jacaranda Queen and ends a week later with a parade through the town. The event is now a major regional tourist attraction that aims to bring locals and visitors together to celebrate everything purple. During this week one can attend the jacaranda children’s party, the jacaranda maypole dancing, the jacaranda choral service or the jacaranda organ recital. Local businesses are encouraged to compete in the decorated window displays competition and everyone can join in the procession. The festival pays homage to the extraordinary display of beautiful jacaranda blooms which carpet the city during this time. The festival was inaugurated in 1935 when the slow growing jacarandas planted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were coming to maturity.

The proactive pursuit of this street tree planting by local residents of Grafton locates them as part of a broader movement seeking to enact change in order to civilise the city. One agent of change linking Grafton to this broader movement was the Sydney Botanic Gardens. Unlike the Grafton council, who planted and maintained trees, the role of this institution was to disseminate both information about street trees and seedlings and young trees to be planted into streetscapes. The Sydney Botanic Gardens collected plants, plant material and plant information from many other global locations into the herbarium, library and gardens at the Farm Cove site adjacent to Sydney’s central business district. This material about street trees made its way into these centres as part of the larger processes of botanical exchanges and transfers.

The role of the Gardens over the nineteenth century was to translate these resources for useful application into settlement problems and issues. For example, pastoralism was one of the key industries that needed to understand how to adapt Australian environments for domesticated animals, especially cattle, sheep and horses. In line with these needs, the Sydney Botanic Gardens
researched the adaptability of various indigenous and exotic grasses and fodder plants for use in local conditions. Grasses were sent there from the United States Bureau of Plant Industry to assess their usefulness to Australian farms. On the other hand the Chief Inspector of Stock stationed at Bourke in Western New South Wales sent grasses to the herbarium for identification. This was a way of providing an important service for people learning about pastoralism under Australian conditions. Eventually in 1915, the Sydney Botanic Gardens had four staff working in agrostology, the study of grasses. Additionally they published lists of weeds of New South Wales and distributed lists of plants that were noxious to stock. When the prickly pear, originally introduced as a fodder plant, became an invasive problem, the Sydney Botanic Gardens was a key site for gathering and analysing information from America, Germany, and South Africa about this plant, such that this knowledge could be utilised in the Australian context.

This made the Sydney Botanic Gardens a hub, or a node in a network that participated in moving botanical knowledges around the world. However, this system was not restricted to matters of economy, or of pure science. Plants were also introduced for ornamental and aesthetic reasons. In the newly formed towns of the mid nineteenth century the new streets were originally bare of any decorative effect. This was identified as a problem that could be resolved through introducing trees into the streets. Establishing an Australian urban aesthetic relied on the very same systems of exchange as the work on fodder species. Plants, plant material and plant information regarding street trees moved through the Sydney Botanic Gardens to assist local communities enhance their urban aesthetics. Grafton was one place amongst many across New South Wales that was an active recipient of these ideas.

For the purposes of this argument Grafton is a detour; a necessarily partial account. Grafton does not represent all cities in New South Wales, but it was not unique in its introduction of street trees either. There were two distinct phases of planting of street trees in Grafton. The first dates from the 1870s until the turn of the century and saw a mixture of exotic and indigenous trees used in street environs. The second phase, from 1900 to the 1920s, favoured the introduction of a single exotic species, *Jacaranda mimosifolia*, for uniform-avenue planting. I will argue that both phases in street tree plantings were responses to trends in urban landscaping that were also being taken up in other parts of the world. This paper traces the way that this particular local place was connected to these global ideas through the Sydney Botanic Gardens. It provides a grounded account of the way that the Sydney Botanic Gardens was able to act as a hub of information and material culture to facilitate movement of plants, plant material
and plant information for urban landscaping. As such it also demonstrates that local ideas played an important part in the way that these global trends were taken up in one Australian place.

By the late nineteenth century many Australian country towns had started to include trees as part of their street form. Henry Lawrence has shown the global reach of an urban aesthetic that incorporated this type of planting in his book *City Trees*. The cities of Europe often included street trees in metropolitan restructuring undertaken over the nineteenth century as a part of bigger projects of urban planning and change. Additionally street trees were found in many towns and cities of colonised places. This trend was not restricted to colonies of the British Empire, but also included sites under French, Dutch and Spanish influence and control (Lawrence). In North America, in the same period, pin oaks, lindens and elms were planted into Washington’s avenues in the 1880s (Solotaroff). Robert Freestone links the trends for urban beautification in North America and Europe to those that developed in Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century. If, as Freestone argues, this was a matter of increased consciousness of comparative ‘civic achievements and attractiveness’ on an international scale, then it also follows that Australians were guided by the trends established in other places (159). However this idea needed two things to succeed in a local place like Grafton: a local advocate and access to the right types of trees.

**Sydney Botanic Gardens**

Botanic gardens had an important role to play in this general global trend of local street tree planting. Many of the places that introduced street trees also had access to a local botanic garden. The establishment of these places as important colonial and imperial centres mostly occurred across the nineteenth century. One of the tasks required of these places was to establish nurseries and propagation houses. This was part of their operations whether they were located in metropolitan centres or colonial outposts. Governments, whether municipal or state, required botanic gardens to provide plant stock for a variety of public functions, including city gardens and parks, beautification of civic buildings and for streets. This was never the primary work of such institutions although it was very common in many different locations. This work was done in Rockhampton Botanic Gardens in Queensland (‘Rockhampton’); Pietermaritzburg Botanic Gardens in South Africa (McCracken and McCracken 78-84), and even at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (Desmond 181-2). In Victoria, the Melbourne Botanic Gardens supported two different phases of street tree planting in the state capital (Spencer). The seeds and plant material used in the nurseries for these purposes were ancillary to the larger exchange networks of such botanic gardens.
Exchanging seeds and plants was one of the primary functions of nineteenth century botanic gardens. As a rule such exchanges supported the scientific work of these institutions with herbarium specimens, botanical illustrations, and wet specimens transiting across states, colonies and empires in a quest to map the botanical world. In this way material from colonial outposts was sent to Europe and material from Europe was sent to Australia. Joseph Banks saw the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew as ‘the botanical metropolis of the world’ in relation to other globally located institutions (Desmond 302). In addition to these “traditional” imperial pathways, botanic gardens also exchanged material into lateral networks. India, Java, South Africa, Brazil and the United States of America also traded plants, plant material and plant information with Australia.

Scientific work produced in Australia relied on flows of plants, plant material and plant information that turned their herbariums and libraries into hubs in transnational botanical exchange networks.

In addition to scientific works and reports from botanic gardens all over the world, the Sydney Botanic Gardens library also collected journals that provided detail about street planting. For example, the *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener* ran various series about street planting that included ‘trees and shrubs for towns’ (1882) ‘tree planting in London’ (1887) and ‘town gardening’ (1867). Trees such as horse chestnuts, limes, elms and oaks were recommended for planting in avenues by correspondents of the journal (KMH, 185). Other popular journals such as *The Garden* and *The Gardeners’ Chronicle* were collected in the library and carried reports of these landscaping trends from Europe. In this way information and ideas about street trees were made available for Sydney Botanic Gardens staff. Many of the types of trees suggested by these journals were also included in the plant transfers from other places.

Information about streets and their trees also came from North America. The Californian *Garden and Forest* published articles about roadside trees that championed a range of varieties and styles including Australian eucalypts. The Sydney Botanic Gardens library also collected reports from other municipal authorities who worked in this area, including the department of parks and boulevards of the city of Detroit from 1905 to 1915. These sorts of reports allowed Sydney staff to compare practical aspects of urban gardening and maintenance with other authorities vested with this task. In this way the library was a repository of the ideas about street planting that contributed to the expertise of staff in fashioning a particular type of urban aesthetics found in other places.

As colonial institutions, botanic gardens became one of the centres that moved notions of street form and function into places within the colony. In New South Wales, this was not always a case of dealing with existing city form, as it was in Europe, or India. Instead the settlements of Grafton and other colonial towns and cities were being established in the second half of the nineteenth century. Many
of the municipalities and councils of New South Wales were only gazetted in the 1880s. Those that had been established earlier did not necessarily include street tree planting at their inception. Such landscaping was more likely to appear once towns were functioning as rural centres. This placed the Sydney Botanic Gardens in a primary position to influence the style of street tree planting.

In 1881, the Sydney Botanic Gardens set up the 22-acre State Nursery on the Bow Bowing Creek at Campbelltown, adding it to the established nursery at the Farm Cove site. These two nurseries, in conjunction with the Gosford State Nursery, were responsible for supplying free seeds and seedlings to councils and municipalities for use as street trees. Local councils could supplement these free trees with stock purchased from local nurserymen. The local nurserymen used the same sorts of trees as those supplied by the nurseries of the Sydney Botanic Gardens. As such, this institution was significant in developing a culture of street trees, how such trees should be used and what plants were best suited to this particular use in urban environments. During the directorships of Charles Moore (1848-1896) and Joseph Maiden (1896-1924) this institution was a place that provided not just stock and seedlings, but developed ideas about how nature’s inclusion into urban environments had the capacity to influence and enhance the cultivation of civilised citizens.

Introducing Grafton

In 1859, 69 householders from the Clarence River area petitioned the New South Wales Government, and the Grafton Shire Council was formed. The first council meeting was held in September of that year (‘Gazette notice’ 593). One of the first demands on the council took the form of a citizens’ petition. Presented to councillors in October, just one short month after the first meeting, they turned to the state of the streets. They proclaimed: ‘We the undersigned, now members of the municipality, respectfully beg to memorise the committee on the necessity of cleaning and opening the streets of Grafton for the better convenience of trade and traffic’ (Grafton Municipal Council 35). Street trees were not included in this early planning for the town. In fact, the impulse of the council was just the opposite – they slavishly followed the survey lines of the towns by imposing graded surfaces across the landscape. They removed the trees, shrubs, vines and other understorey plants locally referred to as ‘brush’ and replaced them with a grid of empty streets. As the city expanded, new streets of the survey were cleared, rolled and prepared for traffic. As a general rule, when brush was removed this entailed clearing from the ground level and above, creating a grid into which schools, houses and businesses were built. In discussing the petition,
the council records and celebrates the ‘men whose strenuous efforts to remove
the dark realities of the old days have made possible the golden opportunities of
to-day’ (Grafton Municipal Council 35). On the Clarence River it was the brush
itself that was threatening. The darkness of the wild natural environment was
juxtaposed with the golden opportunities represented by a grid layout of neat
streets that tamed and harnessed the land for settlement (Giblett).  

The township expanded as closer settlement became a reality in the area.
Grazing, which had followed the cedar harvesting, turned to dairying and
agricultural pursuits. The social, economic and cultural life of the town grew
as the population and wealth of the area expanded (Kass). In the early years
of settlement, various languages dominated the aural environment: English,
German, Gaelic and the multiple languages of the indigenous residents of the
town including those of the local Gumbainggir people (Grafton Municipal
Council 17). Each community contributed to the vibrancy of the rural township
of Grafton. Photographs reproduced in the council history in 1909 show the
thriving commercial centre of the 1870s, though its dusty streets were denuded
and bare.

The removal of these trees in the 1860s was to have a positive influence on
establishing street trees a decade later. Some trees replicate the canopy size
under the ground level in root systems that seek out nutrients and water as
well as anchor them in place; other rainforest species are shallow rooting (Clark
andMatheny 42-47; Harris 42-47; Bernatsky 25-32). As the early residents
transformed the town they grubbed out, burned down, or dug out the
remaining core, but there was a residual mass of lateral or deep tap root stock
that remained underground (Bradshaw, Hunt and Walmsley); as that material
died it was converted, thus enriching the soil, though it can take many years
for root-stock to completely break down. When street trees were planted in the
1870s, a series of soft tunnels in the soil, left by this earlier clearing, provided
optimal conditions for new root systems to thrive.

