Place Pedagogy Change

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Place pedagogy change is a work of creative experimentation in which we explore the ways in which pedagogies of place can enable the relational learning of connections between people, places and communities. In adding the element of place to the dynamic relations between teacher, learner, and knowledge, we articulate a pedagogy of ethical uncertainty. Ethical refers to our mutual responsibilities to others and to the more-than-human world, and uncertainty to the unpredictability inherent in our relationship with this world. In Place pedagogy change, we examine the nature of such innovative pedagogies as they emerged across the curriculum from early childhood to school and community education, and in teacher education. The book will provide a useful text for teachers and teacher educators wishing to address questions of place and sustainability in educational research and practice.
Place Pedagogy Change
This book series is dedicated to the radical love and actions of Paulo Freire, Jesus “Pato” Gomez, and Joe L. Kincheloe. Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation. Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy’s (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity—youth identity in particular—the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant. But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference. If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.
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LIST OF AUTHORS

Margaret Somerville is newly appointed as a Professor of Education at the University of Western Sydney, previously at Monash University’s Gippsland campus and the University of New England. A leading researcher in pedagogies of place, she has published six books in the area, including her latest, *Singing the Coast* (2010), and an edited collection, *Landscapes and Learning* (2009). She is interested in alternative methodologies and modes of representation in educational research, and the ways that these can be relevant and engaging for a wide general audience.

Bronwyn Davies is an independent scholar based in Sydney, Australia, and a Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne. The distinctive features of her work are, on the one hand, her development of innovative social science research methodologies incorporating elements of the visual, literary and performative arts, and, on the other, its strong base in the conceptual work of poststructuralist philosophers such as Deleuze, Foucault and Nancy. Her research explores the discursive practices and relations of power through which particular social worlds are constituted. She is best known for her work on gender, for her development of the methodology of collective biography, and for her writing on feminism and poststructuralist theory.

Kerith Power is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at Monash University. She became an academic after a career as an early childhood teacher and advocate. She has contributed to the field on responsive research methodologies that cross cultural boundaries. Her interest in place arises from collaborative research into local literacies with rural, Indigenous and marginalised suburban communities. She is a member of the Space, Place and Body research group.

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The authors
INTRODUCTION

Place pedagogy change

*Place pedagogy change* is a book that explores new ways of learning and teaching about place. We are not interested in passing on a fixed body of knowledge about place, but in developing ways of knowing that are emergent in, and responsive to, particular places. We are interested in ways of knowing that change the knower—that generate a critique of existing knowledges and practices in such a way that they open up the possibility of transformation and change. We explore how one might come to know oneself differently by focussing not on one’s individualised self whose identity is constructed in its separation from others and from place, but on oneself in relation to those others, including human, non-human and earth others, who make up the places we live in.

Few would dispute that we are living in times of global ecological and financial trouble, and that we do not have the answers we need for dealing with those troubles. The divisions between the wealthy and the poor are rapidly increasing. We are collectively uncertain about what changes we need to make to avert the multiple crises that loom on our horizons. In order to move beyond these discourses of crisis, we, as teacher educators in rural and urban universities in Australia, have explored how we might educate current and future generations for engaging in life in ways that are both responsible and creative—life-giving rather than diminishing. It is in the intersections among place, pedagogy and change that we have sought some strategies that could make a difference. This requires new research methodologies, new modes of learning and new modes of teaching.

Place Studies has recently emerged as a significant transdisciplinary field in which the gap between the social and the ecological is addressed (Somerville et al., 2009). Emerging place research reconceptualises the work of early place theorists by mobilising ‘the recently reinvigorated and transdisciplinary interest and emphasis on all aspects of what can be described as the *spatiality of human life*’ (Soja, 2000, p. 6, italics in original). Human life is constituted in taken-for-granted discourses, as occurring in specific places including, more recently, global space. Place Studies begins to unpick the separation implicit in the preposition *in*—and finds rather that we are *of* the landscape, indeed that we *are* the landscape. The new thinking draws on feminist, environmental, poststructuralist and postcolonial thought, and is emerging as a site where knowledges of selves-in-relation to the other, including the non-human, earth others can be, and are being, (re)formed.

The particular focus that we take up here, drawing on the work in this emergent field, is the development of a trans disciplinary pedagogy of place. The pedagogical spaces that we explore, and experiment with, in this book take up both critical and enabling perspectives. Critical perspectives recognise power; critical research ‘seeks in its analyses to plumb the archaeology of taken-for-granted perspectives to understand how unjust and oppressive social conditions come to be reified as
historical “givens” (Canella & Lincoln, 2009, p. 54). Enabling pedagogies seek the movement from critique to transformation. These two forces, critique and transformation, are vital elements in the development of new pedagogies of place. Foucault argued that:

…the task of a critical analysis of our world is something that is more and more important. Maybe the most certain of all philosophical problems is the problem of the present time, and of what we are, in this very moment.

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and build up what we could be to get rid of… the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. (2000, p. 336)

This book is just such a work of refusal, of imagining and of building, resisting the intensification of neoliberal control that goes hand in hand with extreme individualisation and the (dis)illusions of freedom.

Place is productive as a framework because it occupies the space between grounded materiality and the discursive space of representation. It generates conversations across disciplinary boundaries, conversations that have become imperative when addressing questions about the relationship between social and ecological systems. According to Gruenewald, place itself is also profoundly pedagogical. He points out that ‘as centres of experience, places teach us about how the world works, and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further, places make us: As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped’ (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 621).

Our own approach takes up this double interest in place—of, on the one hand, furthering knowledge, taking responsibility and having care, and on the other, finding ways to recognise our co-implication in place and our co-extension with others, human and not-human, organic and inorganic. We are earth, air, water and fire (Suzuki, 2010). What we do to the planet we do to ourselves. Care for oneself and for the other, the other including one’s place of being, cannot any longer be understood as separate responsibilities or separate processes.

Our approach is quite different from the discourse of globalism and global identities. It is a world-making rather than a globe-making approach (Nancy, 2007). Globalisation, or globe-making, produces over-regulated practices focussed on the production of generic, predictable individuals responsive to the forces of government. It is geared to forging docile bodies, bodies ‘that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). Globe-making dismantles the social in favour of the economic.

World-making begins with self-in-relation to the other. It requires openness to new directions and possibilities not mandated by governmental imperatives, but emergent from the specificity of particular places in the world. It focuses on engagement with the other, where the other includes human and non-human, earth others. It focuses on anticipating the eruption of the new. It has an unpredictable appearance, maintaining a crucial reference to the world as a space of relationality
and as a space for the construction and negotiation of meaning. Against the disembodied and dislocated ‘everywhere and anywhere’ of the global, Nancy (2007) emphasises the specificity of subjects in their particular time and space of ‘this place, here’. World-making is not focussed on controlling the future. Its question is, rather: How can we give ourselves, open ourselves, in order to look ahead of ourselves, where nothing is yet visible?

Our question then is: What kinds of teaching and learning experiences will enable such world-making? It is through the pivotal work of pedagogy, as it sits between place and change in our title, that we make the connection between our ideas about place and processes of change. Pedagogy can be understood as a concept that ‘draws attention to the process through which knowledge is produced’ (Lusted, 1986, p. 2). This process involves ‘the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the interaction of three agencies—the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce’ (Lusted, 1986, p. 3). In this sense pedagogy is framed as a fundamentally relational process; it takes shape as it unfolds. It is only through retrospective narration that it takes a determinate form in the consciousness of participants. Pedagogy must be understood as an ‘inherently relational, emergent, and non-linear process that is unpredictable and therefore unknowable in advance’ (Sellar, 2009, p. 351). Sellar suggests that an ethically responsible pedagogy connects the lives of children and communities, disrupting those habits and judgments that might close down the possibilities of connection. He suggests we engage in the ‘responsible uncertainty of pedagogy’ (Sellar, 2009, p. 347).

In adding the element of place to the relational dynamic between teacher, learner, and knowledge, we further extend this concept to name a pedagogy of ethical uncertainty, where ethical refers to our mutual responsibilities to others and to the more-than-human world, and uncertainty to the unpredictability inherent in our relationship with this world. Such a pedagogy cannot be known in advance. In Place pedagogy change, we explore the nature of such pedagogies in retrospective practice. In this sense the book is a work of creative experimentation in which we tentatively explore the ways in which pedagogies of place might enable the dynamic relational learning of connections between people, places and communities.

To this end each of the researchers have engaged both individually and collectively in creative experimentation, bringing different bodies of theory together with our engagement in different places and processes of learning and teaching. The languages of methodology and method, representation and writing, are troubled in our experimentation. We have not tried to homogenise our approaches but instead to create conversations among them, to extend ourselves to the very edges of our thinking, and to create spaces for our readers to enter into those conversations. In this way, our work can also be understood as creating openings towards as yet unimaginable futures.

We have set this book in a time of unprecedented and unpredictable change in the nature of our worlds and our relationships within them. These changes demand attention to the intertwining of humans and the more-than-human world. Change engenders creative possibilities and responses. To energise the concept of change we briefly touch on Grosz’s concepts of chaos and the frame (2008). These
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concepts enable us to both draw on the chaos, the life force of the dynamic of inevitable processes of change, and also to render our engagement with them possible and intelligible.

In Chaos, territory, art, Grosz proposes that chaos is the condition of the universe:

“In the beginning” is chaos, the whirling, unpredictable movement of forces, vibratory oscillations that constitute the universe. Chaos here may be understood not as absolute disorder but rather as a plethora of orders, forms, wills—forces that cannot be distinguished or differentiated from each other, both matter and its conditions for being otherwise, both the actual and the virtual indistinguishably. (2008, p. 5)

Human activities expressed in the disciplinary constellations of art and science understand, and draw from, this chaos in different ways. The first and primary step in this process is the imperative to establish the frame: ‘the first gesture of art, its metaphysical condition and universal expression, is the construction or fabrication of the frame’ (Grosz, 2008, p.10). It is the frame that allows us to draw from the life force of chaos. The frame enables a part of chaos, as the unknowable real, to enter into the realm of representation, to become intelligible. Pedagogy, we suggest, participates in the nature of both art and of science, drawing from chaos through the frame of the teaching and learning activities that mediate place and change. The frame that we offer in this book is a set of understandings about enabling pedagogies of place.

ENABLING PEDAGOGIES OF PLACE

We began with three principles for an enabling pedagogy of place evolved from earlier poststructural and postcolonial theorising of place-based education (Somerville, 2010). These principles focus on the elements of body, story, and contact zone. In this book we are interested in the possibilities these principles offer for generating place pedagogies for change.

Our relationship to place is constituted in stories and other representations

Story and storytelling are central to place pedagogies for change. A story is a fundamental unit of meaning-making through which we know the world. A first strategy is to extend the concept of story to include creative representations of place in visual, aural, and performance modes as well as recognising that statistical, scientific, and popular representations of place are all versions of place stories. Australian Indigenous place stories, for example, incorporate song, music, dance, body painting, and performance, intersecting powerfully in particular places (Somerville, 2010). Extending the concept of story in this way enables the possibility of different ways of knowing places to come into conversation with each other.

The analytical strategy of storylines informs our approach to identifying dominant storylines of place and facilitating the emergence of alternative stories. A
storyline is the plotline of collective stories about place. Storylines shape our
modes of thinking about ourselves and others, and our place in the world. ‘Stories
we observe, hear, read, both lived and imaginary, form a stock of imaginary
storylines through which life choices can be made’ (Davies, 2000, p. 81). Aus-
tralian Indigenous songlines map the actions of the creation ancestors onto the
physical landscape, connecting story places to each other like beads on a string
across the landscape. Each of these places is a site of meaning and song.