In addition, the layers of alluvium deposited through the flood cycles of the
river enriched the soil quality of this area. Grafton’s location next to the river
also influenced the quality of the soil for the growth of trees (McComb andLake
153-62). Lands adjoining the river acted in response to the ground water tables
that rose and fell in accordance with the rainfalls in the broader catchment
areas of the Clarence Valley. This hydrated the ground, which in turn enhanced
the success rates of introducing trees. Combined, all of these ecological factors
assisted the establishment of street trees in Grafton. Grafton commenced
planting of street trees in the 1870s, at least a decade after the council was

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1 See Giblett for an interesting discussion of the negative language used to understand and manage wetlands
during this time.
formed and the brush removal began. This was ample time for the root-stock to rot down. As the streets were trenched and prepared for trees, gardeners would have found soil conditions suitable for this type of planting.

There has always been local conjecture about who planted the first trees and where they were planted: 1869 (Maxted), 1870 (Dockrey), and 1874 (Craigie-Law, vol. 7, 32-35) are all dates given for the first plantings. Some say figs were planted outside the court house (‘Back to Grafton’ 21) and others say the School of Arts building (Craigie-Law, vol 13, 102). Some say that the Mayor was the first to plant and others attribute that honour to local businessmen, who were supposedly asked to donate a tree each for street planting (Lockley). According to local environmentalist Barbara Fahey, the oldest trees are those in Victoria Street, which also houses the oldest municipal buildings, the post office, the court house and the police barracks. Regardless, it was clear that this was a project that enjoyed a majority community support.

Phase One: Conformity within Diversity

Charles Moore began his directorship at the Sydney Botanic Gardens in 1848 under a cloud of confusion. He had been appointed by the colonial office in London to the position at the same time that James Bidwell was appointed by a local committee. Moore’s appointment stood and he was to live at the Farm Cove site for 48 years until his retirement in 1896. During this time he consolidated the position of the Sydney Botanic Gardens as both a scientific institution and an important recreational space for the people of Sydney. Under his leadership a herbarium and library were both established, as were links into the transnational networks of botanical exchange. Providing trees for streets was one of the many duties that he performed while the principal employee of this organisation.

In 1874, Moore sent a range of plants to the Public School and the Police Department at Grafton, both early public institutions that requested plants. 31 trees went to the Police and nineteen went to the school. Planting of trees by children and prisoners of the police department was seen as fulfilling a civic duty. This activity was one that was thought to enhance the capacity for collective citizenship among the community (Hoskins). Katie Holmes, Susan Martin and Kylie Mirmohamadi have mapped the way that public and private gardens and gardening more generally were caught up in a quest to demarcate

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2 Guided tour conducted for me by long-time resident, tree committee member and environmental activist Barbara Fahey 7 August 2008.
3 The registers of plants sent away list all the species and quantities of plants sent in the early volumes. In early entries Moore listed the plants, quantities and when they were being sent to botanical institutions, but later reduced the entries to quantities of trees, shrubs and misc. Maiden was to further reduce the entries during his tenure and ceased specific lists for botanical institutions as well. Maiden was much more interested in being able to report volume than particularity.
healthy life and patriotic citizenry amongst all classes in Australian colonial society, while Benedict Taylor argues that tilling the soil in plantation forestry improved the morality of male prisoners. Working with nature, whether in a prison plantation or a domestic garden, provided a way to connect social behaviour of the individual with the good of the broader community. Local involvement in street plantings was promoted for the same social outcomes. The prison population, along with the children, provided labour for introducing early trees in Grafton, but this was a two way process enabling them to work toward becoming good citizens of the city.

The consignments sent in 1874 provide examples of the types of trees that Moore sent for local use from the nursery at the Farm Cove site. These trees were a mixture of exotic and native. Native stock included pines *Araucaria excelsia* and *A. bidwillii*, figs *Ficus macrophylla* and lilly pillies *Eugenia smithii*. Exotic did not necessarily equate to plants from Britain or Europe, but also included plants from outside of the British Empire that had also made their way into global circuits of exchange. Some of these trees were the best examples of ornamental street trees used in other places across the world. They included planes, elms, pines and cypresses – all trees used in North America and Europe – but also Camphor Laurel *Cinnamomum camphora* and Catalpa *Catalpa Kaempferi* from China, and the Sawara cypress *Chamaecyparis pisifera* from Japan (‘Registers’ 82).

In a letter to the editor of the Clarence and Richmond Examiner in 1874, local nursery man Henry Volckers recommended a mixture of trees for shade in the Clarence climate. These included three indigenous species: ‘the Turpentine, the Moreton Bay Chestnut and the Moreton Bay fig’, and four exotic: ‘the White Mulberry, the Weeping Willow, the Camphour Tree and the Plane Tree.’ No records exist to identify the exact trees planted into Grafton streets at this time. However the physical remnants of this phase are evident in the living trees in Fitzroy, Prince and Victoria streets. The Court House, the Police Station and the Post Office are all located in these streets. These are the earliest Government buildings and outside these buildings, on these streets, are the oldest street trees. Remnant plantings of camphour laurel, oaks, elms, plane trees and pines still grace the oldest streets of the town, particularly Victoria Street where these civic buildings are located. The early trees flourished due to the local ecological situation combined with a community that cared about the aesthetic of the town. What was distinctive about this phase of the street planting was the variety of trees planted. The trees did not only include trees identified with European towns (planes) but also included trees from China (camphour laurel) and India (figs). Australian trees included local rainforest trees (turpentine), but added rainforest trees from other places (Moreton Bay figs and chestnuts).
Helen Armstrong singles out the use of rainforest trees for this purpose and links this to the early colonial excitement about the strangeness of the indigenous botany. In addition, she makes the case that figs used in the grid patterns of cantonment areas in British India influenced the introduction of figs into the Australian context (23). This does not, however, account for the variety of trees used in Grafton. On the other hand, Mirmohamadi provides some clues to the phenomenon of mixing native and exotic together when she argues that although domestic Federation gardens (popular a little later), included indigenous plants, these were subsumed into already existing templates of gardens design (‘Cultivating’ 84). Rainforest trees were adapted to streets in the same way. Trade catalogues of this time did not distinguish plants as native or exotic. Lists of plants were provided on the basis of their use-value. Ornamental trees—for both domestic and public spheres were listed as one category (‘Some NSW Plants’ 341). Whether a tree was indigenous or exotic or local or from a rainforest was not a consideration in choosing trees for streets. Instead the primary qualifier was their shape. Trees that looked like the street trees of places like Paris, London, Washington and a myriad of other places conformed to a universal idea of an urban aesthetic.

The local community in Grafton preferred a diverse representation of trees for their streetscapes, favouring neither indigenous nor exotic trees, but a combination of the two. The trees grew quickly; photographic evidence from the 1880s demonstrates well-established and healthy trees along the main thoroughfares of the town (Mitchell Library; Clarence River Historical Society). Between 1874 and 1885, 1500 trees were planted at a cost of £1,680. This cost included labour, tools, material for trenching and tree guards, and possibly the purchase of young trees. By this time the population of the town had grown to 4000, enough to apply to the New South Wales government for an additional ward for the council. The outlay of £1,680 suggests that the council was able to raise considerable revenue that could be returned to the community in the shape of street trees.

These trees provided shade; an ameliorative to the heat and humidity found in Australia. Street trees were predominantly referred to as shade trees when directors of the Sydney Botanic Gardens publicly discussed this matter (‘Some NSW Plants’). This indicated a particular function in a hot climate, where settlers needed protection from the heat of the summer sun. Unlike Europe, where the deciduous tree was coveted for its capacity to allow winter sun to warm the chill of the streets, in many parts of Australia, shade was a local requirement all the year around. When presenting the positive aspects of deciduous trees, Maiden argued:

There is much to be said for deciduous trees in towns. We have the beautiful spectacle of their unfolding leaf buds, then the abundance of
their shady foliage, and finally we have the bare branches at a time when the sun has least power, and the streets require all the light they can obtain. (‘Tree Planting for Shade’ 303)

For these reasons the cold climate trees did have a place and were grown by Moore in the nurseries of the Sydney Botanic Gardens.

In 1910, journalist Leslie Curnow visited northern New South Wales and waxed lyrical about the ‘trees that line [Grafton’s] wonderful streets’. He wrote ‘many inland towns have fine trees, Bathurst, for instance, but Grafton ought to be world-famous in this respect’ (44-5). The trees that Curnow saw in the streets of Grafton were the South American jacaranda, *Jacaranda mimosifolia*, the South African cape chestnut *Calodendrum capense*, the Australian silky oak, *Grevillea robusta*, the Illawarra flame tree *Brachychiton acerifolius*, the bunya pine *Araucaria Bidwillii*, the bean tree *Castanospermum australe* and the American plane tree, *Platanus* spp. Additionally, photographic evidence shows the use of the South Asian figs *Ficus* spp. in Grafton’s earlier street plantings. The original decisions made by local council officials about street plantings in Grafton preferred flowering over foliage trees and did not prescribe to native or exotic categories that drove the decision about selection.

Of these, the jacarandas, the cape chestnuts, silky oaks and bean trees all flower in the early summer, when rains are expected in each of their native habitats. Shedding leaves in winter and flowering in spring, this allows seeds to fall in times of high rainfall, thereby ensuring the best chance of healthy germination and early growth. For Grafton, this meant that colour was a feature of the urban aesthetic imagined for the town. Trees such as jacarandas, silky oaks and figs all required the special attention of maintenance crews to attain the sort of density that was usually required. Some of the trees shaded the streets in the hottest months of the year, while the deciduous nature of other trees meant that some of the key streets of Grafton were warmed during winter.

The Australian trees used in Grafton were all trees that would have grown in the local brush and subtropical rainforest stands of the pre-settlement Clarence Valley. Only one generation of local people separated the desire to clear the brush from the introduction of selected species back into the ground at Grafton. Signalling recognition of the irony of this move, one objector to the project said ‘We cleared the streets and scrub and you plant them again!’ (Craigie-Law 102). Here the trees of a natural habitat, once connoting darkness, were transformed into civilised trees, the bearers of civic pride. Progress was delivered in this form and as the trees aged, the beauty of the town was promoted through the trees (‘Grafton City of Trees’).
Moore contributed to the urban aesthetic of Grafton over the course of the decades between the first wave of street tree planting in the 1870s and 1880s, and the second phase in the 1910s. The Campbelltown nursery supplied trees for consignments to be sent to the Convent of Mercy, the local Lands Office, the Public School, Roman Catholic Church, Church of England Cathedral, Court House, Aborigines Board, the Experimental Farm, Benevolent Society, Goal, Police Station, a park in South Grafton and the hospital (‘Registers’). The volume of seedlings sent to these public bodies suggests that perhaps some of these trees were planted into the streets as well as the grounds of places. Local Newspaperman W.A. Zuill reported that 25 Norfolk Island Pines and Bunya Bunyas were planted in Victoria Street by prison labour in 1877. It was apparent that Moore’s nurseries at the Sydney Botanic Gardens were not the only source of supply for these early street trees and local nurserymen were also supplying stock to the council. Henry Volckers, Thomas Bawden and E.P. Samson were all advertising the sale of seeds and plants in Grafton during the 1870s (Kass 93).

After the period of prosperity in Grafton that saw the introduction of street trees came a series of environmental occurrences that affected the settlement economy. A drought in 1886 was followed by a series of floods between 1887 and 1893 (‘Clarence River Floods’). By that time, a broad-scale depression had hit the larger national economy, impacting on this area through the downturn in export commodity prices. In a city whose civic pride was already bound up with its beautiful trees, this aspect of municipal governance would have in all likelihood required reassessment. During this time the council made use of the free-of-charge stock sent by Moore to continue the ongoing project of planting trees to supplement any purchases made from local nurserymen. In the 1880s he sent 480 trees to the Municipal Council for use in streets and one box of Moreton Bay figs to the Police Department (‘Registers’ 40, 183, 194, 209, 274). Again in 1895, Moore supplemented local stock with 200 trees for Grafton streets (‘Registers’ 128). By 1900, locals claimed that 2000 trees grew on Grafton streets; one quarter of them had originated from the Sydney Botanic Gardens.

Phase Two: One Street, One Tree

In 1896 Charles Moore retired as the Director of the Sydney Botanic Gardens after 48 years of service. The incoming director was no stranger to civic and scientific communities in Australia. Joseph Henry Maiden arrived in Sydney in 1880 and from 1881 until 1896 he was the curator of the Technological Museum. In that post he had established himself as an important authority on Australian botany. His reputation and reach extended far into the transnational botanical

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4 According to the Daily Examiner the town flooded on 8 July 1876; 26 January 1887; 10 July 1889; 10 January 1890; 4 February 1890; 12 March 1890; 13 April 1892; 12 February 1893; 19 February 1893; 12 June 1893.
exchange network, as he with corresponded with colleagues in all the major botanical institutions in the world (Gilbert). When Maiden took up his position as director of the Sydney Botanic Gardens, Grafton was already considered to be a prime example of the impact of trees in civilising rural centres. Maiden was not initiating a new campaign in Grafton, but was simply building upon the structures that were available to him in his new job.

Over the course of Maiden’s directorship, he changed the balance of sites which received plants. Early in his term, the dominant recipients of consignments of trees were the public schools. This corresponded with Maiden’s support of Arbor Day activities for school children (‘Acacia Burkittii’; ‘Chat about Wattle’; Robin). Progressively over the years, as his public campaign for street trees gained momentum, the municipalities and councils received the majority of consignments of trees (‘Annual Reports’). This corresponds with his growing advocacy in the public arena for the inclusion of street trees in urban planning. Maiden championed this work alongside a commitment to other types of urban landscaping. In the 1909 Royal Commission that examined the ways to improve the city of Sydney, he advocated for a broad range of urban parks, gardens and street plantings. His statements about ‘roadside trees’ used examples from England, Europe and America to make the case that such planting should be undertaken in New South Wales (Hughes 191). Grafton was also an exemplary Australian case of all the aspects that he championed.

As Maiden’s understanding of the ecological requirements of different places in the state evolved he was able to confidently predict the types of trees suitable to different regions. He synthesised this knowledge in a map of New South Wales demarcating zones based on differences in geography. The divisions, which guided his choices of trees sent to a particular area, were based on geology, types of vegetation cover, rainfall and climatic variation. Maiden identified five divisions:

1) The cold region, consisting of the north and south tablelands—here British trees flourish; (2) the coastal strip; (3) the Northern Rivers, a distinctly sub-tropical belt, forming the north-eastern portion of the State; (4) the Western Slopes and Riverina; (5) the Western Plains. (‘Tree Planting for Shade’ 300)

Maiden gained this knowledge by travelling through New South Wales, and by regularly asking for information from correspondents about the suitability of trees to different areas. When categorising the state into zones, Maiden identified the Grafton area, the Northern Rivers, as geographically distinct. Although no map accompanied his writings about the zones of New South Wales, it may be safe to presume that the area that he is discussing is the area now more formally
identified as the Northern Rivers region. It covers the country north from Port Macquarie to the Queensland border at the Tweed River, and is bounded to the west by the Great Dividing Range. Grafton sits in the centre.

In 1904 and 1905, Maiden and his botanical collector John Boorman visited the Northern Rivers region, collecting botanical material for use in the work of the Sydney Botanic Gardens (‘Annual Report 1903’ 6; ‘Annual Report 1906’ 9). This visit gave Maiden the opportunity to contact local councils and other individuals and bodies who received plants from the Sydney Botanic Gardens. Grafton’s fame regarding the street trees would have attracted Maiden and Boorman to the ‘city of trees’ (Hill). One of the people with whom Maiden developed a corresponding relationship was the nurseryman Henry Volckers. In 1906, Maiden and Volckers exchanged both seeds and living plants (‘Annual Report 1906’ 8-9). Such was the local appreciation for this relationship between the city scientist and the local entrepreneur that it was recorded in Volckers’ obituary as a defining aspect of his notoriety. The paper reported ‘Mr Maiden, Government Botanist, looked on Mr Volckers as an authority in matters pertaining to his department and always interviewed him on his visits to the district’ (‘Obituary’).

One of the constraints of Maiden’s campaign for street trees was the boundary of his bureaucratic control. While he could readily supply trees through his nurseries and happily gave advice about street plantings, ensuring that trees were appropriately planted and nurtured fell beyond his jurisdiction. Maiden argued that one of the key aspects of the success of local tree planting was the existence of a local gardener, preferably employed by the local council. In this way, trees could be tended within local communities in accordance with the information disseminated by the Sydney Botanic Gardens. Maiden said in 1905:

> in Sydney and out of it there still flourishes the ignorant idea that to plant a tree the only thing required is a hole. The first thing necessary is to place such work (as regards the public requirements) in the hands of a professional gardener. (‘Tree Planting in City Streets’ 6)

Thanks to the combination of serendipity and entrepreneurship, this role was already filled in Grafton by Maiden’s correspondent, the seedsman and nursery owner Henry Volckers. According to his friend H.C.T. Maxted, Volckers was settled in Grafton by 1869. He had emigrated from his birthplace of Holstein, Germany, in 1856 to chase gold in Queensland. After a trek through New South Wales (Craigie-Law, Vol 13: 99-104) he and his first wife Elizabeth ended up in Grafton, where he lived until his death in 1911 (‘Pioneer Register’ 215). Volckers commenced business in Prince Street in 1871 (‘Notice’). He initially opened a store and nursery and then expanded to include two other nursery sites. At times he employed up to five men, including a contingent of apprentices, who all lived at the nursery with his wife and family (Graftonian). The nursery
supplied seeds and plants for a broad range of community needs. They stocked a ‘choice collection of fruit and ornamental trees, shrubs, conifers, climbing plants, agricultural, garden and flower seeds’ (Volckers Family). This nursery serviced domestic gardens, pastoral homesteads, commercial fruit and vegetable growers, and municipal endeavours to improve the aesthetic of the town. While Maiden acknowledged that local council gardeners would be affected by the seasonal evaporation of work (‘Our parks’ 5), in Grafton this was managed by contracting work to the Volckers’ nursery. One three-year council contract ensured that the trees were cared for, watered, and appropriately pruned until they were properly established – all recommendations advocated by Maiden for success in tree planting (Leaney).

In the first decade of the twentieth century, street tree planting in Grafton underwent a stylistic change. At this time the Jacaranda *Jacaranda mimosifolia* was conferred a primary role amongst the trees in the city. This change in direction, which involved substituting variation for uniformity, aligned with Maiden’s preference for avenue planting. In the discussion following George Knibbs lecture on ‘The Theory of City Design,’ Maiden stated:

> let me enunciate an axiom “one avenue one tree.” The finest avenues in the world consist of one kind of tree, as by that means uniformity of growth and general appearance, which gives the main charm of an avenue, can alone be secured. (Knibbs 106)

In another forum, *The Forest Flora of New South Wales*, he pointed to ‘the Horse chestnut avenue of Bushey Park, near London, and the Cryptomeria Avenue of Nikko, Japan’ as celebrated examples of single species avenue plantings. He went on to argue that ‘The mixed avenue is an abomination, ragged and irregular at the best’ (‘Tree Planting for Shade’ 300). Advocacy of single species planting distinguishes Maiden’s theories of urban landscaping from those of his predecessor Charles Moore, but also demonstrates his clear understanding of how his views were related to international street tree trends.

In 1910, Volckers’ apprentice Alfred Leaney took delivery of a case of eighty-four young Jacaranda trees sent by the Sydney seed merchants Anderson & Co. As a commercial enterprise, Volckers could not have accessed the free supply from the Sydney Botanic Gardens. Anderson & Co did, however, exchange seeds and living material with the Sydney Botanic Gardens over Maiden’s tenure, placing all three bodies in exchange relations with one another (Annual Reports 1896–1924). Volckers followed each of the trends set in the capital city. In the first twenty years of contributing trees to Grafton’s street he supplied a mixture of varieties, but from 1910 onward it was the single species, Jacaranda, that Volckers planted and tended in the local community.
Different species of trees were used in avenue planting across the state of New South Wales. In Bathurst, poplars and elms were favoured. Internationally this trend was followed in Washington where elms were planted, and in Paris planes were the dominant species that lined the streets. Each place developed a preference for a particular tree that could be used in blocks of plantings. The people of Grafton preferred Jacarandas, but there are no definitive records as to why it was these trees that came to dominate the local streetscapes. Maiden certainly endorsed the use of Jacarandas when he said:

Jacaranda mimosaefolia (sic) is a tree with fern-like foliage and beautiful tubular purple blossoms. It is one of the handsomest trees in cultivation. It is semi-deciduous like the silky oak. It is hardy in the coast districts and foothills. (‘Tree Planting for Shade’ 305)

The earlier planters of trees in Grafton showed a propensity for flowering trees, so perhaps the eighty-four young jacarandas planted and nurtured by Leaney and Volckers on behalf of the council simply followed the model provided by the mature trees already in the streetscapes. If these trees looked beautiful and provided shade then there was no reason to change to another type of tree. It would have been costly to do so and to still expect to create a uniform aesthetic across the city. 84 trees, carefully looked after through the crucial early years established a new look embraced by the people of the city.

The trees of Grafton were no longer seen as indigenous or exotic, but as Australian because of their association with this Australian town. Their national origins were subsumed by the task of nation-building. W.A.B. Greaves, the ex-Commissioner of Crown Lands and the District Surveyor of Grafton, wrote in 1918: ‘These glorious avenues, with their picturesque effects and their variety from street to street, should develop in the same category of Paris, Nice, Naples and Genoa’ (‘Letter to the editor’). In writing home to his nephew Augustus, H.J. Holt compared the aesthetic effect to the Unter den Linden, the famous avenue of lindens in Berlin, Germany (11). Curnow, though listing the different types of trees that he encountered in 1910, did not see them for their difference; rather, he saw them for the role they played in making Grafton a special Australian city. Locals placed jacarandas and the earlier mixed plantings of Grafton into an aesthetic continuum with these famous European cities.

Conclusion

Street trees in Grafton, although distinctively local, were also part of a global trend that saw trees introduced into streetscapes on all continents. The Sydney Botanic Gardens was part of each of the two early phases of style. It sent trees to Grafton, and also provided advice and information about successfully maintaining and managing the urban aesthetic of this New South Wales town.
Through transfer of plants and information, the town and the institution became part of a larger, global campaign for street trees as part of a modern urban aesthetic.