Changing our relationship to places involves changing the stories we tell about
place. The task of generating (or making visible) alternative storylines that have the
power to displace the old is extraordinarily complex and difficult. The work of
\textit{Place pedagogy change} is to articulate the nature of pedagogical processes for
achieving this change.

\textit{Place learning begins with the body}

Focussing on the body is the most radical, controversial and transformative of the
three principles. Despite considerable recent attention to the body as a category of
thought and analysis, the body remains elusive in place theory and research.
Feminist philosophers such as Grosz (1994, p. 5) propose that ‘putting the body at
the centre of our notion of subjectivity transforms the way we think about
knowledge, about power, about desire’. For us, this element of our frame is related
to a necessary focus on the mutual constitution of bodies and places, and on the
materialities, the ‘flesh of the world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Our bodies as
researchers and the bodies of teachers and learners are key sites in place
pedagogies for change.

Perhaps the furthest extension of this idea is an understanding of the landscape
as subject, which we draw from Rose’s research with Australian Indigenous
communities. For Rose, the context of ecological humanities is ‘rapid social and
environmental change’ which brings with it an ethical imperative in settler
societies ‘to be responsive to Indigenous peoples’ knowledges and aspirations for
justice’ (Rose, 2004, n.p.). Rather than appropriating Indigenous knowledges, Rose
proposes that we need to learn from them. She regards her Indigenous collabora-
tors as her teachers. In \textit{Nourishing Terrains}, Rose describes Indigenous concepts of
country which inspire our own thinking about place, pedagogy and change:

\begin{quote}
Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or
represented, it is lived in and lived with…People talk about country in the same
way they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country,
visit country, worry about country, feel for country, and long for country.
Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place… country is a
living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow with a consciousness, and a
will toward life. (1996, p. 7)
\end{quote}

According to this understanding of place, ‘country’ is a subject in its own right that
people engage with in a reciprocal relationship. An important aspect of this
understanding is that country needs care, which is expressed in speaking, singing,
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visiting, worrying, and longing, as an everyday enacting of that care, as well as being ritualised in ceremony. Place, in this concept, is multi-dimensional and includes human beings in relationship with both non-human others and the material terrain of an enlarged concept of landscape. Knowledge of country, and responsibilities to country, are deeply folded into the bodies, memories and imaginations of the human subjects who belong to country. An enabling pedagogy of place recognises that the condition of country is integral to human subjectivity.

Deep place learning occurs in a cultural contact zone of contestation

Indigenous knowledges of place, as identified above, are a fundamental force for change for Australian place researchers. But settler engagement with Indigenous place knowledges is fraught political terrain. The concept of the contact zone (Pratt, 1992) refers to the characteristic of specific local places as spaces for the intersection of culturally different and often contested stories of place. We understand the space of the contact zone to include the place stories of differently classed and ethnic communities, and of different religious, gendered, and sexually oriented collectivities. The in-between space of the ‘contact zone’ has been described as a space of transformative potential and is a highly significant consideration in Place pedagogy change.

Researching, teaching and learning about place means participating in a contact zone of difference. This requires continuing engagement with difficult questions, moving beyond a personal comfort zone to refuse easy answers and often to dwell in a space of unknowing. The ‘borderwork’ critical to negotiating difference in the contact zone (Somerville & Perkins, 2003) involves precarious, risky and emotionally difficult work (Anzaldua, 1987; hooks, 1990) and it means moving within, between, and across boundaries. Yet it is in the in-between space of energy and struggle in the contact zone where new possibilities lie.

Contemporary cultural contact zones inevitably carry with them the distinct individual, familial and collective histories that each person brings with them into the present. They have trajectories into pasts and they open towards futures. The risky borderwork that we advocate in the contact zones where human subjects collide does not elide differences, nor does it reify them. It does not seek to flatten out or homogenise our specificities. Rather, through reflexivity and careful listening, and through a willingness to suspend meaning, it opens possibilities for deep engagement across difference and for transformation into the future. This is a pedagogy of ethical uncertainty entailing mutual responsibilities and unpredictability within pedagogical relationships.

DEVELOPING NEW FORMS OF RELATIONALITY

At the heart of the enabling place pedagogies that we develop through Place pedagogy change is relationality. In pedagogical encounters, no less than in any other domain of human existence, relationality as an ongoing process of becoming is crucial. Education can invite the opening up of new questions, new ways of
asking questions and of answering them, in an ongoing, dynamic, relational framework. New forms of relationality become possible. Cixous asks:

Why do we live? I think: to become more human: more capable of reading the world, more capable of playing it in all ways. This does not mean nicer or more humanistic. I would say: more faithful to what we are made from and to what we can create… (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 30)

We came to this project with an interest in how power works, not by shaping us against our will, but by governing the soul, generating desire that persuades us to take up dominant discourses as our own or, alternatively, to work against the grain of those discourses. We understand language as a powerful constitutive force, shaping what we understand as possible, and shaping what we desire within those (limiting) possibilities. We are also fascinated by the power of language and of art to enable us to open up the not-yet-known. Throughout this book we seek those pedagogical moments and possibilities that enable learning that shakes thought up in such ways.

In order to rethink the habituated modes of thought through which we constitute ourselves as human, and as separate from others, both human and non-human, we have sought to unsettle the sedimented practices of categorical thought. Difference has, for a long time, been understood as categorical difference; the other is discrete and distinct from the self, with difference lying in the other, whose identity is constructed through a string of binaries in which their sameness as, or difference from, oneself is made real. Deleuze (2004) offers a radically different approach to difference in which difference comes about through a continuous process of becoming different, of differenciation. In the first approach, difference is being ‘divided up, a dimension of separation’, while in the second, Deleuzian approach, difference is evolutionary, ‘a continuum, a multiplicity of fusion…What is at issue is an insistence on the genuine openness of history, of the future’ (Massey, 2005, p. 21).

In this openness to creative change there is important work to be done towards generating a new understanding of relationality, of what it means to be in relation to, and known through the other—the human other and earth other (Bergson, 1998). Cixous speaks of a complex balance between knowing and not knowing oneself in relation to the other. She develops the term positive incomprehension to capture something of the movement of the movement and openness of differenciation, once differenciation is no longer individualised and separated off from the other, where we are no longer fixated on capturing the essence of self and other in their difference but on being open to the unknown, to the impossibility of knowing and, simultaneously, to the beauty of moments of insight into the being of the other (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997).

In order to open up the creative forces that enable us to evolve beyond the fixities and limitations of the present moment we need to both turn our attention to what we are made of, our material continuity and “ontological co-implication” with others, including non-human others, and to open ourselves to multiple points of view, while deconstructing the sacralisation and ascendance of humanity. Wilson
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argues that we limit our evolutionary capacity if we accept human as the dominant term, separated from and superior to other ontological systems: ‘Each mode of materiality is built through its complicitous relations to others’ (Wilson, 2004, p. 69). Human existence in this understanding is not an existence that is separate from other forms of existence. Human, animal, earth and other matter all exist, and exist in networks of relationality, dependence and influence. In pedagogical contexts these networks can be cherished and nurtured through creative practices that include new ways of looking, being and becoming in place that open generative spaces in which change might happen.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Introduction

In the introduction the authors map the central ideas of place, pedagogy and change that inform the book. We set the book in times of global ecological and economic crises but we ask, in moving beyond discourses of crisis, what might be a generative and future looking educational response. To this end we begin with the framework of place in order to explore and articulate enabling place pedagogies of ethical uncertainty that we propose as opening possibilities for change.

Section 1: Researching

We begin the story of enabling place pedagogies with the self, with the experience of our learning and researching bodies in particular locations. The first four chapters of Place pedagogy change explore different ways of locating the self in place, as a basis for the chapters that follow about learning and teaching across the educational curriculum.

Chapter 1: Body/place journal writing This chapter explores the process of coming to know a new place through body/place writing, and writing the sensing body-in-place. Margaret Somerville investigates the idea of liminality as a place of no words and then of the gradual unfolding of a fragmented but embodied narrative of place. Many of the ideas that emerged from this body/place journal writing directly inform her later chapters about learning place and forming community in primary schools and in adult and community education.

Chapter 2: An experiment in writing place This chapter introduces writing as a mode of inquiry into place. Drawing inspiration from a Deleuzian approach to writing, Bronwyn Davies writes a play about the street she lives in and reflects on the nature of such experimental writing. She elaborates three principles that inform her writing of her own place. Unlike ethnographic writing, which seeks objective knowledge on the basis of which the researcher can make an account of a place, this chapter argues instead for the use of imagination, for the decentring of the author’s self, and for generating openness to the other and the not-yet-known.
Chapter 3: Walking my way back home  Susanne Gannon works memories of place through a poem of a morning walk that maps the suburb she used to call her home, and explores her ambivalent love for this particular place. Poetry slows language to a walking pace, and creates rhythm and space and attention to the details of place and of subjectivity in place. Through the poem, home and neighbourhood are reconfigured as assemblages where soils, vegetation, birds, animals, light, landscape, people and their habitats coexist on the same plane of being.

Chapter 4: Getting lost in Logan  In this chapter Kerith Power takes up Lather’s (2007) question of ‘what it might mean to claim getting lost as a methodology’ in times of ‘the loss of absolute knowledge’ (p. 3). It narrates an embodied process of getting to know a suburb by driving, walking and hanging out, mapping the intersecting “natural”, built and social ecologies of a particular place—Logan, a satellite city of Brisbane, the capital of Queensland on the east coast of Australia. The chapter frames the experiences through place pedagogy categories of storylines, bodies and cultural contact zones (Somerville, 2005). It problematises binary cartographies of advantage and disadvantage and explores what it means to walk to get to know a place.

Section 2: Learning

In this section we ask the question: how do learners across the curriculum learn about their places and form community? The four chapters explore innovative ways of learning place from the perspective of the learner in relation to early childhood, primary, secondary, adult and community education.

Chapter 5: Becoming-frog: learning place in primary school  In Becoming-frog Margaret Somerville analyses the productions of primary school children who have participated in an integrated educational program involving local wetlands. In one of these productions the children performed frogs to music made entirely of frog calls in a perfect example of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘becoming-animal’ (1987, p. 274). In taking up this idea she explores the post-industrial origins of the wetlands, the integrated educational curricula associated with the wetlands, and the children’s representations.

Chapter 6: Transforming self-place relations in the project approach  In this chapter Kerith Power moves beyond the modernist framework of the “project approach” to read from a postmodernist perspective how foregrounding place in an early childhood teacher education context generates learning about the mutual constitution and representation of places, bodies, subjectivities and collectivities. Examples drawn from students’ work during the three project phases of topic selection, field work and display will illustrate how the project approach acted as an enabling place pedagogy to facilitate students’ learning about place and building community.
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Chapter 7: Learning place through art and stories Susanne Gannon and Bronwyn Davies document the learning that secondary teacher education students engaged in as they took up elements of an enabling place pedagogy in an alternative model of the professional practicum. Working in the areas of Visual Arts and English, the student teachers developed place-specific projects for working with school students in their communities. These demonstrate that learning is not simply the acquisition of a fixed body of knowledge, but also openness to and experimentation with the not-yet-known.

Chapter 8: Peripheral vision: collaborative place-storytelling in community Phoenix de Carteret discusses collaborative place-storytelling workshops she designed to research women’s connections to place in Gippsland, Victoria. The workshops were developed from memory work, collective biography and the place pedagogies framework to unsettle storylines of gender and the dominant economic and colonial narratives in this place. The workshop method demonstrates the enabling pedagogical potential of place to facilitate informal learning, moving adult participants towards the place-consciousness considered necessary for sustainable futures.

Section 3: Teaching

In this section we focus on enabling place pedagogies through the breadth of practice that can be considered to be teaching. The three chapters explore enabling pedagogies of place in collective biography, community place-making, and a critical approach to place-writing in secondary English to open up new ways of thinking about and practising teaching.

Chapter 9: Collective biography as pedagogical practice: being and becoming in relation to place Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon detail how they worked with a small group of student teachers in a collective biography workshop about place, inviting them to examine their own experiences of being in place. This chapter outlines the methodology of collective biography as a teaching practice, and shows how it might be done in a tertiary education setting. The links between the philosophy and practice of collective biography and the principles of place pedagogy are explored. The place stories written by the pre-service teachers are used in this chapter to explore the links and to open up new ways of thinking about teaching place pedagogy in tertiary settings.

Chapter 10: Rewriting place in English Susanne Gannon explores a range of strategies for writing and reading place in English that she has developed in contexts of secondary schools and teacher education. In each of these sites, close attention to the discursive constitution and textual representations of the local becomes a springboard for creative work. The interweaving of critical and creative
responses to texts, and the careful design of student learning experiences, resources and assessment, open possibilities for complex and engaging responses to particular places.

Chapter 11: The place-makers
Margaret Somerville draws on conversations and stories from a number of extraordinary community educators whom she characterises as “the placemakers”. She traces the origins of their practices in their own embodied place learning, and in the places and communities which shaped them and which they in turn have shaped. Their teaching practice, which parallels their ongoing place learning, is analysed to identify the qualities that might contribute to formal educational curricula and pedagogies towards a sustainable future.

REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

This first section of *Place pedagogy change* is about new research approaches for coming to know place differently. We take as our theme the task of coming to know our own places in new and unexpected ways. Our strategies include the writing of radio drama, body/place journals and poetry, walking and getting lost. We begin with the idea that all place learning starts with the embodied self in relation to others, including non-human earth others. In the chapters in this section we look at ourselves as researchers embedded in complex contact zones that are simultaneously environmental, geological, social and cultural.

In researching place, we give space to what our senses tell us about the places in which we find ourselves. We ask ourselves what we can see, hear, feel, sense and touch in each of our places. At the same time the research requires the hard work of finding new ways to conceptualise place that enable us to break with those preconceptions that have separated us off from place and divested us of responsibility toward place.

Belonging and longing to belong are themes that arise in each of the chapters in this section. Each of the authors has moved their home at least once, or several times, whilst we have worked on *Place pedagogy change*. We have moved thousands of kilometres away from the places we have known as our homes and from our familiar landscapes, terrains and communities. The intricate work of finding our ways into new places, and working out how our old places are carried within us and as part of us, contributes to the multi-layered mapping of place we undertake in this section.

Walking and writing, writing and walking are intertwined research practices that emerge through these chapters. In different ways we each slow down our sensing through walking, enabling us to pay closer attention to where we are and who we can be in those places. The modes of writing that we develop also open up new ways of thinking about place and our immersion in place, and new ways of thinking about research and representation. We write bodies—in all the complexities of the fleshy, desirous, curious creatures that we are—back into the research texts from which they are more often elided.

We recognise, through the chapters in this section, the permeability of bodies and the places in which they are located, and the relations and responsibilities that must ethically follow such recognition. We move beyond the individual towards a collective sense of individuals as located within complex networks of interdependence with human, non-human and earth others. The personal, interpersonal and conceptual work we do here is a necessary precursor to our explorations of teaching and learning in ways that make a re-formed relation to place both imaginable and possible.
Liminality has no words.

Only a body sense of where I lie in bed at night in my bedroom—my body in relation to the sound of frogs in the pond below the house, and further down the hill the creek, how it winds from Mount Duval towards the spot where I walk every day, each shape and curve.

Leaving is another failure of belonging.

Within six months of beginning this research project I moved from my home of twenty years on the northern tablelands of New South Wales to the Gippsland region of south-eastern Victoria in the southernmost part of the Australian continent. In that six months I prepared to leave the place where I had lived and worked happily for twenty years. I completed academic commitments, bought and sold houses, dealt with the unexpected illness and death of my estranged husband, and my own and my children’s grieving. During that time I began to keep a journal about moving to Gippsland, spasmodically at first, but more regularly once I moved to my new place. This chapter explores the process of coming to know that place through body/place journal writing as a method of inquiry, and the creative evolution of a practice of body/place journal writing.

I started the process of what I came to call body/place journal writing at a hiatus in my own research trajectory. Significantly for this chapter, it emerged from my response to text I had produced from Indigenous oral place stories, and to a poststructural feminist practice of massage. I re-map this emergence here to recall the body traces of this writing practice. At the time I was writing a paper about relationship to place and was aware of another dimension I wanted to write about but couldn’t articulate. While searching for this new connection I kept hearing echoes of old Bill Lovelock’s story of the grasses blowing up against the fence in autumn before the cold weather comes:

I’ve seen ’em too go and get that
you might see a lot of grass
up against a tree or a fence
very soft grass
and it would blow like the wind
they’d go and get this
stuff it into bags
and make bed ticks out of them

M. Somerville, B. Davies, K. Power, S. Gannon and P. de Carteret,
Place Pedagogy Change, 15–28.
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they used this a lot
dry grass that catches up
on netting fences
soft as a bed to sleep on
very warm in winter
warms up and keeps the heat.
That’s what a lot of them done,
this is about what I know.

Bill clearly articulated his story as a form of body knowledge expressed in language. I sensed the body/place connection always already there in such stories but I didn’t know how to do it for myself. I thought and thought about how to articulate this missing dimension and the more I thought the more distressed I became. I felt weak and exhausted, my heart pounded, even to walk up the stairs was an effort. I had strange and frightening dreams about a fragmented body, one in which my body was sliced into fine layers of flesh which were cooked and spread with Vegemite. I was trying to think through complex theoretical problems and I could think no longer. I felt I had fallen into an abyss of dualistic thinking predicated on the separation of the body, not only from thought, but from the site of writing.

After a very hard walk in the local gorges which brought me back to my body, I began a series of massages with Cathy Carmont who was investigating the experience of massage through feminist poststructural theory. In this massage Cathy provided a space of trust where I could speak images that surfaced from tissue, organs, joints and bone, without the need to make sense. There was no system, no order, no expectations, just pleasure in the touch of skin on skin, release from pain and tension, and permission-giving in verbalising and in silences:

Margaret: It makes me think about what I said before—about moving mountains by tunnelling through or lying down rather than trying to shift whole mountains with your shoulder.

Cathy: What you said before? Being in the landscape?

Margaret: Yeah, because I think of that connection, that’s like I feel now, that I can lie down real low beside the ledge of the mountain and shift it.

In the next phase of this process I began to remember these images that surfaced in the massage, and to write them down afterwards:

A tight place in my tummy, a hard black rock about fist size, round and flat. As Cathy massages the rock is washed with water that wells up into throat and eyes. A deep sadness. It belongs to the women from Coonabarabran, the undoing knots of connection made when two souls bump into each other and then the sadness of always having to leave.
I want to go to the water-splashing place where the water washes over hard smooth rocks. Rock inside and rock outside; place in body and body in place.

Committing the images to memory during the massage, however, was too disruptive to the experience itself, so I began to write down images that came to me:

Picnic with kids; little rocks in the shade inviting but kids want to play on big flat rock in the sun. Warm and sleepy, I lie in shallow dip on lichen-dimpled surface of big flat rock, face into brightness. Circles of green light form and reform behind closed eyes. My skin becomes flecked with grey and light apple-green lichen-lace. I am a lizard, grey scales and flecks, lying on a rock in the sun. I become so flat I am the rock, body blends into surface, tufts of soft green moss shape line of body and voices of children play over me. I am the surface of the earth and they are playing on my edges.

The emergence of body/place journal writing from the space between my Indigenous collaborative research and feminist poststructural theory is significant. Both of these positions are underpinned by deep theoretical work and personal experiences that are important in relation to this chapter. With Australian Indigenous people and communities I have continued to learn and write about place and country through many years of listening to stories and being in place. Feminist poststructural theory gave me a speaking position as a woman and as a mother, and theoretical ideas with which to think through the body. It was not until I began my Gippsland journal, however, that I used body/place writing as an intentional method of inquiry. In the following excerpts, selected mainly from the journal of the first six months, I ask our research question of how I learned place and community when I moved to this new place.

MY (IM)POSSIBLE GIPPSLAND

Tuesday morning, top of hill Princes Highway shock as Latrobe Valley opens out to huge power lines, power stations, coal mines. I recall puzzle of bright orange spreading like a fungus across the landscape on whereisit.com, then the recognition that they are the open cuts. Here it is the real thing. On road to Churchill sense of confrontation intensifies, massive power lines criss-cross in every direction, small and large chimneys pour out smoke (water vapour they tell me), electricity transformers, massive power lines marching across paddocks. As final visual assault, monoculture forest of blue gum or pines, planted in rows, close to each other, for the paper mill. Real estate agent says ‘which ever way you travel between Morwell and Churchill you are skirting around a mine or a power station’. I decide not to drive between Morwell and Churchill to face this every day.

In Churchill we leave behind visual assault of power stations but there is the blight of shabby 1970s commission houses with unknown lawns, no gardens, torn curtains, old car bodies, and angry looking young men: male, chunky bodies walking stiffly with arms out, scowling or tailgating us. On top of the
hill three old weatherboard houses stand out in this desert of uniformity and on the other side, trees and hills. Churchill is saved by the hills. But even in their bright and shining air, one whole slope has been clear felled of its pine trees for the paper mill, leaving a few ugly bare timber stumps standing like amputated limbs on the hillside.

I have done bits and pieces of writing but nothing that represents my normal journal. The experience reminds me of Phoenix’s *entre deux*—when the world before and the world after are completely different—there is a failure of words. I remember reading this idea in Kay Ferres’ article about colonial women’s writing. How much more so for them than me, moving from one side of the world to the other? Perhaps it is simply the quintessential experience of migration repeated from the psyches of grandparents over the generations.

Yesterday I woke up in the night with the strongest clearest image of the Gwydir River near where I used to live. I could identify exactly which bit of the Gwydir it was. I could visit in my body’s senses, all the places where we had picnics, boiled billies, lazed in shallow water in summer, camped. But in my dream it was the shallow winding strands of gold weaving in and out on the wide sandy river bed through soft dark green casuarinas where it joins Booralong Creek. We often sat at that place and boiled a billy. There were always the marks of other fires, others sitting there. Sometimes we took food for a barbecue but often just a billy to have a cup of tea. I remember tracking the small changes in the river at that corner when heavy rains had remoulded the shape of the meandering golden water.

Body memory comes as a painful longing, a physical longing that I feel in my heart space, as I realise what I have done, how far I have come from the place that has been always there for me, for more than twenty years now, on the New England tablelands.

It is yet another (dis)placement, having grown up in Sydney and lived in many places. I was thinking about that yesterday, what is this learning place and forming community?