The relationship between the Sydney Botanic Gardens and the local Grafton community relied in part on the serendipity of relationships formed through a common interest in botanical exchanges. The city-based institution was able to provide advice about street planting that was drawn from information collected by staff and the two directors, Joseph Maiden and Charles Moore. However, the role of the nursery at Campbelltown enhanced the possibility of turning these ideas into material culture because they grew the trees that came to be distributed to councils like the one at Grafton. This meant that during Moore’s time he could follow a mixed planting regime by sending out a wide variety of trees. Usually this meant sending small numbers of a particular plant, but multiple different species. In Maiden’s time, consignments of plants sent for street planting conformed with his ideas of avenue planting—large volumes of single species reinforced a particular aesthetic, which in Grafton was for jacarandas. In this way the Sydney Botanic Gardens directed the form and style of street tree plantings across the state by drawing on the resources available to them from exchanges within the botanical networks that operated across the globe.

This did not mean that Grafton was without agency in this process. On the contrary, without a receptive council, it would not have mattered what the Sydney Botanic Gardens sent from Campbelltown. In Grafton, it was the local community and a local nurseryman that combined with the best of the government efforts to provide attractive streetscapes for rural New South Wales. The people of Grafton had their own ideas about which trees they preferred to beautify their city. This was undoubtedly an international trend, but the local inflection saw jacarandas take a prime place in this urban aesthetic, instead of plane trees or Moreton Bay figs. In 1935, the council inaugurated the Jacaranda Festival which has taken place every November since that year. It should be noted that jacarandas are relatively slow growing. By 1935 the trees planted by Volckers and Meaney in 1910, and those planted before that time, were mature trees, worthy of becoming the symbol for the city. In 1991, John Wrigley conducted a Heritage Tree Survey and found 1457 jacarandas growing on streets all over the city. Jacarandas dominate the urban landscape for a community that still calls Grafton a ‘city of trees’ (Dockrey). As a result of committed nurturing of this urban aesthetic the festival has always attracted many visitors to the town.

From this time until the 1970s, Grafton’s council and community preferred jacarandas for their streets. In Australia there has been a movement back to using native trees in landscaping for an urban aesthetic (‘Talking About’;
Cerwonka103-150). This process no longer includes an input from the Sydney Botanic Gardens. Its role and influence in the introduction of street trees is no longer a part of its institutional work, having sold off the Campelltown nursery site as part of cost saving measures during the 1930s depression. Local Grafton environmentalists are presently advocating for the replacement of all exotic trees, including jacarandas, with a diverse range of native species. This proposal has been actively resisted by other sectors of the Grafton community who see the maintenance and replenishment of jacarandas as an integral part of the ongoing social and economic life of the city. The Jacaranda Festival continues to celebrate the contribution of these trees, first planted in the late nineteenth century, to the making of a unique Grafton identity. Gradually, over a period of one hundred and forty years, the exotic from South America had become Australianised in Grafton.

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REVIEWS
This twelfth volume in the Rodopi Australian Playwrights series is a welcome first collection of essays devoted to one of Australia’s finest theatre practitioners. Nick Enright was recognised, before his death in 2003 at the age of fifty-two, as a gifted actor, teacher and director, and a prolific playwright unusually possessed of the capacity both to create runaway successes, and deeply to engage and explore the self as all great art should. Part one of this publication consists of eleven essays devoted to the key plays, as well as an examination of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Enright archive; part two includes memoirs from four of his friends and colleagues.

Anne Pender gives an informative overview of Enright’s life and career. His fascination with the theatre began with an epiphany at the age of six, when John Bell, his neighbour in Maitland at the time, showed him a toy theatre with scenes from *Macbeth*. Sent to Riverview College for his secondary schooling with the intention that he eventually enter the family profession of the law, he starred there, performing, for example, the remarkable scholarly feat of comparing, in a final year exam, the Greek (Sophocles) and French (Anouilh) versions of *Antigone* in the original languages. Yet his traumatic experiences at Riverview, as a sensitive gay youth misplaced in the militaristic milieu of the Vietnam War years, would provide the material for his semi-autobiographical play *St. James Infirmary Blues* (1990). His twin virtues of scholarly wealth and an unusually highly developed spirituality undoubtedly contributed to the mesmeric and inspirational effect he had as teacher, as Karen Vickery, his former pupil at NIDA where he was Head of Acting from 1980 to 1984, fondly recounts. Enright’s confession that ‘working with actors’ was his favourite aspect of working in the theatre recurs several times in the book, as does the *leitmotif* of his belief in it as a democratic activity (19).

*St. James Infirmary Blues* emerged from a transitional period in his writing career, when the largely presentational mode of the earlier period—including
On the Wallaby (1978), the phenomenally successful The Venetian Twins (1979), and the hardly less popular Daylight Saving (1988)—was giving way to drama of greater introspection and complexity. Sandy Gore gives a fine insider’s account of the genesis of Daylight Saving, which gave Enright the encouragement to persevere with his playwriting, which he had largely abandoned during his time at NIDA, and which had stagnated in the four years since. He was emerging, in 1990, from six years of psychoanalysis, in which his family and his sexuality must surely have been central themes. Gore is perceptive in her assertion that ‘Nick’s plays were all about family, loss of family, looking for family, reuniting with family, coming home to the bosom of family and finding one’s roots again’ (200). Enright himself said that we are all ‘prisoners … creatures of our own preoccupations and obsessions’, which for him were ‘family and the fate of the young’ (21). Enright explored his inner self in the character of Dominic Connolly, who in St. James Infirmary Blues is driven to assert his own anti-war sensibilities in the face of the entrenched militarist culture of his school; and in Vincent O’Hara in Mongrels (1991), whose articulacy and sensitivity counterpoints the brutishness and self-indulgence of Edmund Burke, who was based, famously, on the prisoner-turned-playwright Jim McNeil. The collection reprints Veronica Kelly’s Southerly essay ‘Enright’s Mongrels as Intervention in the Canon of Contemporary Australian Drama’.

Enright’s mature phase saw also, amongst much else, the Oscar-nominated screenplay of Lorenzo’s Oil (1992); A Property of the Clan, his examination of the aftermath of the murder of the teenager Leigh Leigh in Newcastle; his co-adaptation with Justin Monjo of Tim Winton’s novel Cloudstreet, which one critic hailed as ‘one of the most successful productions in Australian theatre history’; and The Boy from Oz, based on the life and songs of Peter Allen. Susan Lever, in her extended account of Lorenzo’s Oil, is surely correct in highlighting its theme of ‘misplaced guilt for physical failing and the extreme actions which follow it’ as ‘Enright territory’ (51). Both she and Gore describe Enright’s dispiriting subsequent experience in Hollywood, which he decided to abandon rather than submit to its demands to sugar-coat the confronting aspects of his work.

Jack Teiwes’ essay on Cloudstreet is one of the most interesting in the collection. Enright and Monjo collaborated with director Neil Armfield in an ambitious adaptation of Winton’s sprawling novel. In the end it required 38 speaking parts in three acts, and ran over five hours. Teiwes does justice to its legendary opening night, when so much went against it—inter alia lack of adequate rehearsal, rain-corrupted acoustics, a poorly placed container ship which marred the visual finale on the harbour—only for it subsequently to be hailed as a resounding
success. Sell-out seasons in the capital cities followed, and three overseas tours. Teiwes says ‘The play’s phenomenal success stands as a testament not only to Nick Enright’s talents as a playwright, but as an inspired collaborator’ (75).

The most challenging essay in this symposium is undoubtedly Jane O’Sullivan’s ‘Mongrels and Young Curs: the Hounding of the Feminine in St. James Infirmary, Good Works, Blackrock and Spurboard.’ Her theme is that the “erasure” of the feminine in these plays is regrettable and alarming, coming as it does from an artist so professedly an advocate for womanhood. This is a point worth making. Enright’s female characters—for example Elaine in Mongrels, Jenny in St James Infirmary, and Rachel in Property of the Clan and its film adaptation Blackrock—tend to be two-dimensional, while the real depth of characterisation is given to the men. Anne Pender notes that ‘Helen Garner expressed her dissatisfaction with the play and the film version of Blackrock for their failure to imagine the young female characters as individuals when the young males are given an attentiveness and an “angry pity”’ (24). Yet O’Sullivan’s censure begs several questions. Is it just to reprove a gay man for concentrating on the world of men? Might it not be that the feminine principle, as distinct from the literally feminine, can be powerfully present in male gay literature? Might an artist with profound misgivings about the grossly masculine world not do immense good by focusing his attention on that world? One suspects that Enright simply lacked the range adequately to convey the inner lives of women; and that, further, this limitation may have prevented his ascent to or beyond the plane occupied in Australian drama by David Williamson. Yet O’Sullivan is too severe in her censure, and Susan Lever’s comment to the contrary is welcome: ‘This focus [of Blackrock] is not so much a determined erasure of women, as the critics claim, that makes the film somehow complicit with misogyny, as a desire to teach young men the implications of their casual, matey mistreatment of women’ (55).

Peter Fitzpatrick gives a fine treatment of The Boy from Oz, emphasising Enright’s capacity to see beyond the popular Peter Allen of such catchy hits as ‘I Go to Rio’, to the damaged soul beneath, as evidenced especially by the song ‘Tenterfield Saddler’, the central event of which is the suicide of Allen’s father. Again, this is family; and a family, moreover, from the perspective of a gay member of it. Other essays are dedicated to The Venetian Twins, The Man with Five Children and Summer Rain, while there are further memoirs from George Ogilvie, and Enright’s collaborator on The Venetian Twins, Terence Clarke.

Nick Enright: an Actor’s Playwright is the celebration of a life directed by love, enthusiasm and passionate commitment. The subject thoroughly deserved the book. These essays may indeed ‘inspire theatre practitioners as well as scholars’ and ‘inform and enlighten students and teachers both at high school and university’, as the blurb justifiably asserts.
Michael Buhagiar is currently (October 2010) in the third and final year of a PhD in the Department of English at Sydney University, on the subject of the Greek influence on the Australian poet Christopher Brennan (1871-1932). His first degree was however in science—a BSc Hons I (biochemistry major). Prior to beginning his PhD he self-published full length books on Shakespeare (2003) and Don Quixote (2008).
Staging Masculinity

Men at Play: Masculinities in Australian Theatre since the 1950s
By Jonathan Bollen, Adrian Kiernander and Bruce Parr
Rodopi, 215pp, $98.95, 2008.
ISBN: 9789042023574
Reviewed by Bradley Wells

Taking as their premise the assertion that in light of the continued burgeoning of studies investigating female identities in the theatre, a failure to investigate or ‘define’ masculinities could result in it remaining the ‘unexamined gender’ comprehensible merely as, what Kimmel calls, a type of ‘anti-femininity’ (126), the authors of this ambitious study address this through a comprehensive survey and categorisation of expressions of masculinity in Australian theatre since 1950.

After an introduction which acknowledges the pre-existing problematic definitional debate surrounding masculinity and its associated ‘others’ (7) of race, ethnicity, sexuality and class, this book goes on to take essentially a thematic approach in both argument and structure. Whilst acknowledging a general chronological progression of developing notions of masculinity since 1950, the chapters are grouped around separate categories of masculinity with each investigating a variety of individual texts that best exemplify those ideas.

Beginning with a study of three Australian musicals, Reedy River (1970), The Sentimental Bloke (1977) and Lola Montez (1958), the reader quickly discovers the tensions within traditional notions of hard-working, egalitarian, liberated, patriotic, loyal and physical masculinity in a genre which is itself notoriously torn between its ‘highly suspect’ flamboyant and camp qualities and its sheer popularity in the ‘normal’ mainstream. Apparently aware of its suspect potential, Reedy River took a deliberately political approach to demonstrate how the values of unionism and traditional Australian male bonding were a means by which society could neutralise the allegation that unionism or left-wing politics was communist and therefore anti-Australian. On the other hand, The Sentimental Bloke ‘made use of the force of emerging heterosexual desire to bring the Australian male out of his inexpressive shell’ (30), and in Lola Montez, ‘it is the galvanizing influence of Lola that generates and unlocks the potential for theatrical flair in Australian manhood’ (30). Thus from the beginning of
their study the authors seem to be establishing a pattern for the rest of the book. Namely, that within the ambiguities and complexities of the notion of masculinity in Australia, there has been an overall sense of developmental evolution, even liberation from stereotype, since the 1950s.