In the space between body/place and language there is always the liminal. Dreams and images emerge in this space where there can be no smooth and continuous narrative, to tell a story. In this early time of place learning I am suspended in this liminal space, in between here and there. Moving to a place like the Latrobe Valley, with the stories of socio-economic disadvantage that always precede it, was a strange experience. People told me about the Jaidyn Leskie story. In Moe, they said, a child was murdered and a dead pig’s head was thrown into the front garden. There was the shock of moving from a pleasant rural landscape to a place that was both intensely rural and intensely industrial. (Dis)placement was a common theme in my journal at this time and I recorded the haunting sound of the little birds that sing every day before dawn. I had only heard them in the hedgerows in Scotland, the land of my old people. David Malouf says that until we have our own ghosts in
this country we can never belong. I live with the ghosts of the spirits of the Old People from my Indigenous work but there are no ghosts of my ancestors here. In opening myself to this new place I become other-to-myself. It is an ontology of the in-between where I am like the ghosts that hover between two places, between dreaming and waking, between my old self and new, a pre-condition for learning and change.

I write of the undoing of self; of waiting in the chaotic space of unknowing; of the absences, silences and disjunctures of the liminal space with no narrative; of the relational nature of any coming into being; and of the messy, unfolding, open-ended and irrational nature of becoming-other-to-oneself through research engagement.

At home in the afternoon I lie on the couch with gas heater on in front room, the only room where I can see out. I still see fences, houses and roofs but a tiny view of a hilltop, or from the corner where I have placed Miss O’Donnell’s chair, a larger view of a hill with the biggest house in Churchill in the foreground. I long for a fire, real flames, for something organic, for some disorder. On waking I see little wiry haired dog sniffing along the street and rain has briefly stopped so I decide to do what little dog is doing and snuffle around the streets. Starting with streets to south and west of me. There are only a few streets to the edge of town. Where the town finishes there are houses on one side of the road and none on the other, trees, grass, bit of a gully. I walk down towards this road and look at gardens, learning different plants, different seasonal responses. Bright oranges and lemons dropping off trees look like they are never picked.

Last weekend was moist gloomy grey all day both days. Each day in late afternoon just before dark I drag myself out of a dull lethargy and walk a few streets. It is a lethargy born of loss and greyness, so the little light that seeps through the moisture is necessary for survival. But this is a good strategy, tuning into the particularities of this place. On Sunday I walk the streets to the east of my house towards a main road that produces the cartographies of advantage and disadvantage. On one side the “private” area and on the other the “commission” area where the real estate agent said he would not let me live. To the west of my street the houses become more substantial. Right at the top of the south west boundary, with a backdrop of hills and bright green paddocks where cows graze is a huge new house typical of neo-colonial McMansions now spawning in prosperous outer suburbs everywhere. Just one, with double sided palatial grandiosity. But as I walk east towards the commission area the houses become more modest, a quiet suburban sort of feeling. The gardens to the east, like the houses, are less luxurious and sprinkled with the neglect that marks rental properties as different from the others. Further on are the streets where I don’t go but on the road in between an abandoned plant nursery where the owner, they tell me, was murdered by a kid one Saturday morning for a bit of change.
Weather remains mainly cloudy and grey with occasional sun but walking out I see the hills, sky, feel the air, smell the freshness, feel my body warm with movement. Monday Tuesday Wednesday I walk to work and every day the same feeling of aliveness, exhilaration. Thursday and Friday driving, leaves me feeling unsatisfied. Yesterday after the fog was sunny and clear, the first sunny clear day since I arrived two weeks ago. People speak about the feeling of happiness from seeing the sun. I think it is a literal biochemical phenomenon. But because I drive to Clayton [the city] and sit in an entirely internal seminar room with no outside windows at all, I experience the sunlight as strange when I come out. It’s like when I have been in the movies as a child and come out into the brightness, time has somehow warped and my sense of light and dark is disturbed at some primitive level.

Walking back up again I look at the blue sky streaked now with clouds. They come from the direction of Loy Yang Power Station and I think of reveries about clouds. But clouds here have a different provenance. The clouds that stretch out from Loy Yang’s chimney stacks are formed by vapour released as part of the production of electricity from burning coal. Who knows what else is in the clouds apart from water vapour. I don’t want to think about it too much but in both directions I can now see power stations and I think of the abject, the abjection of the Latrobe Valley and its de-industrialisation. With the loss of jobs due to increasing automation of the power and mining industries, we are left with a society in transition. There is no longer the heroic story of masculine hard work and sacrifice, because there are few jobs and much unemployment. And yet, we still have the incredible presence of these industrial giants, pumping out electricity, the energy furnace that keeps the city of Melbourne humming. Gippsland is what allows Melbourne to be a clean and cultured city of the arts; we are Melbourne’s abject.

Through walking the streets around my house I learn the suburbs and the orderings of the suburbs according to privilege and poverty. I have only once lived in the suburbs and that was long ago, when I was a child. I chose to live tightly nestled amongst other houses in Churchill because of moving to a new state as a woman alone, but I can hear the man next door cough and clear his throat. I learn the impact of light and weather by walking, the intimate relationship between the sunlight that strikes my pineal gland and my sense of wellbeing. Walking, I also learn the power stations as an insider, becoming part of my identity in place. The Latrobe Valley chimney stacks appear every night on the television in relation to the scourge of carbon emissions, but one morning a momentary lick of pink on a power station cloud defies all logical orderings. There is no sequential process of transition that fits neatly into any schema but rather I seem to spiral through the same processes of learning place. Over this time, however, my work identity and place writing change forever, deeply influenced by living in this place of abjection and over-representation; by knowing place through movement; through walking suburban streets; through weather, greyness, and clouds.
I write of an ontology that includes our participation as bodies in the ‘flesh of the world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), a reciprocal relationship with objects and landscapes, weather, rocks and trees, sand, mud and water, animals and plants, an ontology founded in the bodies of things. In this ontology, bodies of things are dynamic, existing in relation to each other, and it is in the dynamic of this relationship that subjectivities are formed and transformed.

The seeping moisture of this climate is so different.

My ensuite is dark and enclosed, like the main bedroom and house really. At night it feels womblike and I chose the house for these qualities, a safe place to land alone, start new work, make a new identity. But the ensuite always felt a bit unsavoury. Then the other day I noticed what I thought was a piece of wet crumpled paper on the floor where the vanity meets the wall. I bent down to pick it up and realised it was alive, felt like cool moist skin, sweaty almost. Looking closer, it had two petals, curled at the edges, a delicate pale fawn colour and it was firmly rooted to the crevice between floor and wall. It smelt a bit like mushrooms, or toadstools. I cut the fungus out with a knife, and examined it closely, no ribs, just smooth pale moist flesh. The rainforest ever immanent.

In my garden rainforest trees pop up everywhere, tiny seedling trees that want to grow into rainforest giants. I was planning to go to Morwell National Park to look at these giants this afternoon but when I got into housework and garden, I put it off. Then, as evening came, the more I was in the garden, the more compelled I felt to go and walk and see what native plants grow around here. Tall tall trees, huge girth, at the bottom of the valley, quiet, birds, air of trees, smell of moist cool tree air. I breathe the green of trees.

Movement, the feel of walking, sand underfoot, surprise of sand, I thought it would be sticky volcanic soil.

At the bottom of the valley lots of logs covered with green moss and soft green light, shaded. A huge tree with a hollow at the base, big enough to walk into, through layers of openings like dark curtains, blackened by fire.

At the bottom of the valley I startle a dark brown wallaby who hops a little into a clearing and then stops to eat again.

Ferns in the gully, I want to see more—tree ferns, ground ferns, I want to learn ferns.

Halfway up the hill as I round a corner there is a rustle and I stop still and quiet. A male lyre bird, flicking long ornate tail, moves a little way off, slowly, protected from view by ferns, and then begins to feed again, pecking into the leaf litter, busy. Further up the track another, a female this time with a tiny bird that at first I think is a chick, but is just company, hopping around her on the ferns and logs.
Walking at Morwell National Park this Sunday morning, a grey and moist day that intensifies the green of moss and light, not the same walking with company, but we pass a woman on the way back and she asks ‘is it a lyre bird day?’ and I say ‘no, I saw them last week but none today’. She says ‘that is the joy of it, you never know what you are going to see, you cannot predict’. No you cannot predict the natural world, I think, it is its own curriculum and that is the pleasure, the unpredictable, the new learning every day, every time every day a little bit different but you only get this little bit different by repetition, by the same walk in the same place over and over again. Over days weeks years, generations even.

In the gloomy light of a moist grey day it is the sound of birds that stands out. Lots of different kinds of tiny birds flitting, trilling, chattering in the undergrowth in this little valley. Then I notice a brilliant red parrot sitting on a boll on a huge old tree, head turning side to side looking at me, somehow engaged with my presence. I wonder if it is waiting for food, sitting above the car park and picnic area, or just curious. I take out my camera to photograph this beautiful bird. It feels a bit objectifying after our exchange but I want to remember that moment. The bird, of course, flies away, resisting my attempt to capture it. Then, as I put my camera into the bag, it flies back again and lands on another boll, this time a hollow one and begins chatting to noisy babies inside, poking its head in and out of the hollow, looking from me to whoever is inside. I photograph this charming display, but think that any photograph will not contain, could never capture, the brilliance of this bright moment, the bird, me, the bush, the sounds all round of birds chattering.

The sense of body, weather, climate, house, and garden is enlarged into a wider circle of being-in-place through the rainforest in the national park. Finding my way to, and then within, Morwell National Park became something of a symbol for finding myself in Gippsland. I asked: How do I find my way in(to) this place? I tracked my steps from the Tourist Information Centre where I got an information pack with local maps, to the interpretive sign in the parking area, to the pamphlet that had a mud map with numbered sites. I prefer my own responsiveness not to be mediated by maps but they gave me a safe beginning point. I also learned about Lyndon’s clearing named after Mrs Ellen Lyndon of Leongatha, ‘who previously lived on a farm near here. Her studies of the plant and animal life of this forest established its significance, and together with the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club was instrumental in having the park proclaimed in 1967’. I felt connected to a potential network of women as in my work for Wildflowering. Paper knowledge and body knowledge. I think about maps as curriculum and curriculum as maps. What do they make possible? What stories do they open up and what do they hide? I think that they can only be guides to opening the self to the unpredictability of body-in-place learning.

I write about an epistemology that requires a new theory of representation. Each representation, the parrot looking at me looking at her, the brilliance of this bright moment, the bird, me, the bush, the sounds all round of birds chattering, that I cannot capture by camera but I attempt to capture in writing. It is what I
call a naïve representation. It is naïve because it knows that it can never capture the moment but it tries to do it anyway. There are multiple attempts that together make an assemblage: the image of the parrot from the eye of the camera, and the black marks on the page that both mirror and do not mirror the image of the camera, but assemble the two into another image made from the reflections on the first. Each is a pause in an iterative process of representation and reflection. I become more and more interested in the (im)possibility of representation.

The Churchill Leisure Centre where I do my gym is transformed today. The quilting ladies have taken over with their first quilting exhibition. The northern end has rooms stretching endlessly, hung with quilts, embroidery and textile work, knitting, folk painting on old objects, stalls with plants, homemade candles, preserves and jams, soft toys, all the sorts of arts that women do. There are lots and lots of women here, maybe a hundred or so, looking at the quilts, laughing, exchanging words, ideas, sharing. An older woman, bent over, with sun spotted skin, says to another, ‘I’m in seventh heaven’. Women laugh about how they make quilts and give them away as fast as they make them, hundreds of hours of work, they just love doing it, they say.

On one wall a large, draped, creamy-white quilt, a light delicate lacy object, catches my eye. The sign says ‘Made in 1915 by Mrs Tess Mills, by hand, and by candlelight’. When I return to buy another quilt I ask if I can talk with the owner and take a photograph. The woman running the office passes me to another woman who says it belongs to Marg Whitehall and calls her. She hands me the phone and Marg talks to me, wants me to come out today.

I buy a quilt called “Roses in Spring”, beige, pinks and maroons, double size to put on my bed. In the afternoon I pick up my quilt, more beautiful than I remember.

In Marg’s front room the old quilt made by Mrs Tess Mills is unfurled, more light and air than fabric. It is made of small flower circles of creamy white lightly joined on four points by tendrils of fine stitching. Each small circle of cloth has been gathered to the centre so that the back looks like a flat circle and the front like a gathered flower. It is called a Sussex Puff. Marg picks out individual “puffs” where the fabric is softer and more pliable, and says these ones are probably made of muslin, the others are calico. We examine the different textures, some of the fabric would have been bought new at the shop in nearby Yinnar where Marg bought the material for her wedding dress, some would have been reused. She tells me that she got the quilt about six months ago, ‘in a bad fashion, I suppose. A chappie passed away, Jeff’s second cousin. I was there taking a cake, and everything had been sold up, they had a big garage sale. They only kept an old iron bed and the quilt, because no-one wanted it’. The quilt had been on the same bed in a sleepout on a farm in south Gippsland since Mrs Tess Mills made it in 1915.
I now remember the conversation with Cynthia before I left Armidale about the quilts the miners’ wives made. She stroked the texture of the woollen quilt gently as she told its story: of her dad coming to work at Yallourn Power Station as an engineer, her mum buying the patchwork quilts made by miners’ wives from the men’s old woollen overcoats. The men needed the woollen overcoats against the cold Gippsland winters and the wool mills in England supplied superior quality woven cloth, each with their distinctive weaves. The coats were expensive and when parts of them were too worn to work as coats, they became *waggas*, homemade patchwork blankets for bedding. The quilt made of all these different woven patches is a myriad of tiny birds, delicate shades of browns and greys, feathers flecked and mottled like the different weaves and textures of the British wool mills.

Shirley came yesterday morning, her usual Friday morning to do the cleaning. I was pleased to see her, one important local connection. I was still at home, not yet ready for work, eating breakfast so I explained I had got home at one thirty that morning from a conference in Adelaide and was tired, running late. Shirley said that she was tired too, worked till after midnight. Surprised, I asked her what work she had been doing. ‘Making cushions’, she said, ‘for the family for Christmas’. She told me she has thirty relatives, starting with three sisters, their husbands and children and every year she makes each of them a present for Christmas. This year’s project is cushions. ‘I couldn’t just make them one cushion’, she said, ‘that seemed a bit strange, so I had to make them two, that made sixty cushions for the lot’. She began in April when she saw a friend knitting the diamond shaped sides with a leaf design. It took her three days to learn the pattern from her friend and then she started knitting. She explained to me that every year her presents are in the colours of their favourite football teams, counting out on her fingers the football teams that each member of her family follows—‘Richmond, Collingwood, St Kilda…I did the black and gold first, and it looked stunning’. She has been working to a tight timeline to get all this done, has to stay up working till one o’clock in the morning, after long days of cleaning houses, to get the knitting finished. ‘I can’t wait’, she said, ‘to see their faces when they open their presents this Christmas’.

There have been so many threads from this entirely serendipitous quilting experience of learning place and community. The quilts tell the stories of women’s lives, the constitution of the feminine in Gippsland, such an invisible story compared to the dominant masculine storyline of heroic work and subsequent loss. The quilts were a way to access these alternative stories as transitional objects, occupying a space both inside and outside the self, of the body and of the (m)other. The spring roses quilt is still on my bed, now soft and moulding to my body with five years of use. They connected me to another thread through possum skin cloaks of Aboriginal Victoria and to Treahna Hamm, a Yorta Yorta artist who was part of the revitalisation of possum skin cloak-making with Victorian Aboriginal communities.

Possum skin cloaks were practical, wrapped around the body for warmth, but equally symbolic, as they were inscribed with the maps of identity in country. In
ceremony people would open the quilt to introduce themselves and their places. Treahna stitches the soft furry possum pelts together and burns her stories of the Murray River on the soft inner skin. We did a project together about the river and she made a baby cloak: ‘imagine the river without a map…this is my country where I come from, you could wear it as a cloak, use it as a map, together’. She made a baby cloak for my granddaughter, when Eva was very fragile as a newborn. I am not allowed to exhibit it, except by carrying it with me, because it is needed for Eva and her new baby sister’s protection.

Shirley’s story of her work jolted me into a new recognition. Her work, paid and unpaid, participates in an alternative economy. She works for cash, small dollars per hour but it is all her own, or for her family in rigorous leisure pursuits that are about the same reciprocity and exchange. She manages, monitors and worries about the quality of her unpaid work, its aesthetics, whether it will please her family, and about meeting her deadlines. But also, and perhaps more importantly, it is about love. It is about labour that produces relationships, those complex webs of feeling and connection that sustain, make meaning and identity, a sense of purpose in the world. The stories of the women’s quilts are about an entirely different economy that already exists for a world of “prosperity without growth”, an economy of bodily care, of gift giving, and of love.

Yesterday was Armageddon day. Hot, with strong northerly winds. Went to Powerworks to do tour of power stations. Huge car park on top of a hill between Churchill and Morwell, hot dry bare and windy with power stations visible in every direction. Inside Powerworks building is cool and air-conditioned with wall displays about the history of power stations in Gippsland. Wall posters tell us, among other things, that ‘the greenhouse effect is natural’. The first section of the tour is an eight minute film about production of electricity from brown coal. Brown coal is younger than black coal—from fifteen to fifty million years old, laid down in layers of petrified soft woods, rainforest trees, such as Kauri. There is a twenty kilometre seam that stretches from Morwell to Sale, virtually the whole floor of the Latrobe Valley, which is surrounded by mountains. Once a huge forest of softwood trees. As we leave the building the guide points out clouds of brown dust blowing up from the open cut coal mine. She says we might not be able to get out of the bus because of the dust. We drive through a morass of big and small power stations, electricity lines and transformer stations, and learn the many other power stations of various sizes in Latrobe Valley that are connected to Melbourne by the electricity grid.

At the brown coal mine right next to Hazelwood Power Station big clouds of brown dust rise up on the wind from the giant cavernous hole. Tiny garden sized water sprays do nothing to settle it. A couple of fires have already broken out on the northern wall, and the tour leader tells us we cannot stay because of the fires. The massive hole in the ground is like an inverted pyramid, a negative image of the huge Egyptian structures we were taught to marvel at as kids. A kind of negative tomb of our civilisation. Its walls are
similarly constructed in layered steps out of those fifteen million year old rainforest trees. It takes twenty five thousand tonnes of these petrified trees to power this one power station for half a day and this one supplies about a third of the state’s electricity needs. It is like a giant pot belly stove, must be the most inefficient method of producing energy in the world. By the time we leave, a fire engine is arriving and thick brown smoke billows from the mine.

Inside the huge belly of the power station it is even hotter and a walkway is lined with interpretive signs that tell us about the generation of electricity. The tour leader reads them to us, despite the fact that we have to have ear plugs against the roar of engines and that we can read anyway. The workers who operate the power station are sitting at computers behind a glassed wall in a cool air-conditioned office where they can monitor everything that the station is doing, humming its connection to electricity users in Melbourne. We move through the various processes from the massive turbines to the huge fires that seem to be only just contained inside giant furnaces where you can see the red flames flickering through triangle shaped vents.

As we drive back to Churchill the air is filled with gritty brown and I remember the day I saw this before and wondered what it was, this time I know it is brown coal dust and smoke. The next night walking home it is still hot at six in the evening, the air filled with the pungent smell of brown coal smoke. I wonder what it does to my lungs, to my body. It makes me angry that people have to put up with this desecration that no-one can speak in this university that owes its origins to the power stations. At night the fires in the mine are on the news. I am hot and tired and gritty; eyes, lungs and, even more so, psyche feel assaulted.

I know that I will not stay forever in the Latrobe Valley.

I make a veggie garden. Not directly in response to the fires in the coal mine and power station tour, but to feeling of impending doom (drought, water shortage, climate change, bird flu epidemic, nuclear war), a longer more enduring response to Churchill. I buy a compost bin. On Saturday I go to Bunnings and buy vegetable seedlings—mostly leaves—lettuce, coriander, Italian parsley, rocket, silver beet, two tomato plants and marigolds. I sit in the dirt next to the shed in overalls, mattock and fork the tough dry ground, sitting in the earth, lost totally in physical sensations, getting to know this ground. Then that evening, just before dark, I plant the little seedlings, careful of their tiny roots, and water them in. I feel the clay-ey texture of the fine silty soil, earth on hands, smell the wet soil like smell of rain on hot dry ground. The little plants look bedraggled, broken and messy, but the next morning early, they are springing up with that amazing life, reaching towards the sun.

Walking on the rail trail feels safe and healing too. It is shaded by tall gums and one early morning we discover feral plums. We eat from the first tree, picking the small just-ripe plums and eating them at the tree. Then we
discover five feral plum trees, each at different stages of ripeness. Because they are seedling plums each tree has its own characteristic plum colours, flavours, and smell. Some are ripe when they are golden, others bright red and some dark maroon. We fill our hats with plums and walk back in the dappled sunlight through tall trees. All week I make my breakfast with oats and seeds and cut up plums. The plums are quite small so cutting them seems arduous and a waste of time but this kind of domestic repetitive task also opens to meditation and contemplation.

To cut these small ripe plums the knife has to be super sharp and I can feel the quality of the ripe flesh of each plum with my fingers as I select them by colour and feel for ripeness. Only the really ripe ones are fully flavoured. Each plum has a line, the line of the fold. The fold is the line of the outside folding in, where the plum blossom has been fertilised. The fold also tells me how to cut the plum. If I place the knife directly into the line of the fold, the seed lies flat to the cut. In such a small plum as seedling plums are, this is important because otherwise most of the flesh gets left on the seed. It also helps the soft juicy flesh of the plum to come away more cleanly from the seed. The seeds go into the compost and the flesh with its dark skin into my breakfast and I eat of the shady rail trail walk.

A couple of weekends ago, just into autumn, I walk along the trail and come again to the aroma of the first seedling plum tree. A strong smell of overripe plums, mostly on the ground or pecked by birds, reminds me of the smell of grapes left hanging on the vine when the season is over. They are fermented tiny globules of red wine and the bees pierce the soft thin ripe skin, getting intoxicated on the heady wine. I say goodbye to plums for the season but further down the walk the bright red colour of not-quite-ripe plums on another tree. Another gift. I pick a hatful of mixed colours from yellow-green-tinged-with-red to bright dark red. I put them in a bowl on the kitchen bench, enjoying their bright colours. Each day the miracle of plum colours unfolds. The plums change from red-tinged-green to bright red to maroon to almost black-maroon, the deepest dark maroon I have ever seen. How is it, I wonder, that colour is produced and changes so day by day? What does it mean to eat colour?