The inclusion of selective photographic images at the end of this and every chapter helps reinforce the point about how these texts foreshadow, represent and respond to the ongoing challenges of presenting masculinities on stage. In this case the contrast between the shearers drinking (but not touching) taken from *Reedy River* and the posed semi-naked male dancers taken from *Lola Montez* clearly show the breadth and development of these early masculinities.

Chapter 2 goes on to consider the particularly masculine notion of violence as it is presented in various realist plays in the 1950s and 60s. Rather than echoing the lament of critics like Hunt who argued that physical violence had replaced articulate expression of genuine conflict (see Hunt), the authors posit an alternative and enticing argument that the scenes of physical violence contained within the plays of this time were not simply occasions when language gave way to inarticulate violence, but ‘where male performers also engaged new techniques of realist acting for expressing emotion’ (32).

Nonetheless, there is an obvious dilemma in evoking sympathy for this type of expression in characters who oscillate between romance and violence, especially with their accompanying sense of an abdication of agency. It is a dilemma which unfortunately remains unresolved in this chapter. Surely, though, there is a more effective way of resolving the tension regarding the inarticulate but violent male beyond the one proffered by the suicide victim’s ghost in *Gary’s House* (1996)?

Conversely, the next chapter ‘The bully and the businessman’ offers an overly optimistic conclusion that bullying as a concept and expressed reality is now purely social and not gender-related. However, even the various plays studied seem to support rather than subvert the continuing phenomenon expressed in the theatre of the brutal policing of gender evident since the sixteenth century *charivari*. The problem with this chapter, as with other parts of the book, is the authors’ tendency to stray too far into contemporary social criticism rather than sticking to their strength, which is the detailed study of texts and the drawing of thematic conclusions within an historical context.

Following the chapter ‘Black men, white men’, notable for its understatement that ‘Australian theatre is still finding ways to present images and narratives of Indigenous masculinity which draw upon the authenticity of Indigenous cultures and reflect the lived experiences of “Indigenous men”’ (88), the authors seem more confident in investigating the role and impact of war in theatrical presentations of masculinity.
Through an investigation of post-war gender anxieties associated with male re-integration into domestic suburban life, Chapter 5 clearly demonstrates the oppositional tropes of home-front versus battlefront, passivity versus activity, weakness versus strength, private versus public, staying versus departing, and defended versus defenders. This chapter also makes a useful distinction between memorialisation and memory, and develops convincing new scholarship in arguing that the theatre of the time successfully animated the narrative arcs of masculine memory and heterosexual desire between here-and-now and there-and-then rather than simply the traditional dichotomies between a masculine war and a feminine home.

The danger of defining masculinity in negative terms re-emerges in the analysis of theatrical presentations of race and homosexuality. Playing off well-established stereotypes and relying on an inherited intertextuality, so-called ‘wog-boy’ plays seem implicitly to reinforce the conjecture that Australian males are masculine because, in addition to not being women, they are simply not Greek or not Italian. So too, it is a sense of absence which helps define the non-heterosexual male in these forms of Australian theatre. For example, the character of Michael in A Fox in the Night (1959) does not fit in to the masculine normalcy understood by his father and, by implication, society, nor does he fulfil the stereotypes of the day. Unfortunately, a definitive alternative is not presented in this play nor any other raised in this chapter. Rather, as the authors point out, the theatre of the period has merely offered what Hanson calls ‘a host of sexual possibilities that play havoc with the conventional distinction between normal and pathological, heterosexual and homosexual, masculine and feminine’ (56).

The reader also discovers that these possibilities are further complicated by economic factors. In Chapter 8, the discussion of the anxieties related to the reproduction of masculinity from father to son reveals a compelling contention that the real threat to masculinity explored via characters like Owen from Louis Nowra’s The Jungle (1998) is the ‘dead end jobs and dead end lives’ encapsulated in a character who represents ‘the immateriality of unproductive service labour with the reproductive failure of homosexual sex’ (160). The very revelation of this on stage, of course, represents some progression along the journey to better understanding and portraying the complexities of masculinity in Australia. However, the problem remains and lingers, just like the stench of ‘McDonald’s and semen’ which follows the audience out after the final scene from Viewing Blue Poles (1998).

It is a pity that the analysis does not finish here. For some reason, presumably only to give justification for talking about the various plays contained therein, the final chapter does a cursory and somewhat tenuous study of various nautical tropes in Australian theatre. The conclusion that Cloudstreet (1999) represents
the ‘dissolution, of masculinity dissolving between the sea and the sky’ (p.177) seems to contradict later statements that these plays also represent an ‘intergenerational consolation’ (178) and ‘resolutive effect on men’. (179). Even the final tease of the prospect of a possible solution to the problem of masculinity posited by an ‘ungendered’ past and present, as envisaged in the dance work Inuk (1997), can only be provided as the alternative of ‘carefree irresponsibility of pre-adolescent suburbia’ (183). Such an anti-climax and ambiguous ending may, however, be the very point the authors are trying to make about the notion of masculinity itself.

In the end, the authors are right to warn that it would be ‘a great exaggeration to report the death of gender’ (183). If anything, this study successfully foregrounds the virile tenacity of a real, if still somewhat ambiguous, notion of masculinity in the theatre, as in life. In light of this book, masculinity need no longer fear neglect in the face of continued studies of femininity. If anything, this book is a compelling historical study and it contributes much to the field by furthering the ongoing debate about the contradictions, inconsistencies, complexities, anxieties and ambiguities of masculinity in Australian theatre; a theatre which has proved itself time and again to be more than adept at wrestling with the seductive and timeless appeal of men at play.

**Works Cited**


Turning Points in Australian History
Edited by Martin Crotty and David Andrew Roberts
University of New South Wales Press, 320pp, $34.95, 2009
ISBN: 9781921410567

Reviewed by Bradley Wells

UNSW Press has certainly chosen an appropriate visual for the cover of *Turning Points in Australian History*. The image of a dark Australian-shaped weather-vane silhouetted against a bright blue sky alludes to the paradoxes that lie within. Like the weather-vane, the history contained within this book both reassures and unsettles. It can appear both fixed and wavering. It is at times becalmed and at other times agitated by the frenetic force of new and unpredictable winds.

Following on from the success of their ironically named volume *Great Mistakes of Australian History* (2006), Martin Crotty and David Andrew Roberts appear to be appealing once again to a wide audience with a hunger for bite-sized chunks of insight as a way to comprehend anew the ‘great story’ of Australian History. An initial glimpse at the table of contents confirms a re-assuring list of selected dates and corresponding events, one assigned to each of the seventeen chapters that follow. Each stand-alone chapter is written by a different specialist author and is about a specific event and its impact on Australian history, ranging from Tasmania’s split from the Australian mainland during Pleistocene Ice Age 14,000 years ago to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.

The chronological ordering of these chapters, stretching from the pre-historic to the present, implies overarching narrative and gives an immediate sense of unity and coherence to this volume; a sense which is subsequently reinforced through repeated use of cross-referencing within and between each chapter. However, wary of any temptation toward the meta-narratives of history, Crotty and Roberts, in their somewhat apologetic Introduction, quickly qualify any sense of a strict ‘line of causation’ by acknowledging the problematic nature and purpose of defining a ‘turning point’ (2). They are, of course, right to note the subjective nature of their mission in this way but in quibbling over the finer distinctions between a ‘watershed’, ‘milestone’, ‘crucial moment’, ‘momentous
action’, ‘highlight’, ‘focal point’, ‘pivotal instance’ and ‘turning point’ there is always the danger in a volume such as this that, whatever you call them, they simply become self-legitimising constructs for an ‘ever-upward trajectory’ view of history (2).

One of the earliest chapters titled ‘The Arrival of the First Fleet and the ‘Foundation of Australia’ acknowledges the subjectivity and politically charged nature of the varying accounts of the significance of the landing of Arthur Phillip in Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788. Yet, like the next chapter on Lachlan Macquarie and the Bigge Report, which is presented as fundamentally a classic battle between two dead white males, this reader was unwittingly seduced by the sheer force of the unfolding chronological narrative tracing an archetypal human struggle between a pragmatist and an idealist. In these chapters, despite pointing to the controversial fluidities of interpretation, it is the more linear narrative which is perhaps the most compelling force.

Other chapters eschew the controversial altogether by presenting their ‘turning points’ fairly safely with an emphasis on the uncontroversial ‘facts’. Keir Reeves covers fairly well-known territory in his chapter about the discovery of gold by Hargreaves in 1851 and the subsequent gold rush. True, he undermines Hargreaves’ claim to be first by noting the earlier attempts by the colonial authorities to suppress news of prior discoveries, but this is not new. His main argument for viewing the gold rush as representing a fundamentally economic event which shaped the future of Australia is timely and well made, albeit briefly. However, again symptomatic of the paradox of these ‘turning points’, he concludes with the image of the heroic Hargreaves whose ‘posthumous fame resides in his role as a key catalyst of Australia’s golden age’ (73).

Hamstrung by the absence of any one defining moment, Erik Eklund, in his chapter on The Great Depression, gives fairly cursory and familiar coverage of the main events. His implied justification for this ‘turning point’ is its retrospective significance in light of the long-term consequences for Australia. Like some of the later chapters, there is a sense of unfinished business about this analysis even if granted the limited scope of this work where ‘the consequences are too numerous to mention with appropriate detail’ (127).

Other chapters focus more explicitly on the development of academic interpretations of their event before positing their own interpretation. For example, Melissa Bellanta’s survey of the events and implications of the so-called Great Strike of 1890 is both a succinct identification of the main events and parties involved in the Maritime Strike, Shearers’ Revolt and associated events in 1890, and a useful survey of the various historical interpretations of these events since. She shows how interpretation of this ambiguous event has moved through various phases ranging from militarist, revisionist, New Left and Feminist before finally a more recent return to Marxist class-war interpretations.
This is a useful and succinct survey, but it is her argument for a re-interpretation of the event in terms of it being an expression of the utopian ideals prevalent in Australia in the 1890s which is the most compelling. Nonetheless, her argument that this event was ‘bound up in turn with the precarious hope that society might be transformed’ is also open to re-interpretation in the future (86). After all, all that is needed to shift the ‘precarious’ weather-vane of history from utopia to dystopia is a puff of interpretative wind.

Other contributors to this volume focus on answering just one key question that arises from their event. In Chapter 6 the question is: ‘why should such a crucial moment in Australia’s development as Federation in 1901 have had such a lack of resonance with its population?’ (89). Was it ‘because no-one died’? (91), or because it was ‘overshadowed emotionally by the death of beloved Queen Victoria’? (91), or because it lacked ‘martial sacrifice or revolution’? (92), or because the ‘sycophantic, monocultural, racist, sexist and somewhat paranoid’ (94) nature of the event meant that people felt, and still feel, guilty about its commemoration? The answer again appears to lie in one’s perspective. The ‘turning point’ of Federation is thus seen as part of a discursive framework upon which subsequent generations can interpret and ‘evolve’ (97).