All of these stories are important place learning that gives me a deeper sense of the complex dynamics of space/time in my new location. I recall Massey’s ‘event of place’. Place, for Massey is defined by a quality of “thrown togetherness”, which propels the need to negotiate in the here and now:

…what is special about place is not some romance of a pre-given collective identity or of the eternity of the hills. Rather what is special about place is precisely that thrown togetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of then and theres); and a negotiation which must take place within and between both human and nonhuman. (Massey, 2005, p. 140)
Massey refers to this moment of space/time conjunction in the global flows of culture and nature as the ‘event of place’:

This is the event of place. It is not just that old industries will die, that new ones take their place. Not just that the hill farmers round here may one day abandon their long struggle, nor that the lovely old greengrocers is now all turned into a boutique selling tourist bric-à-brac...It is also that the hills are rising, the landscape is being eroded and deposited; the climate is shifting; the very rocks themselves continue to move on. The elements of this ‘place’ will be, at different times and speeds, again dispersed. (Massey, 2005, pp. 140–141)

My place research becomes all the more nuanced and complex, deeper and more extensive in its reach, but these insights do not account for the intense desire to belong somewhere. The fact that I can choose to leave Gippsland makes me feel forever an outsider here. With no place to return to this is a precarious and risky proposition. Yet, in another way this is the position that I occupy as writer and researcher of place, always both inside and outside and simultaneously neither.

Body/place journal writing as a method of inquiry has opened up many threads for me, threads that both unravel and stitch together in loose kinds of ways the story of a space/time intersection in a particular place. It is a process of coming to know. Through this writing I have come to know place as multiple; there is not one place that is Gippsland or Latrobe Valley, or even my house or my garden. They are all many places that change constantly. Place is multiple, shifting, dynamic, and always becoming, just as I am always becoming-in-place. These understandings and some of the threads that I have drawn from my body/place journal have deeply informed my ongoing research, including that reported in the other chapters in this book.

NOTES

1 This material is taken from Body/landscape journals (1999, Spinifex Press, pp. 11–14), a publication which came out of my doctoral thesis, which charted the insertion of the body into my place research and writing practice.

REFERENCES


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In this chapter I make a space to think about the underlying principles that inform my own transgressive, emergent, experimental writing—in particular, a radio play about the place in which I live. In order to help me do this thinking I draw on poststructuralist writers, such as Barthes, Cixous and Deleuze, who suggest that it is in literary and artistic texts that new ways of thinking are most readily opened up. Integral to my thinking about experimental writing are what Butler (1997) calls the ethical necessity of disruptions to everyday ways of speaking and writing, and what she identifies as the problems generated by the ongoing repeated citations that make up the everyday world. Those repeated citations, through which the everyday, common-sense world is generated, offer some a viable life and both implicitly and explicitly deny a viable life to others. How does one disrupt those repeated citations in one’s own thinking and writing? How does one launch oneself into the risky space of thinking against the grain of that which “everyone knows”?

In order to disrupt my own repeated citational practices about the new place that I had come to live in, and to open up ways of being in that place, I experimented with a form of writing that would enable me to know my new place differently, against the grain of the already known. I embarked on two closely linked writing projects. One was the play Life in Kings Cross: a play of voices (Davies, 2009). The other was this chapter, in which I explore the principles that informed that experimental play-writing.

Cixous asks: ‘Why do we live?’ And she answers: ‘I think: to become more human: more capable of reading the world, more capable of playing it in all ways. This does not mean nicer or more humanistic. I would say: more faithful to what we are made from and to what we can create’ (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 30). Language is a powerful constitutive force, shaping what we understand as possible, and shaping what we desire within those possibilities. With Cixous I am fascinated by the intoxicating power of language that enables us to open up the not-yet-known while at the same time work out of the materiality of our bodies and of the places around them.

Cixous speaks of a complex balance between knowing and not knowing oneself in relation to the other. She develops the term positive incomprehension to capture something of the movement and openness of Deleuzian differenciation (2005), of the process of becoming different. Once difference is no longer about being individualised and categorised and separated off from the other, differenciation becomes instead a process of creative evolution in which we might become ‘more faithful to what we are made from and to what we can create’ (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 30). Once we
are no longer fixed on capturing the essence of self and other in their isolation, but open to the unknown, to the impossibility of knowing, to the delight of knowing differently, we are opened up to the beauty of moments of insight into the being of the other (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997).

In order to open up the creative forces that enable us to evolve beyond the fixities and limitations of the present moment we need to both turn our attention to what we are made of, our material continuity and ontological co-implication with others, including non-human others, and also open ourselves to multiple points of view. Human existence in this understanding is not an existence that is separate from others or from other forms of existence. Human, animal, earth and other matter—all exist, and exist in networks of relationality, dependence and influence.

WRITING THE CROSS

Voice 1

It is late-summer, early on a Saturday morning in Springfield Plaza. The night revelers are finally gone, leaving behind them the sad detritus of the night: a splatter of blood, broken bottles, vomit, bins and gutters overflowing with wrappers from McDonalds, Sushi Hero, Garlo’s Pies, The Best Kebabs, Indian Food... The revelers are unconscious in the lock-up, or at home in their suburban beds, oblivious to the day, and to whoever they might find curled up in their sweaty, rumpled, dream-filled beds. One lies safe, for the moment, snoring softly in the comforting arms of a lady of the night, who drifts softly on the enveloping waves of her latest hit.

Over by the freeway, old Professor Jones snorts and turns over, restless in his bed of rags beneath the footbridge. He dreams his complex six-legged formulae as the early morning traffic rushes past him, humming into his dreams.

[SFX Sound of seven lanes of traffic rushing past, mostly cars with an occasional truck, continuing as background to the Professor’s dreams]

Professor Jones

When I walk, you see, my back and front legs on one side move in phase with the middle leg, like this, on the other side. The other side... The suction cups on my feet hold fast to the wall, to the roof. Then, watch carefully, the other three legs move together, with a relative phase of half a cycle compared with the first set...

Voice 1

He drifts again into a dreamless early morning sleep.

Voice 2

A body lies on the pavement curled up in a patterned blue doona, oblivious to the passers by.
Voice 1

Wrapped up in his doona, Harald dreams of Vikings, sailing over the wild, cold sea. Steering through the narrow waters, with sheer cliffs on either side, his ship rolls over the grey, pregnant waves. He stares out the ship window straight into the heavy deep waters, and when the ship turns on its side, as it slides down the wave, he stares at the ice cold silver sky. He is wearing his Viking helmet with two cow horns and plays on his mouth organ a sweet nostalgic tune.

[SFX Music of the mouth organ and the creaking and groaning of the ship as it rolls on the waves]

Harald

I’m Harald the Great. I write poems that make the dead rise up from the deep, and I play music to rival the Sirens. I play for my Dadda who is lost at sea. I will play so sweet he cannot resist me. Why did you leave me Dadda? I’m stretching my hand down so deep into the roiling ice-cold water. Can’t you take hold of it now? Take hold of it Dadda and I’ll pull you up. Can you hear me Dadda? I can see your eyes, your two soft grey eyes. Can you hear my music Dadda? Just reach for my hand Dadda.

Dadda

Those are pearls that were my eyes. You cannot see me son, my bones are all disjoint and spread about on the floor of the wide, wide sea, and my eyes picked out by wee fish long long ago. Go home Harald, go home.

Harald

Where is home Dadda? Don’t leave me Dadda! I’ll play you sweet music Dadda…

Voice 2

An ancient landlord, bent over his brass filigreed walking stick, walks, slowly, along Darlinghurst Road, past Andersen’s Danish Ice Cream and on towards Llankelly Place. He takes one step at a time, along the new black granite pavement with its black blobs of chewing gum and its brass inlaid histories of people he remembers only too well (drunken Christopher Brennan, crazy Bea Miles, the mad witch Rosaleen Norton). Elegantly dressed in his ancient black suit, spotless starched white shirt and silk tie, he pauses to lean on his cane and catch his breath.

Landlord (traces of a Polish accent)

I am ninety eight years old, but there is life in the old dog yet. Not like my buildings.
Voice 2

He jabs his cane in the air, pointing to the buildings in Llankelly Place. He rests his cane down and leans both hands on it. He gazes for a long time along the lane, thinking...

Landlord

There are termites in my floorboards and the cockroaches swarm up my walls. The cockroaches seek the warm damp places. They lurk in the makeshift shelters put up each night by the dross that rises to the surface in the gaudy drug-filled nightlife of this rapidly decaying place. It is filled with the stench of the drunken youths who piss against my walls, and the derelicts who no longer know the difference between a latrine and the walls of my buildings. The termites come in on the roots of the plane trees. They follow the roots that travel along the surface of the sandstone in search of the sweet cool spring in the once-upon-a-time gardens of Springfield House.

Voice 2

He walks slowly step by step toward the Plaza. He stops and jabs his stick at the brass inlaid plaque in the pavement, reading:

Landlord

“Springfield House. Demolished in 1934”.

Such a beautiful house with its laughter and its music—those were the days of splendour and romance—the parties that went on all weekend, with artists, playwrights, actors, beautiful women... (sighs)

[SFX A dance band strikes up a waltz]

I was eighteen years old when I first danced with her. 1926. I remember as if it were yesterday...

Voice 2

He holds his cane to his chest as if it were a beautiful woman, and sways to the music, dancing once again on the wide moonlit verandah of Springfield House, with Lily Littmann, magnificent dark-eyed beauty.

Landlord

Ah Lily, Lily, my love.

Voice 1

Back along Darlinghurst Road, Gloria da Silva leans toward the mirror inside the doorway to inspect her lipstick. Carefully and precisely she tidies her face with the tip of her elegant long nailed little finger. Long shiny black boots, black bag over her shoulder, she is ready and waiting. Fresh as a dew-dropped daisy in the early morning light.
Gloria da Silva

Ya want a lady darlin’?  

Voice 1

...she says to a bleary, blond haired youth heading for his lonely, bug-ridden backpacker bed. 

Voice 2

At the end of Darlinghurst Road, the El Alamein Fountain glitters in the early morning light, like a huge round dandelion, ready to blow a wish on. Next to the fountain is a sign that makes another sphere, locating this watery birth of wishes at the magnetic centre of desire: telling how far and which way to Athens, Berlin, London, Moscow, Tokyo, Seoul, New York, Rio, Auckland. 

Up toward the fountain runs Georgie Delaney, dressed in a tight pink t-shirt and very short shorts, looking drop dead gorgeous, nods hello at Gloria. As she runs past the Plaza she sees a body wrapped up in its doona, dead to the world. She stops, and taking ten dollars from the pocket of her shorts, she gently tucks it into the shirt pocket of the slumbering man.

I began my own place writing for this project with the complex and sometimes deeply confronting place in which I had come to live in 2004 not long before this project began. Kings Cross is well-known as the drug, prostitution, and nightclub heart of Sydney. In the conceptual and interactive space of this group project I began to explore the possibility of writing a radio play set in that place. Although I had previously written about the places of my childhood, and my place in the tropics, it seemed in the context of this new project that I needed to begin again, to write about my new place in Sydney, in order to imagine my way into the project of teaching our own students at the University of Western Sydney to write about their places and to take up in their own teaching the practices and emergent possibilities of place pedagogy.

Inspired by Deleuze (2005), I wanted to engage in writing that would open me up to difference, to seeing differently, to being different, in my newly familiar place of living. I decided, therefore, neither to tell an autobiographical story of place, nor to interview others about their stories of this place. While such stories may have produced new and different insights, they were also at risk of repeating and propagating the already known stories through which “the Cross” might be said to be colonised. I chose, instead, to develop a form of writing that would draw on a different imagination, mobilising transgressive/experimental strategies for the writing of place.

As I began work on the play (its form inspired by Dylan Thomas’s Under Milk Wood (1954)), I also began work on this theoretical analysis, inviting the play-writing to inform my theorising and the theorising to inform my play-writing. The three principles that I elaborate below became my key to the transgressive writing that I was seeking, through which I might disrupt my own repeated citations of the known order. At the same time, the writing of the play allowed me to understand in practice what the principles that I was mapping out here meant. I thus moved
constantly back and forth between the two writing projects: one transgressive within usual social science practices, and the other primarily philosophical, yet each dependent on the other. In this writing of the double project I planned to work with the familiar everyday world that I lived in, and at the same time, with the help of Deleuze and others, to propel myself beyond my already-lived experience: ‘Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived’ (Deleuze, 1997, p. 1).

The play was not envisaged as a realist report of a place that might be said to pre-exist the writing, or to exist independent of my experience of and experiment with it. It was thus not tied to a belief about “the real” place, even though it is named after and inspired by a place with that name. To this extent, the writing was free to move toward the not-yet-known, and I could let it unfold in an as yet unimaginable way. The way this felt, retrospectively, was that I could be more “intelligent” in the writing, drawing on every sense, every awareness, every memory, every experience, every thought, and every available document. I could allow my minds, conscious and unconscious, free reign among these possibilities. I was not guided by how it should be written but by the sense of open exploration.

The writing that I sought for the play did not, thus, begin with a place that was extrinsic to the act of writing, but with the image, the sound, the idea that was forming itself on the deep surfaces of my body. My desire was to open myself to a movement in which something as yet unknown could become visible, become thinkable. I wanted to immerse myself in the Cross in such a way that I opened myself to inhabiting it differently, and I wanted to write the play in such a way that I invited the reader to listen, not only to new possible meanings, but also to the sounds of the words, their rhythms, their poetry—to take pleasure in it, and also feel its pain. I wanted readers to feel their flesh prick, or their eyes water, as they entered the place called the Cross. I wanted them to encounter the multiple tangle of subjectivities that make up the Cross, to recognise the place as both intensely familiar and simultaneously providing an opening on non-habituated ways of seeing/feeling/hearing “the Cross”.

The principles developed in what follows suggest a reconfiguration of the relations between the author, the subject/object of writing, the text, and the reader. Transgressive, experimental writing, as I am envisaging it here, invites us to discard the self-conscious “I”, to abandon representation, and to experience/experiment with language and with ourselves, each in order to enable us to think beyond what is already thinkable—what is already there to be thought.

**DISCARDING THE SELF-CONSCIOUS “I”**

*Immersed in writing the play, I walk out of my apartment and into the Cross. I have grown eyes and ears all over all my body. I no longer walk with ears closed and eyes cast down, lost in my own thoughts, speaking only to those I know. I have eyes and ears about me everywhere, seeing who is there, how*
they walk, how they talk, how they gesture, how they each create their own fold in the social and physical world. I notice for the first time the smallest, most precious details, the lipstick tidied in the mirror, the Viking helmet put out as a begging bowl, the cellphones glued to the ears of the young and beautiful, the man in the elegant suit pacing back and forth in the small hours of the night, the call of the currawongs in the evening. I discover that I am invisible to the drug dealers who act as if I am not there, and as if I cannot see them and do not see them. “I” have become a place where thought happens, where the Cross can write itself, opening up the fold within my monadic soul to encompass other, nomadic folds, each shining its light on this place, the Cross. In bed at night I immerse myself in texts based on this place by other writers, reading their poems and novels and short stories late into the night. I read autobiographies and histories and heated debates with developers who want to take over and “destroy” the Cross, with their cheap towers and nightclubs pandering to the tourists. Whenever I can, I participate. I talk. I listen. I walk through. I sit. I observe. I find the words to bring these folds to life in my body/my writing. I dwell in the times I have been in the Cross in the past; memories stretching back fifty years; intense passionate memories; my own search for lost time. I reread Proust, and am deeply moved by his evocation of places I have never been. (Journal)

Barthes suggests that we take as our primary research focus the text that is written, rather than the author who writes. He enjoins us to give birth to ourselves in our writing, that is, to know ourselves as coincidental with our writing. This is not in order to reveal a pre-existing, known or knowable self who can be represented, or pinned down, with the words that are fixed on the page. It is not a self in the past (prior to writing), that can be brought into the present and fixed in an imagined future. The writing is a process of bringing-to-life the process/present moment of writing and, in doing so, unsettling the already known. In that act of writing of, and in, the present moment, we open the possibility of going beyond the pleasurable repetition of that which is already known and already judged, and of opening up the possibility of puncturing the familiar, pleasurable surface of that which is known. Barthes calls that punctured text a text of bliss. It is the text that ‘imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the state of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to crisis his relation with language’ (1989b, p. 14). The writer of such texts is ‘born at the same time as his text; he is not furnished with a being which precedes or exceeds his writing, he is not the subject of which his book would be the predicate; there is no time other than that of the speech-act, and every text is written eternally here and now’ (Barthes, 1989a, p. 52, italics in original).

Those pleasurable repetitions that Barthes enjoins us to puncture create the habitual patterns through which we act, through which we usually engage in writing, and through which we establish the recognisable and predictable objects that “have identity”. Those objects (and subjects) are already determined, even over-determined. They are the same, or opposite, or analogous to that which is
already known. In each case, they are made out of the same recognisable, predictable elements. The object/subject produced in those repetitions has an essence; it may individuate or evolve but remain the same; it can be pinned down in all its possible futures as this object, ‘just as white includes various intensities, while remaining essentially the same white’ (Deleuze, 2005, p. 45).

The repetitions create a baggage of habits and memory, which potentially lock the individual, in this case, the author, into an undesirable stasis (a fixed identity) that is continually obliged to repeat itself—or at least to attempt to do so. Williams, in his analysis of Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*, says: ‘We come to recognise an actual thing and assign a fixed identity to it because habitual repetitions, recorded in memory, lead us to have a fixed representation of things’ (Williams, 2003, p. 12). While such identities are taken for granted in liberal humanist cultures, they are made problematic by philosophers whose focus is on the emergence of difference and the process of differenciation (as when cells of the body differentiate). Deleuze sees difference and differenciation as the elements of life. Life is not static; it is movement. At the same time life requires the capacity to be immersed in the present moment. While the immersion in the *moment of being* involves connectedness to past and future, the differenciation of the emergent subject requires at the same time a capacity to forget, to let go of those repeated citations that hold the world in place. Williams (2003, p. 13) captures this Deleuzian point in this way: ‘…the abstractions of habit and memory militate against the emergence of new sensations and hence against the expression of virtual intensities and ideas…So do not make your variation depend on representation, habit and memory. *Leave all actual things behind (forget everything)*’ (italics in original).

In such a conceptual framework, the individual subject, whether they be the author or a character in a play, is interesting insofar as each moment of their being reflects some aspect of the whole of reality: ‘an individual is a perspective on the whole of reality: ‘an individual is a perspective on the whole of reality, something that is connected in a singular way to the whole of reality’ (Williams, 2003, p. 5). In conceptualising the human subject, Deleuze is not interested in the familiar self-conscious “I”, the one that is constituted as an isolated object that struggles to know itself and be known as one who has a fixed identity. He conceptualises the subject as a series of processes and, most importantly, as a place where thoughts can emerge: ‘The individual is a take on the whole of reality, where reality is not restricted to actual things that we can show or identify in the world. The individual is, rather, a series of processes that connect actual things, thoughts and sensations to the pure intensities and ideas implied by them…An individual is not a self-conscious “I”, it is a location where thoughts may take place’ (Williams, 2003, p. 6). For the purposes of writing my play I wanted to become that location, the location where thought could emerge and differentiate itself, where I became one of the folds of the Cross, and was open to other folds.

Deleuze draws on Leibniz’s monad in spelling out the relation between the individual subject and the whole:

Leibniz’s most famous proposition is that every soul or subject (monad) is completely closed, windowless and doorless, and contains the whole world in its darkest depths, while also illuminating some little portion of the world,
AN EXPERIMENT IN WRITING PLACE

As writer, I experiment with and dive down into that place, my body, searching the folds in its deep surfaces, seeking to read what I might find written there. I register my own mo(ve)ments through and within the place I am writing. My task is to see/hear/think the folds in the social fabric, as I find them in myself as a singular manifestation of it, and in others who are also manifestations of it. I must open myself to the ongoing experience of finding within myself a fold of the social fabric, and at the same time open myself to other foldings, each ‘illuminating some little portion’ of that place, ‘each illuminating only one little aspect of the overall folding’ (Deleuze, 1990, p. 157). In this sense I am co-terminous with the others I find in this place, the Cross—each of us a fold, each of us a manifestation of the whole.

As writer, then, I myself must be emergent in the act of writing and not separable from it. I will be not so much represented in the text as emerging co-extensive with the text and with the place I am writing. The author and the text will be simulacra for which there is no identifiable original. To engage in the act of writing, I must be fully present and connected and, at the same time, leave behind what went before—the origin, the cause, the subject “I” which was imagined to pre-exist the writing. My self-conscious “I”, with all its pleasures, its preciousness and its predictability, must be abandoned in favour of an emergent subject in process, a subject that is a reflection of some aspect of the whole, a singular perspective of the whole, a place where thoughts can happen.

ABANDONING REPRESENTATION: THE LABYRINTH WITHOUT THE THREAD

Voice 1

Round the corner, Corinne the crow wakes. She’s been sleeping in the warm alcove of the auto teller. She sits up, blankets still around her, her wild black hair all over the place. Her shimmy slipping down over her smooth brown round shoulder. She croaks at each passer-by.

Corinne

Spare any change for a cuppa tea? Spare any change? Got any money for a cuppa tea? Got a coupla dollars for a cuppa tea?

Voice 1

She needs a drink badly. The morning pedestrians barely notice her. Their worlds and hers run parallel and rarely meet. But now she needs money. She levers herself up to standing, using the wall of the abandoned bank to lean on, get herself steady. She needs a piss. Needs a change of clothes. Needs
some grog. She grabs the bottle in its brown paper wrapper and tips it upside down. Empty. She is distracted by the vision of a young Aboriginal woman wheeling a stroller towards her. Sitting in the stroller is a gorgeous child with a black tumble of curly locks, holding tight to a knitted elephant. She stares at the child, and moves out onto the footpath, out of her warm alcove, with steps remarkably like a big cat, despite her creaking bones. She holds out both her arms to stop the stroller. Danielle, on her way to the train, stops to watch, concerned. The baby hugs its knitted elephant and looks up at Corinne with interest. Corinne bends over toward the baby and croaks:

Corinne

You’re a little beauty. Aren’t you? Eh? What a beauty!

Voice 1

The child stares unafraid, and Corinne reaches down gently and takes hold of the baby’s toes and waggles her foot.

Corinne

I could kiss the earth you walk on.

Voice 1

The mother smiles, and Corinne lets the foot go, and turns away to gather her gear and find some food and drink. But first a piss. Her bladder is busting. Easy for the blokes who just piss in the potted plants. Just the right height. Or against the wall. She has to go all the way down to the toilets. The mother and child move on, and Danielle stands there amazed at the love that Corinne has expressed for the baby girl. Corinne is oblivious to her. She changes her top to start the day fresh, choosing a bright red one she got from the Wayside Chapel, and a blue and green striped beanie that she pulls out of an old plastic bag.

Just as the author who might be said to pre-exist the text is left behind, in writing from the imagination, so is the “real world” that exists independent of the text. Whereas representation might find and present again the habitual, repetitive patterns that hold the world in place, transgressive, emergent writing dissolves its dependence on the habitual perspective from which that “real” is observed. Deleuze suggests that instead of representation, or re-presentation of an imagined original, we endeavour to make observations of the world in the process of differing in each attempt to tell what it is.