Such compelling contemporary re-interpretations of ‘turning points’ can be found in David Day’s chapter regarding the foreign policy significance of Curtin’s 1941 New Year radio message. Day convincingly argues that it was not a straight shift from the UK to the US but ‘it was Britain that was moving away from Australia, rather than the reverse’ (140). Similarly, Russell McGregor provides a new interpretation of the 1967 Referendum on Aboriginal rights, suggesting that the context and nature of the ‘yes’ campaign was misleading and inaccurate, and the outcomes of the reforms less significant than previously imagined. Both these studies further support the logic of this volume, which is that ‘turning points’ are a matter of perspective and remain as shifting as a weather-vane.

At the centre of the collection is the ambitious chapter on what has become perhaps the most embedded ‘turning point’ of Australian history—the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli on 25 April, 1915. Here, Crotty acknowledges the birth of a nation myth but then quickly debunks it. He concludes, however, that the event itself has succumbed to the myth, which in turn justifies its ‘turning point’ status. This is an argument which we are presumably asked to apply to the entire volume. As the notion of ‘turning points’ becomes more ambiguous the role of interpretation, translation and categorisation becomes even more important in creating its own reality.

The ambiguous notion of ‘turning points’ becomes even more tenuous in the later chapters of the volume where the selection of events seems purely thematic and topical. These include Susan Magarey’s study of gender through an account
of the women’s liberation movement in the 1970s, Melissa Harper’s chapter on environmentalism in her case-study of the Franklin Dam Protests, and Ray Broomhill’s chapter on economics through his investigation of Paul Keating’s ‘banana republic’ speech in 1986.

The essays collected in this volume cover a diverse field, with varying results. The pointed lack of any specific date in the title of Magarey’s chapter on women’s liberation is another intellectual tease but one which is complicated by her tendency toward sentimental nostalgia and a self-referential style (she quotes herself) that can be unsettling. On the other hand, Brett Hutchins’s chapter on sport, which ostensibly appears somewhat forced, actually works by successfully embedding it within the specific ‘turning point’ of the opening of the Australian Institute of Sport on 26 January, 1981. This allows him to trace the process by which ‘top level Australian sport moved from impoverished amateurism to generously funded elitism through the profuse expenditure of public funds’ (199) while being used as ‘a weapon in Cold War international politics’ (203) in order to show how ‘the conjunction of sport, politics and nationalism was perfectly distilled in to a single moment’ (206).

In a final attempt to come to terms with the notion of historical ‘turning points’, Robert Manne turns to very contemporary events in the final chapter, ‘From Tampa to 9/11: Seventeen days that changed Australia’. Here, while noting ‘the rise of populist conservatism, voluntary re-dominionisation, the embrace of a mimetic foreign policy style, the creation of a new anti-terrorist legal structure and the militarisation of the political culture’ (254), he makes the salient admission that in the end ‘historians are notoriously ill-equipped to see into the future’ (254) and only time will tell whether these events represent a genuine historical turning point.

And so in one sense, after the buffeting of each chapter, this reader has not really moved on. My preference for sturdy reference points and directions regarding the ‘big history’ questions has been appeased. At the same time, I enjoyed the thrill of reading a variety of self-consciously subjective viewpoints. Like the foreboding weather-vane itself, this book balances chaos with order and, while it may not (or cannot) be accurate in ascertaining where the next gust will point us, it is very useful in helping us understand from whence some of the past winds of change have come.

Bradley Wells is currently completing his PhD in English Literature at the University of Sydney where he also helps teach an undergraduate course in Renaissance poetry. His is currently researching the performance theology in the collected plays of the ‘forgotten Inkling’, Charles Williams.
Australian colonial production continues to provide fertile ground for critical studies, not least because there is still much to be uncovered beyond the ‘official’ records and canonical texts of the colonial period. These two very different books provide first-hand accounts of the century around Federation that converge on detail: the mundane, challenging, destructive, creative and often surprising activities of individuals and groups in homesteads, goldfields, towns and cities across Australia. The photography of James Dwyer and the women’s writing examined by Ann Standish are shown to be, in strikingly similar ways, simultaneously records of and contributions to the process of creating the Australian colony and nation.

Ann Standish’s *Australia through Women’s Eyes* is a welcome addition to the still comparatively small body of work that, over the last 20 years, has sought to situate women’s writing firmly within the great avalanche of writing that flowed from and within Australia from the moment the English arrived with the intent of settling. For reasons that feminist critics have long since made clear, the writing of men has always held pride of place both at the time of its publication and since. Standish focuses here on women’s writing across almost a century, selected and compared in order to shed light on women’s contributory role in what she describes as ‘the colonialising project’ (266). The focus is therefore on women’s everyday activities, not simply in settling the land and establishing homes with their husbands and families, but also in the scientific and other observations that they wrote for home and local audiences and that made them a ‘part, however modest, of claiming Australia for Britain’ (11). Standish makes
a convincing case for women’s writing as central to the development of the idea of Australia as a community and nation, and an enabler of the British colonial project.

Standish selects writings by sixteen women. Some wrote privately, in diaries and letters home, describing their new lives in the colonies as best they could for their readers; others wrote for wider audiences interested in travel books and tales of life in far-flung places, or for local Australian audiences. Ordered chronologically, the selections date from 1840 to 1930, a period that centres on Federation and includes the shift from convict to free settlement, from dependency to nationhood, and also the involvement of Australia in its first overseas conflicts.

The book is laid out in five chapters — beginning with the travelling and settling of the pioneers, then moving on to the descriptions of the natural environment, visits to the goldfields, visits to the cities, and then different social writings. The women are introduced with short biographies at the start of each section, and the structure gives great clarity to the thesis, organising a large amount of material in such a way that the reader never loses sight of any of the women discussed. The clarity and order of the book makes it highly readable and a useful resource. Standish’s writing is refreshingly free of any glib framing in terms of women’s expected position and role — which can lead to defensiveness and over-praise. Rather, the women are described plainly, on and in their own terms. Standish avoids sweeping statements, allowing each woman’s account to stand on its own merits and to convey each individual experience. Individuality is the key, and gives the lie to generalisations drawn from similar accounts. Standish’s incisive analyses and comparisons of writings on the same subjects by different women add much detail that is invaluable particularly in the context of broader discussions about the colonisation of Australia.

Standish begins the book with material drawn from largely private correspondence of ‘pioneer women’ — letters and diaries that were, literally and metaphorically, ‘letters home’. These compare and contrast life in Britain with life in the colonies, and it is these accounts, the writings of these women, a long way from home and adapting to new and alien conditions, that are the most familiar kind of text associated with colonial women. Standish, however, sheds new light on them, showing that the women’s sense of adventure and self-actualisation wasn’t simply a personal one; it was ‘integral to colonisation’ (9) and inextricably linked with the adventure of ‘bringing civilisation to the wilderness’ (36), and the actualisation of a new nation in which their children and grandchildren would be natives. By continuing with accounts beyond 1901, Standish traces the change in the content and focus of the writing as pioneer women came to see themselves as Australian, and as women born in Australia begin writing their own accounts. She shows how their identity was informed
by and informed Australia’s national project, the continuing negotiation of relationships with the ‘old country’ and with the old ‘new world’ of America, and with the ancient and emphatically different world of Indigenous peoples. Standish argues that women had an active role in creating and positioning the Australian nation, and that ‘Acknowledgement of their contribution to the development of colonial discourses deepens an understanding of white women’s participation in establishing Australia as a white Western dominion. It aligns these writers with their peers in New Zealand, Canada, India and elsewhere who similarly helped to normalise a white presence in other peoples’ lands’ (268).

She then moves on to explore women’s role in scientific discovery in Australia through the writings of women such as Marianne North, whose life and work is preserved and commemorated in the gallery at Kew Gardens that North herself established and paid for. North and others were field workers, classifying, describing and illustrating plant life and treading a fine line between demonstrating and adding to scientific knowledge while appearing not to encroach on the knowledge of men of science.

Standish then analyses women’s accounts of visits to urban developments, particularly their comparisons of the new Australian cities with each other (especially the positive response to Adelaide and the wonder of Melbourne’s rapid growth) and with other colonial cities. She also uncovers women’s writing about the goldfields—places particularly known largely through men’s writings given that they were particularly male-dominated spaces—and convincingly adds these women’s voices to the established narratives of mateship, the ‘fair go’ and hardship that established a very particular and core Australian identity. Standish situates these women and their writings within the larger European tradition of adventure travel by women in this period. Importantly, accounts from globetrotting women provide a fascinating comparison with the local accounts, and situate the Australian urban landscape within the milieu of other colonial cities of the time. Standish follows this chapter with an analysis of accounts by two widely travelled women who visited Australia with the express purpose of social investigation. She offers valuable insights into the way Australia was viewed by outsiders and its early social concerns by comparing the writings of an American, Jessie Ackerman, who travelled as an activist of the explicitly missionary World Women’s Christian Temperance Movement, and the writings of Mrs Charles Thompson, who with her husband visited as a representative of the secular British social reformist movement.

Similarly, in the final chapter, she contrasts the writings of two women with different interests in Indigenous peoples, the well-known Daisy Bates, famed for recording a valuable archive of Aboriginal oral culture, and Katie Langloh Parker, who similarly recorded Aboriginal life with a focus, not on preserving
it for posterity under the auspices of the ‘dying race’ theory (though she also subscribed to this), but on the lived experiences of Indigenous people under colonial ‘protection’.

These writings particularly display attitudes towards Indigenous Australians that were already proving tragically catastrophic. Bates and Parker were prejudiced by ideas that either rendered Indigenous Australians a dying race that would soon no longer ‘trouble’ the settlers, or a dying race deserving of anthropological study and preservation. This in itself is an important challenge to the comforting idea, promoted by some scholars that Standish discusses, that colonial women were more sympathetic to Aboriginal people than their male counterparts, assumed through the recognition of shared humanity through their contact with Aboriginal women and children. While Standish concedes that there are accounts that show moments of genial contact between white and black women effected by the presence of babies and children, she also demonstrates that the language these women use to describe such encounters remains grounded in their belief in their natural superiority to a ‘pitiful’ race that would soon be extinct, and that they were offering a kind of palliative care. She also notes that in the majority of accounts, Aboriginal people are mentioned briefly and occasionally as a focus of fear and derision, and that even these occasional mentions vanish as the colonial project succeeds in its aim of forcing Indigenous people from the land. Katie Langloh Parker and Daisy Bates wrote about Aboriginal people directly from their unusually prolonged and deliberate interaction with them, and Standish points out that this makes a critical reading of such accounts valuable. While they shared the ideology of those who ignored or derided Indigenous Australians, they nonetheless recorded useful insights and created a valuable record, not least for the descendants of the Aboriginal people they wrote about.

What is perhaps most interesting in this study is the weaving of the personal with the political, as well as attention to how colonial women imagined their readers, even in private diaries. Standish argues that while men wrote for an assumed audience of other men—their peers—and for posterity, women wrote for other women and a general readership. Standish notes that while this leads all of them to make self-deprecating comments that allow them to find a place within the dominant discourse without seeming to challenge its accepted authority, they nonetheless make modest assertions that they are contributing to the literature and, indeed, filling gaps on ‘common, every-day topics’ that the dominant discourse left out (10).

And indeed their writings do just that—Standish’s immensely readable, perceptive and erudite book is a long-needed restitution of this fascinating body of work that will be useful to scholars and students of Australian studies, critical history, colonial and post colonial literature and, indeed, late nineteenth
Everyday Life in Colonial History

and early twentieth-century women’s writing. There is a sense that this study is the distillation of a far wider range of available material, and that this is an excellent new foray into women’s writing and hidden or forgotten colonial narratives of a scope not seen since the early 1990s. Standish argues correctly that the 1980s scholarship on the writing of ‘pioneer’ and travelling women celebrated a ‘breaking the bonds’ angle, in the mould of self-actualisation and female independence that grew out of 1960s and 1970s feminism, and which missed entirely the fact that upper-class, white British women abroad in the Empire were both products and promulgators of British colonialism.