Representation has only a single centre, a unique and receding perspective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything, but mobilises and moves nothing. Movement, for its part, implies a plurality of centres, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of moments which essentially distort representation: paintings or sculptures are already such ‘distorters’, forcing us to create movement—that is, to combine
a superficial and a penetrating view, or to ascend and descend within the space as we move through it. Is it enough to multiply representations in order to obtain such effects?…Difference must become the element, the ultimate unity; it must therefore refer to other differences which never identify it but rather differentiate it…Difference must be shown differing…it becomes a veritable theatre of metamorphoses and permutations. A theatre where nothing is fixed, a labyrinth without a thread (Ariadne has hung herself). The work of art leaves the domain of representation in order to become ‘experience’

Neuroscientists confirm what Deleuze is writing about here. In Proust was a Neuroscientist, Lehrer shows how great writers and artists worked out how the brain works long before the neuroscientists, understanding the active work the brain does in making sense of what it sees—what it imagines to be real:

Neuroscientists now know that what we end up seeing is highly influenced by something called top-down processing, a term that describes the way the cortical brain layers project down and influence (corrupt, some might say) our actual sensations. After the inputs of the eye enter the brain, they are immediately sent along two separate pathways, one of which is fast and one of which is slow. The fast pathway quickly transmits a coarse and blurry picture to our prefrontal cortex, a brain region involved in conscious thought. Meanwhile the slow pathway takes a meandering route through the visual cortex, which begins meticulously analysing and refining the lines of light. The slow image arrives in the prefrontal cortex about fifty milliseconds after the fast image.

Why does the mind see everything twice? Because our visual cortex needs help. [The mode of processing means that] the outside world is forced to conform to our expectations. If these interpretations are removed, our reality becomes unrecognizable. The light just isn’t enough…It is because Cezanne knew that the impression was not enough – that the mind must complete the impression – that he created a style both more abstract and more truthful than the impressionists…[He] realized that everything we see is an abstraction. Before we can make sense of our sensations we have to impress our illusions upon them. (2007, pp. 107–109, italics in original)

Deleuze turns to artists who reveal in their work what it is that he is after in the written text. The linear possibilities, represented by Ariadne’s thread, are gone; what we thought we knew is abandoned in favour of a certain chaos. The solution, however, does not lie in a simple multiplication of perspectives from isolated self-conscious “I”s. Each small perspective must hold the world. And in this there is the clue as to why Under Milk Wood was such an inspirational model for my play. It was originally conceived by Thomas as a story about a group of mad people, that is, people not reined in by the dominant perspectives of the world. As he wrote and rewrote it, it became instead an imaginary place, full of those who might have been
seen as monsters, but who can be encountered as the multiple voices that make up the life of that beloved Welsh village nestling under the Milk Wood. One is drawn into a movement of understanding, of being, in that village, with its ‘plurality of centres’ with one perspective superimposed and disappearing into another, with its ‘tangle of points of view, [and its] coexistence of moments which essentially distort representation’ (Deleuze, 2005, p. 67).

The Cross is already, even before I begin, a place of such a plurality, of such tangles, such a coexistence of moments, each encompassing the whole, yet none the whole in itself. In attempting to imagine my way into that tangle, I was guided by the search for difference, for the moment of opening up to that which emerges, the movement which becomes, itself, ‘the element, the ultimate unity’ of the place.

In writing the play, then, I did not set out to represent individuals who “I” observed to be there each day, as if my singular perspective could re-present that place, as it really was, again and again. I did not set out to accomplish “the truth” of it, as if I had found the perspective from which all could be told. Instead I began from minute, observed details that might then expand into one of the multiple folds of the social reality of that place. Like Thomas I thought of many of my characters as quite mad to begin with. But as they emerged onto my imagined stage, they seemed “more human”, and by this, and echoing Cixous’s words, I do not mean “nicer or more humanistic”. Rather they seemed ‘more faithful to what we are made from and to what we can create’ within the multiple folds of the places we inhabit (Cixous, in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 30).

EXPERIENCING/EXPERIMENTING WITH LANGUAGE, WITH ONESELF: WRITING ON AN IMMANENT PLANE OF COMPOSITION

She lifts her face to the morning sun, startled, as she is each morning, at the quality of the golden morning light. The soft breeze that finds its way up from the boat-bobbing bay caresses her bare skin still warm from sleep. Hair rumpled every which way, she is on her way to Bondi, to swim in the salt water and early morning light. Turning into Darlinghurst Road she sees the last of the revelers huddled in the street waiting for taxis—anxious taxis crowding the curb and vying to receive them—beautiful young people with bleary waxen faces and damaged livers, not quite ready to abandon the night. She walks past the door of the Massage King, now shut, the masseurs at home in their weary beds. The dying thumps of stale music escape with a whoosh of warm air from the opening door of the Empire Hotel. An old man hunched over his cane walks along the pavement, one step at a time...

She loves this old man, the man asleep on the pavement, the small bird-like woman she helped down the stairs the day before, the mad man under the bridge... Each throws some light on this place, each folded in a cocoon, each one is this place, repelling the world, shining light on the world from within its folded space...
Writing beyond what is already known involves intense immersion in the known, an intimate knowledge of the known, gained through an intense experience of oneself and of others, and gained through endless repetitions, through habituated immurement in the known. It involves an intimate and intense immersion in the already available schemas of knowing and being. Smith writes, in his introduction to Deleuze’s *Essays Critical and Cultural*:

The writer, like each of us, begins with the multiplicities that have invented him or her as a formed subject, in an actualised world, with an organic body, in a given political order, having learned a certain language. But at its highest point, writing, as an activity, follows the abstract movement of a line of flight that extracts or produces differential elements from these multiplicities of lived experience and makes them function as variables on an immanent ‘plane of composition’. (1997, p. lii)

This line of flight from the multiplicity of the known to the as yet unknown depends on the capacity for letting go, for forgetting, for allowing the known to die. These two contradictory elements work together: the principles combined invite an immersion in the intensity of being and a willingness to experience painful loss of the familiar terms that made that being possible. It is the movement from pleasure to bliss that Barthes sets out in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1989b). It is movement where immersion in the moment and movement beyond the specificity of one’s own identity become possible. It is the decolonisation of identity, of place, of the other. The writer is intensely connected and, at the same time, s/he lets go and moves onto the not yet known, to which s/he will also be intensely connected: ‘…reality is ever changing and the challenge is how best to live with that change…This constant alteration means it is a mistake to want to hold onto everything. Individuals must find a way of connecting well but the only way of doing this is by forgetting. To connect and discard are joint actions’ (Williams, 2003, p. 5). Immersion in the moment, and openness to the movement that emerges—the captured moment in which we may previously have imagined we had pinned reality down, is already movement. The task of the writer is to participate fully in that movement, understanding it as movement.

Such writing must be accomplished against the formidable weight of familiar language uses and patterns, the language whose task it is to hold everything the same. Both Deleuze and Cixous see that familiar language as full of lies, of distortions of a particular truth or sets of truths that we might otherwise struggle to express:

It is not only that words lie; they are so burdened with calculations and significations, with intentions and personal memories, with old habits that cement them together, that one can scarcely bore into the surface before it closes up again. It sticks together. It imprisons and suffocates us…Is there then no salvation for words, like a new style in which words would at last open up by themselves, where language would become poetry, in such a way as to actually produce the visions and sounds that remained imperceptible behind the old language (“the old style”)? (Deleuze, 1997, p. 173)
This is where the experimentation with language itself becomes necessary, since the burden of old habits, and the sticky surface of familiar language, must have their power displaced. It is in experimentation with language that one can learn to unlie. In learning to unlie one comes to know oneself as human, as a reflection, an instance of the human, and in moving beyond the known and the readily knowable, the individual glimpses the condition of humanity.

The attempts to describe what the experimentation with language might entail push the boundaries of what is understandable, and rely on poetic and sometimes deeply paradoxical images. Cixous quotes Kafka who says a ‘book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us’ (Cixous, 1993, p. 17). She continues: ‘The book strikes a blow, but you, with your book, strike the outside world with an equal blow. We cannot write in any other way—without slamming the door, without cutting ties’ (Cixous, 1993, p. 20).

What do we do with the body of the other when we are in a state of creation—and with our own bodies too? We annihilate (ourselves) (Thomas Bernhard would say), we pine (ourselves) away (Edgar Allen Poe would say), we erase (ourselves) (Henry James would say). In short, we institute immurement. It all begins with walls. Those of the tower. (Cixous, 1993, p. 27)

This blow with an axe, this dissolving, pining, erasing, this relinquishing of the familiar may take us to painful edges akin to death. ‘Those I love go in the direction of what they call the last hour—what Clarice Lispector calls ‘the hour of the star,’ the hour of relinquishing all the lies that have helped us live’ (Cixous, 1993, p. 37).

In opening ourselves to what emerges in the moment of creation, we allow what lies behind the usual practices of language to emerge, to come to the surface of writing, of consciousness. Writing is a place where we are blind and do not know what we will discover, and it is also the place where blindness and light meet, where self and other meet, and attempt to know each other, to go beyond repulsion toward love:

The thing that is both known and unknown, the most unknown and the best unknown, this is what we are looking for when we write. We go towards the best known unknown thing, where knowing and not knowing touch, where we hope we will know what is unknown. Where we hope we will not be afraid of understanding the incomprehensible, facing the invisible, hearing the inaudible, thinking the unthinkable, which is of course: thinking. Thinking is trying to think the unthinkable: thinking the thinkable is not worth the effort. Painting is trying to paint what you cannot paint and writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written: it is preknowing and not knowing, blindly, with words. It occurs at the point where blindness and light meet. (Cixous, 1993, p. 38)

*Harald dreams yet again of his lost Dadda and whimpers in his sleep. The second Professor dreams of her Uncle Llewellyn throwing back his head and laughing his huge belly laugh, in the days before he was sent from home in
disgrace. Danielle dreams of a small girl whose feet she kisses. Georgie Delaney dreams of Judgement Day, and discovers to her amazement that God is Chinese. Janni writes in his journal of his new-found libido, and Jen dreams of her husband, who loved her so much, and died at sea when she was only thirty. Mollie dreams of a magnificent hat with sweeping feathers and a dress that shows off her magnificent cleavage. Corinne dreams of walking, walking endlessly, her weary feet taking one step after another, the silver mirage of her destination slipping out of sight each time she thinks she is home. The backpacker scratches himself and dreams of Queenie’s breasts and sobs with pleasure as he buries his face in them.

And so the dreams weave their way in and out of the flow of traffic in the Cross, in and out of intersecting lives that do and do not touch each other.

The song of a currawong [SFX Sound of currawong] summons the faintest wash of pink into the deep night sky.

All is quiet in the Plaza.

The El Alamein Fountain flows over, and the water runs down to the sea.

In writing the play I have been guided by these three principles: letting go of the self-conscious “I” who is the centre of events, who sees only with her own “eyes”; letting go of representation (the illusion that the world can be fixed from a single perspective) in order to open up images of multiple lives, each a manifestation of the whole; and, finally, opening myself up to the experience/experiment of writing in which the world is not reduced to what I know already, but pushes me out into other ways of knowing, into the tangled possibilities of intersecting, colliding and separate lives. I now walk differently through the Cross. I do not yet know if the play will have that effect on those who hear it. And for those who have not been to the Cross, where will this play take them in the imagining of their own places? I hope, into a possibility of disrupting their own repetitive citations in relation to their own places, opening up the ethical possibility of granting the others in that place a more viable life.

NOTES

1 I discuss the further work with the teacher education students that I undertook with Susanne Gannon in Chapters 7 and 9.

2 Where experience incorporates the concept of experiment.

REFERENCES


*Bronwyn Davies*

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