Standish navigates questions of gender, imperialism, colonialism and voice, carefully deconstructing and producing precise arguments that rise well above the all-too-common equations of gender and sex, assertions about ‘male’ and ‘female’ writing, and assumptions about the motivations, quality, purpose and impact of men’s and women’s writing. She presents the writers as individuals with their own motivations for travelling, writing, emigrating and being active in their chosen fields, while identifying the commonalities that speak to the experiences of women abroad in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century.

Her central thesis, however, is that it is not enough to reclaim these writings as a ‘hidden’ part of colonial history, postcolonial writing or even as part of a ‘canon’ of women’s literature, it is actually vital to a full understanding of colonialism to include and examine women’s writing as an essential and integral part of the imperialist project, validating British presence in Australia. Standish argues that their constant comparing and contrasting of Britain with Australia wasn’t simply a familiarising technique aimed at reader understanding, but that it also had the reciprocal effect of assimilating Australia into the conception and reality of the British Empire. She notes too that women were in every sense the ‘civilizing influence’ on the bush, a role they undertook consciously and with a conviction of its rightness and necessity. She points out that pioneer women were perceived, and often perceived themselves, as the foil against which the male work of creating Australia could develop: while the bush may have been central to a certain type of Australian masculinity—the stoical, free ranging and heroic men that populated the early literature of Australia—women were central to the domestication of a life in the bush that had to be ‘cleared and replaced with homesteads and farm buildings, livestock and crops’ if the Australian colonial project was to succeed (26).

Turning to An Everyday Transience, this book also deals with everyday detail, and presents its material in and on its own terms. The editors, Philip Goldswain and William Taylor, note in their introduction that there has been no scholarly work specifically on the Western Australian photographer J. J. Dwyer (4), though his work has been used and reproduced. This book attempts to bridge...
several genres—it is in format a sizeable coffee-table book that allows the images to be reproduced at a respectable size, but includes scholarly and creative texts that are as much an invitation as a beginning for studies of the Dwyer collection.

Dwyer’s photographs of the Western Australian goldfields, and in particular Kalgoorlie, date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They offer a fascinating insight into both the histories of mining towns that still thrive in WA, and towns that shared the same hopeful beginnings and bore all the usual hallmarks of a town with a future—hotels, banks, recreational facilities, churches, stores and the investment in rail and other infrastructure—and yet which had only a brief existence and were dismantled as the disappointed residents moved on to new ‘finds’. The book’s title, then, refers not only to the transience of photography, a medium which captures a moment that instantly becomes the past and which itself is subject to the ravages of time and perishability, but also the peculiar transience of unsuccessful pioneer towns. Appearing as permanent as any other, these abortive settlements did not simply crumble over time, forgotten ghost towns weathering away in the WA desert; they were purposefully taken down by their builders, their component parts used to construct other settlements as if they were nothing but the temporary canvas tents of the travelling circus. It’s a little-known backdrop to the standard histories of the cities and towns that still exist today.

Dwyer was an itinerant photographer, one of many who captured the Australian colonisers for their own posterity, for their communication with their families back home—be that overseas or in other parts of Australia—and simply to record, in the new and fashionable medium of photography, scenes that they were well aware were of historical significance. Like the women of Standish’s book, their reasons for making the records they did were personal, commercial and contributory to the growing body of knowledge that Australian colonisation was generating, as well as to the project of colonisation itself. The presence of both photographers and the photographed recorded and confirmed the legitimacy of colonisation, stating irrefutably ‘we are here, we are building our homes, we are the rightful owner-occupiers of this land’.

Dwyer’s photographs were published in the goldfields newspapers, and he took photographs for mining companies and private individuals (3). He photographed the mine workings and the industrial activity around them, photographs that show technical skill in lighting and composition that echo the European and American celebration of mechanisation that would later reach its zenith with photographers such as Wolfgang Sievers. He also photographed the towns as they sprang up, and these are compared in the first two essays, by Geoffrey London and Philip Goldswain, with the urban photography projects of Europe and America. Four of the seven authors are staff of the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts at the University of Western Australia; the others are
an NLA archivist who provides essential contextualisation of the photographs in terms of their production, their preservation and their accessibility, a goldfields researcher and documentary-writer (Barry Strickland), and Australian writer Joan London. London’s short story, ‘The Photographer’ is reproduced here, along with an exploration by Clarissa Ball (Dean of the aforementioned Faculty) of the same images London drew on for inspiration in her story. These latter four focus on photographs that document the commerce of the towns and the daily activity of the townspeople, as individuals sitting for formal portraits, groups at leisure and work, and as crowds gathering on momentous occasions. It is these photographs that contain some of the real surprises—an image of a man on roller-skates, dressed as a butterfly; a group of men at the local baths, unabashedly naked; Dyer himself in a crumpled white suit and pith helmet, cigarette posed between his fingers trailing a vertical line of smoke to the level of his waxed moustache.

Like the accounts in *Australia through Women’s Eyes*, Dwyer’s photographs are accounts of colonial people and their activities, requiring a critical examination of their representation of the colonialist project. The book does make accessible a tantalising glimpse of the Dwyer collection, presented with a select and diverse group of interpretive essays, but while the book is multi-disciplinary it is not interdisciplinary. In the first essay there are moments where it sounds like a tourist history, uncritically narrating a white progress view without critical reflection in a way that seems somewhat dated. The documentary nature of Dwyer’s photography is very apparent, and in the images of industry and commerce there is some repetition. Elsewhere however, there are commentaries on people other than the European majority—Japanese sex slaves and their pimps are mentioned briefly by Barry Strickland, as is the multiculturalism of the goldfields and the White Australia policy that sought to eradicate this, right from Federation. Clarissa Ball’s essay suggests that prostitutes were financially independent and notes that they are now a celebrated part of modern Kalgoorlie’s historical tourist trade; one can only assume that these were white European sex workers, which suggests some interesting research areas on how racial hierarchies were enacted in all strata of life, and indeed on how prostitution can be something a town is proud of—as long as it’s the prostitution of the past.

All in all, this book responds to the problem of compiling a representative account of this vast collection and all the interpretive avenues it offers, by making a creatively free-ranging, eclectic window into it. It suggests rather than argues, expands rather than prescribes, and stands as an open invitation to scholars in every discipline to mine this archive. The essays are suitably different, in that each builds a more detailed picture of Dwyer and Kalgoorlie,
focusing on different, often contradictory aspects without attempting an artificial homogeneity—as Barry Strickland states of the collection itself, it has ‘surprising and pleasing eclecticism, both in subject and in composition’ (126).

*An Everyday Transience* works well as an introduction to Dwyer’s photography and an invitation for further study to researchers in a wide range of disciplines, and particularly to interdisciplinary researchers. *Australia through Women’s Eyes* is certainly a must-read for students and researchers in a similarly wide range of areas, particularly women’s history, Australian history and transnationalism. Both these works are valuable contributions to the discourse of Australia’s colonial past, presenting their material in accessible ways that should both add to the resources available to researchers and invite further critical study.

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Pleading Robinson

Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson
Edited by N.J.B. Plomley
Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and Quintus Publishing, 1180pp, $99.00, 2008
ISBN 978-0-9775572-2-6

Reading Robinson: Companion Essays to Friendly Mission
Edited by Anna Johnston and Mitchell Rolls
Quintus Publishing, 238pp, $34.95, 2008
ISBN 978-0-9775572-5-7

Review Essay by Greg Lehman

Christine McPaul’s review in AHR’s May 2010 edition¹ of two highly significant publications in Australia’s colonial record highlights why Aboriginal people generally, and Aboriginal intellectuals in particular, continue to be unhappy with both the substance of Australian history and the method of its telling. But it is not the discontented Indigenous authors included in the collection of essays that speak most to this problem. Rather, it is the exclusion of any Indigenous Tasmanian writer not closely associated with the Riwuunna Centre for Aboriginal Studies at the University of Tasmania that has ensured these essays collectively fail to make an emancipatory contribution to a critical dialogue that is both necessary and overdue in the telling of Australian history.

If you are already familiar with N. J. B. Plomley’s unique volume, then you will understand why a new edition of Friendly Mission is a momentous event. The first (and only) edition was becoming increasingly hard to obtain and expensive at over $1000 for copies in excellent condition. For those who have yet to discover this enormous work, a new edition offers a fresh opportunity to enter a world that leaves most who encounter it profoundly moved by the experience. An edited collection of journals, correspondence and associated lists produced by the builder turned evangelist George Augustus Robinson

¹ <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-May-2010/mcpaul.html>
(1791-1866), *Friendly Mission* is a record of one man’s extraordinary (but by no means selfless) vocation to save my ancestors from almost certain annihilation on the lawless and mal-administered frontier of Van Diemen’s Land.

Buried within Robinson’s ostentatious prose and amateur naturalism is a patchwork of observation and interpretation that constitutes most of what is known of the cosmology and lifestyle of an ancient society in the midst of devastating change. Biblical in its volume and scale, *Friendly Mission* is replete with accounts of creation, slavery and exodus. The covenant offered to Tasmanian Aboriginal nations by Robinson comprised a series of empty promises, which delivered the generation that parleyed with him from a wilderness that was their home, to imprisonment and early death in an unpromised land. But unlike the Biblical mythology, this is a primary account. While there is no doubt that Robinson gilded his record to suit his ambitions, *Friendly Mission* is strongly grounded in the historical experience of those who faced a carefully executed ‘final solution’ to the Aboriginal problem in Van Diemen’s Land. It is a volume that provides the basis for contemporary mythologies every bit as poignant for today’s Tasmanian Aboriginal community as for those who study them and their origins.

Since its first publication in 1966, *Friendly Mission* has been the principal source of both authoritative fact and romantic imagining about Indigenous Tasmania. Republished in 2008 by Launceston’s Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (of which Plomley was the Director in 1946) and Quintus Publishing, *Friendly Mission* now gains from the inclusion of later work published separately by Plomley, as well as a comprehensive index—sorely missed in the first edition. In it can be found an enigmatic historical narrative of a people in the midst of a war and from it are derived many of the cultural articles of faith for Aboriginal families who survived the Tasmanian holocaust. Through his pious and ethnocentric account, Robinson positions himself as their saviour, delivering them to a sanctuary on Flinders Island that ultimately proved to be a death sentence for most who were sent there. Plomley, while never threatening Robinson’s lofty identity, elucidates its flaws and builds a story of monumental heroism and brutality, advocacy and injustice, vision and folly.

Resulting from painstaking work by Plomley during the period 1959 to 1965 at University College, London, *Friendly Mission* constitutes one of the most extensive collections of first-hand information on the impact of British invasion on Indigenous people ever published. The book, more than any other, has profoundly influenced the scholarly understanding of a decisive period of Tasmanian history. This influence is explored in *Reading Robinson: Companion Essays to Friendly Mission*. Edited by Anna Johnston and Mitchell Rolls, the collection includes essays by a range of established authors on Tasmanian Aboriginal history. Cassandra Pybus, who published her romantic historical
narrative *Community of Thieves* in 1991, introduces Gilbert Robertson, a little-known challenger to Robinson for the role of Aboriginal Conciliator. Henry Reynolds is well-known for his seminal publications reflecting on Tasmanian Aboriginal history, including *Fate of a Free People* (1995) and the more personal *Why Weren’t We Told?* (2000). In the *Companion*, Reynolds offers a concise perspective on Robinson’s character and impulse. Lyndall Ryan, who published one of the most comprehensive recent histories with *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (1996) is also included, and documents the need for a critical understanding of Robinson as much more than the sum of his failings.

While Plomley published a range of monographs and books during the later part of his scholarly career that specifically examined Aborigines and their culture, *Friendly Mission* is his most profound legacy. Primarily an account of Robinson’s quest to ‘conciliate’ the Aboriginal nations of the British colony of Van Diemen’s Land, it is also an inadvertent ethnography of Tasmanian Aborigines, which emerges almost accidentally as Robinson attempts to underline the harsh vicissitudes he faced in his travels across the island. This layering of intention and consequence poses a complex challenge for the reader in an almost irresistible challenge to decipher Robinson’s project. There are tantalising glimpses of a unique Indigenous culture, embedded within a narrative driven by humanitarian zeal that, as Alan Lester points out in the *Companion*, coincided with a broader campaign across the British Empire during the period.

Robinson’s intention was to evidence his own ‘good works’ for both posterity and for the satisfaction of the colonial governor, who rewarded his efforts to remove Aborigines from the island with an annual endowment and grants of land. However, in so doing, as Patrick Brantlinger points out in the *Companion*, Robinson contributed to the growing body of humanitarian, abolitionist and Darwinist discourse at a time when the majority of colonists were intent on Aboriginal ‘extirpation’. *Friendly Mission* presents numerous accounts of attacks by Aborigines in response to brutality by settlers and documents responsibility for widespread and frequent massacres occurring at the time.  

2 John Connor’s *Companion* essay highlights that *Friendly Mission* therefore constitutes an essential chapter of Australia’s military history—detailing, for example, the effect of martial law in providing immunity from prosecution for murder to those who killed Aborigines, whether it be for revenge, malice or sport (270). Ian McFarlane exemplifies this with an essay reprising his 2008 book *Beyond Awakening*, a re-examination of the intense period of conflict between the Van Diemen’s Land Company and Aborigines in the north-west of the island.

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2 For example, at Robbins Island (p.226); Western Marshes (p.254); Cape Grim (pp.207, 266); various locations (pp.584-586); Emu Bay (p.629); and Launceston (p.721).
For readers like myself, *Friendly Mission* provides an almost unique canon of knowledge about the tradition and practice of ancestral tribal culture.\(^3\) In this way, Robinson’s records have informed much of the revitalisation of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture in the twentieth century and continue to provide the basis for investigations of identity and deep relationships to land by Aboriginal scholars such as Patsy Cameron.\(^4\) Brief, matter-of-fact journal entries by Robinson offer sometimes lyrical and often enigmatic glimpses of a complex cosmology—powerful touchstones for today’s Aboriginal community in reflecting on their own relationships to land.

Those (tribes) of Oyster Bay ... the gum trees they claim as theirs and call them countrymen. The stringybark trees the Brune call theirs, as being their countrymen, the peppermint the Cape Portland call theirs, and the Swanport claim the honeysuckle. (402)

These narratives are not only significant for Aborigines. As Nicholas Thomas suggests in his reflective essay in the *Companion*, *Friendly Mission* constitutes a rich yet accessible resource for the development of national narratives, which should be placed alongside the journals of James Cook. Ironically, if Tasmanian Aborigines figure at all in Australia’s defining story, it is through their ‘removal’. Plomley continued throughout his life to argue that Tasmanian Aborigines were extinct; angrily rejecting assertions by their descendents of continuing culture.\(^5\) This neatly reflected Robinson’s project which, while attempting to protect Aboriginal lives, did little to preserve their culture. Rebe Taylor’s *Companion* essay recognises this and explores its powerful influence on later work by Rhys Jones, who further contributed to the mythology of Tasmanian extinction. While Robinson worked harder than most in Van Diemen’s Land at the time to protect Aborigines, he actively discouraged cultural continuity, seeking instead to instil in his captives the qualities of a British agrarian class. Ironically, without Robinson’s efforts it is likely that Aboriginal culture would have become more dissolute in the confused colonial social landscape of the time, decimated as it already was by the impact of introduced disease, slavery and active killing by colonial roving parties. Of course, these same processes were at play across the British Empire and the *Companion* supplies a fascinating account by Elizabeth Elbourne of the parallels between Van Diemen’s Land and the Cape Colony.

Ultimately, it was not simply the efforts of Robinson in gathering together the survivors of the Black War that facilitated the continuation of Tasmanian

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3 While *Friendly Mission* is the most voluminous publication recording interaction with Aborigines at the time, other journals of the period such as those by Jorgen Jorgensen and Gilbert Robertson are also informative.

4 Current doctoral research by Aunty Patsy at the University of Tasmania retraces Robinson’s journey through contemporary Aboriginal perspective and analysis.

5 Julie Gough – personal communication.
Aboriginal culture. Rather, it was the survival of their children, dispersed across the Bass Strait islands and quietly co-existing with sealers and other settlers away from the reach of the colonial administration that provided a well-spring of oral tradition and knowledge for today’s Aboriginal community. The work of Plomley in publishing Robinson’s journals in 1966 has functioned to enrich knowledge and understandings that Aboriginal families themselves maintained. Most significantly, it has provided a chaotic encyclopaedia that increasingly serves to supplement the revitalisation of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture.

I was fortunate to be a member of the Board of Quintus Publishing during the preparation of the new edition of *Friendly Mission*. As someone with a vital interest in the influence of Plomley’s work on those of us descended from the people whose world he described, I saw an obvious and irresistible opportunity. Just as collectors of the first edition of *Friendly Mission* understood that the volume could not be complete without the accompanying supplements later published by the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, the Board was quick to agree that an accompanying title, which critically explored the immense consequence of Plomley’s work for both historians and Aborigines, was a necessity.

Like Ian Andersen, the construction of my own identity as a contemporary Aborigine had been enormously influenced by what I had read in *Friendly Mission* and I was critically aware that my cultural peers, both academic and lay, were similarly engaged. Andersen’s contribution to the Companion, in which he revisits his earlier discussion of hybridity and the influence of racialising discourses on identity, articulates this better than most. Through a reflective relationship with his own Tasmanian Aboriginal identity, Andersen focuses on the ‘enduring legacy’ of Plomley, in providing ‘a path back into history’ (76) for the Tasmanian Aborigines whose continuing existence Plomley strenuously denied.

The decision by the Plomley Trust to republish *Friendly Mission* created a rare opportunity to assemble an authoritative commentary—a guide to the significance, flaws and profound influence of *Friendly Mission* on how Tasmanian Aborigines are perceived and how we perceive ourselves. To acknowledge this, the Companion was conceived by the publisher to harvest the scholarly perspectives that had accumulated since *Friendly Mission*’s publication in 1968, and at the same time present a profound Aboriginal voice that could richly illustrate the Aboriginal community’s critical engagement with the document and its consequences.

Sadly, the opportunity for the editors to respond to the latter goal has been largely missed, limited by the very thing that coloured both Robinson’s and ultimately Plomley’s work. Like them, Johnston and Rolls seem to have been
reluctant to step back from the impulse to mediate the Aboriginal story through their own familiar associates in order to argue their own position. Rather than empowering Aborigines to rally our own voice on this matter, the editors insisted on orchestrating the Aboriginal response themselves by drawing Aboriginal contributions from among colleagues and family members associated with the University’s Centre for Aboriginal Education—of which Rolls is a Director.

The contributors mentioned thus far provide an important overview of current scholarly perspectives. However, apart from Andersen, the perspective is from outside of Aboriginal cultural experience. The Companion was meant also to engage with the diverse critical thought and analysis of Tasmanian Aborigines themselves. And while the essay by Andersen is an important one, it is alone in its ability to converse on like terms with the assembled non-Aboriginal scholars who dominate the collection. This is not to say that Aborigines should be obligated to contribute within the language and methods of academe, but as all other contributions proceed from this standpoint, there is a collective sense created in the Companion that somehow we might not have been willing or able to participate in the conversation.

The essays by Tasmanian Aborigines Rodney Dillon, Wendy Aitken and Sharon Dennis provide poignant personal perspectives, but seem cursory alongside the more lengthy, discursive essays of other contributors. The consequence is failure to provide a compelling cultural presence for Aborigines in the volume that adequately acknowledges our capacity to participate in rigorous discourse. Rodney Dillon’s observation that Robinson’s writings ‘highlight a soft representation of history’ (145) could just as easily be a reflection on the editors’ construction of Aboriginal voice—the Companion softens the vigour of intellectual debate that could otherwise have been harnessed in its pages—suffering unnecessarily from the absence of critical Tasmanian Aboriginal writers who could easily have been engaged in the project if they had been more open to collaboration on this project. Heather and Gaye Sculthorpe, Patsy Cameron, Jim Everett, Michael Mansell and Julie Gough are just a few Tasmanian Aborigines who have well-established credentials to participate. Most disappointing is that the opportunity for such collaboration was offered, but refused.

The particular selection by Johnson and Rolls of Aborigines to contribute to the Companion attests more to the ‘hostile environment’ that Andersen describes as surrounding our search for ‘representational integrity’ (60), than it does to any willingness by the editors to engage with Tasmanian Aboriginal intellectuals beyond the boundaries they have imposed on the Companion. Too many of the Aboriginal writers appear to be included in order to support the editors’ reference to Lowenthal’s explanation of heritage as the stuff of ‘imprecise impression and sketchy surmise’ (18). In this respect, Johnston and Rolls share much in common with the naïve grasp of Tasmanian Aboriginality that Andersen observes of
Nicholas Shakespeare. They appear to be ‘out of their depth’ (73) and resort instead to arguing contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginality ‘more ... as a realm of faith than of fact’ (18).

*Friendly Mission* then, is a document of significant weight, not only for Tasmanian history, but for Australia’s national narrative. As McPaul observes, it is ‘integral to contemporary debates across diverse areas of scholarship and society’ (152). Plomley’s defining work is the most evocative account of the Aboriginal culture of the island in existence, distilling the history of a people from the drama of a religious crusade with mercenary credentials. It offers a flawed encyclopaedia on which observers have based their analysis and critique of Aboriginal culture and history, and from which Aborigines ourselves have drawn to inform the dynamic and fluid process of cultural continuity and revival. The great significance of *Friendly Mission* is that much of our collective ‘knowing’ of Tasmanian Aborigines is conditional upon its selective records—left by a single observer whose project it was to reduce a people to victimhood and impose, as their sole salvation, his zeal for the abandonment of their ancient culture and its replacement with the values of industry and Protestantism.

Ironically (or perhaps not), the *Companion* suffers from a similar malady. A compelling field of non-Aboriginal scholars offer an authoritative summary of the value and importance of Robinson’s contribution. Yet the unique opportunity to engage with critical Indigenous thought for which the project was originally conceived is mostly missed. This flaw is not apparent to McPaul and could hardly be expected or even discerned by most readers. But it is very clear to those of us who are participants in the continuing story of Aboriginal Tasmania; an experience of oppression and control that has been exerted since British sealers arrived in Banks Strait in 1797. Through its selective assemblage of Aboriginal voice, the *Companion* intimates a scenario in which Tasmanian Aborigines have paid the price of Robinson’s success. We are presented as insubstantial in our apparent unwillingness to engage in critical discourse, instead offering what McPaul describes as ‘contemplative’ ‘offended’ of ‘playful’ commentaries, coinciding neatly with Lowenthal’s argument of imprecision. In this way our cultural response is characterised as personal—little more than faith—constructed to serve imagination and a desire for privilege. As such *Reading Robinson* is a project that lacks sympathy for the intrinsic validity of contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal culture - something that the descendants of those who are portrayed in Robinson’s journals hold as self-evident. I suspect that the editors are content with this outcome and Plomley, if he were still alive, would be most approving.
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